

CULTURAL HISTORY OF LADAKH PART - I

-Mrs. Kamala Mukherjee

Ladak which is aptly known as western Tibet, is situated between 70°15'E to 75°15' E longitude and 32°15'N to 36° N latitude in the Trans-Himalayan region. It is strategically located at junction of four or five important regions; Afganistan-Turkestan on the North and North-West, China-Tibet on the North, Pakistan (since 1947) on the West, and India on the South. At 12000 feet, Ladak with its capital Leh, is one of the highest inhabited plateaus in the world. Owing to its location, it served as an overland Trade Centre between Central Asian regions like Yarkhand, Kashgar, Khotan, Tibet as well as the Indian regions of Punjab and Naggar in the bygone days. During the summer months ranging between July and October, caravans from all these regions arrived here after negotiating various mountain passes and the place would suddenly be turned into a veritable market for exchanging goods and commodities through the barter system. The lowest of the passes is Zozi-la which once comprised the boundary between Kashmir and Ladak ; and the highest ones are Mutag-la (19000ft.) and Karakoram (18002ft.). Besides being the only routes for transporting merchandise, these passes were veritable highways for cultural exchanges, linking people representing diverse cultural groups and thus helped in furthering mutual acculturation and assimilation of thoughts. These again were the routes through which invaders and plunderers galore made inroads into the mainland of India ever since the time of Alexander. Portuguese and Jesuit Fathers also trudged their way to Central Asia, Tibet and the adjoining regions through these routes.

Ladak, hailed as one of the principal bastions of Tibetan Buddhism, was annexed to the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1843 A.D. by the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh with the tacit approval of British. The aforementioned routes are less frequented now more on account of political imbroglios and consequent blockades rather than any natural hazard or physical barrier. The pristine virility and vigour with respect to the practice and dissemination of Buddhism has been adversely affected though the Buddhist creed still thrives miraculously amongst the devout ones. But the fact remains that the association of Ladakh with the state of Jammu and Kashmir is not only incongruous from socio-religious stance, but equally self-effacing. The influx of tourists from all over the world and the resultant process of acculturation may very soon obliterate the culture and religion that once shaped the history of Ladakh. Despite their incessant and impassioned appeals to be granted an autonomous status, the people of Ladakh are agonised at the Union government's stoic refusal and the more palliative means adopted. Persistent importunities by the people to be recognised atleast as a Union Territory has ultimately resulted in the formation of the Ladakh Autonomous Council which was inaugurated by a representative of the Indian government in the month of September, 1995.

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It has been rightly surmised that the broader dissemination of Buddhism began with the second Buddhist council which was held in 237 B.C. during the reign of emperor Ashoka.

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(Some Scholars attribute this to be the third council considering a convention held at Vaishali under the aegis of the king Kalashoka to be the second council). Priyadarshi Ashoka sent his Buddhist emissaries, scholars and teachers to farflung countries like China, Korea etc. However, it was after the fourth council held during the reign of the Saka king Kanishka at Kashmir that the passes of Kairong and Kuti bridging Nepal and Kashmir as well as the old trade routes became once again active with Buddhist Pandit and Lamas traversing through them. Fa-Hien, Huen-Tsang and such other travellers from China came through these inaccessible routes. Kashmir remained as an important centre of Buddhist learning for ages long receiving zealous patronage from the kings, a fact corroborated by Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*.

In the history of Tibet, the first great who introduced the Buddhist creed as the State religion was the accomplished ruler Srong-bTsan sGam-po who was a contemporary of King Harshavardhana Siladitya of Kanauj, Prophet Muhammad of Mecca, Huen-tsang and the Chinese emperor named T'aijung. It was he who directed his minister Thu-mi Sambhota to devise a script and grammar for the Tibetan language thereafter presiding over the gargantuan task of translating canonical and non-canonical works into Tibetan from their original SANSKRIT AND PALI.

Another great landmark in the annals of Tibet was during the reign of king Khri-srong-ldeu-bTsan when at the behest of the royal preceptor Pandit Santarakshita (Shi-ba-hTsho), the great Master of esotericism Guru Padmasambhava arrived at Tibet and firmly established the Buddhist religion after taming and exorcising the Bon-po priests and its votaries. In the year c. 816 A.D., Ral-Pa-Chen sat on the throne of Tibet. He was the younger son of king Khri-lde-srong btsan who in turn was the second son of king Khri-srong-lDeu-bTsan. Ral-Pa-Chen was a paragon of human excellence, a veritable blend of administrative skill, military valour, and devotion to the Dharma. While his expansionist ventures extended the territory of his kingdom far beyond the frontiers that he had initially inherited, he also patronised the Buddha Dharma with such zeal that its reverberation could be felt throughout the length and breath of the kingdom. All these took sudden turn when one day, he was assassinated by his elder brother named Glang-darma who had been nurturing a deep-rooted hate for the king who had been by dint of his merit, their father's choice as the successor superseding his claims as the eldest son. The ascent of Glang-darma to the throne ushered in, an age of total anarchy. At his behest, monasteries were closed, religious ceremonies banned and monks were forced to give up their vows of renunciation and celibacy and instead live the lives of ordinary laity. His well garnered hate for the popular spread of Dharma which he took to be the elementary factor behind his brother's successes turned to be his achilles' heel till atlast, he was killed by a monk named Lha-lung-dPal-Gyi rDo-rJe masquerading as a dancer attired in black, in the year 841 A.D. Thus ended a saga of ruthless religious persecution. It took decades for the wounds inflicted by this apostate king to heal and much longer for the scars to disappear. Chaotic condition prevailed all over the country with the Bon priests once again returning back with vehement resurgence. The successors of Glang-darma proved to be weaklings and could not consolidate their authority over the kingdom. They lost their hold over the mighty empire that had been built by the valiant Khri-srong-lDeu-bTsan. dPal-'Khor-bTsan (906-923 A.D) was the last king in this line who left Lhasa and migrated to western Tibet where he is famed to have brought the

three districts-Ladakh, sPurang and Guge* under his suzerain control and later let his three sons rule over them. These kings and their descendants were consummate patrons of the Buddhist faith and caused the translation of many Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. They also sent regular emissaries to Kashmir and the adjoining lands. Among these luminaries, the name of Jnanaprava or Ye-shes-hod also known as Lha-bLama shines exclusively for being instrumental in bringing the famed master Atisha Dipankar to Tibet. He relinquished his throne in favour of his nephew so that he could devote his time to religious matters. With the noble intention to introduce religious reformation in his country, this great prince invited Atisha Dipankar Srijnana who hailed from the Vikramasila Vihar. Till his death in 1054 A.D., the Acarya travelled to many places and instilled discipline and faith among the monks encouraging them to live spartan lives dwelling more on practice and rigorous study. During the course of his journey in Tibet, he also met the great translator Rinchen-Zanpo or Ratnaprabha. The latter is believed to have been spiritually inspired by the Acharya and is famed for the establishment of 104 monasteries which was accomplished with munificent help from the royalty. Acarya Dipankar's multitudinous activities gave a fesh fillip to the dwindling spirit of the Buddhist faith in Tibet which gained universal acceptance and popularity. Based on the teachings of Asanga and Maitreya, he established a new order called Bka'-gDams-pa which received further impetus under the able stewardship of his principal disciple named Brom-sTon-pa and other successive teachers and lineage holders. Atisha enjoined strict discipline among the monks and forbade the people from indulging in occult practices. Many siddhs and teachers flourished and fed the flame of Atisha's reformative tradition which never allowed the creed to be maligned by impurities of precept and practice. Reformers and teachers galore appeared on the horizon fired by the example set by Atisha, to purge the faith and its doctrine from vulgar dilutions. Among the teachers who belong to the earlier period of transmission, the names of Marpa and Mila-respa stand out distinctively. Marpa Lo-Tsawa or Marpa the translator who was a disciple of Naro-pa of Magadha ushered in a new era of doctrinal dissemination based on the direct teaching of the Buddha. This new school was known as Bka-rGyud-pa and its doctrine was widely taught by his chief disciple Mila-respa, the cotton-clad yogi. This school further developed into four major and eight minor school in the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The 13th century saw the beginning of Sakya hegemony over Tibet when the high abbot of Sakya went to China on invitation by the Chinese emperor to become the latter's preceptor and returned to Tibet to be installed as the ruler of the country. The Mongol emperor or China Kublai Khan was infact initiated into the Buddhist faith by Phags-pa, the Sakya hierarch who was allowed to rule Tibet as a theocracy. Thus a new school of the Buddhist esoteric tradition called Sakya-pa was introduced whose doctrines were widely disseminated through out Tibet. The rise of king Byang-chub rGyalchen in the 14th century eclipsed the power of the Sakyas and ushered in a new dynasty which ruled for around three centuries till its overthrow by the king of Tsang in 1635 A.D. The latter was in turn vanquished by the Mongol king Gushi Khan who offered the spiritual and temporal sovereignty of Tibet to the great fifth Dalai Lama in year 1642 A. D. Meanwhile, dwelling

*The three regions of western Tibet collectively known as MNga-Ri-sKor-GSum consisted (1) sPu-Rang, Mang-Yul & Zaugs-DKar (2) Zhang Zhung, Khri-Te sTod-sMad (3) 'Chim Mam Li, Bru-Sha, sPal Ti. Ref : Bod rGya Tsig Mrdzod Chan-Mo

on the fourth important Buddhist school of Tibet, the great reformer Tsong-Khapa who was born in 1357 A.D. was much inspired by the tradition established earlier by Acarya Atisha Dipanker. He reorganised the monastic order and streamlined the curriculum of the monks laying great emphasis on learning based on logic, discipline and academic erudition. He founded the dGa'-lDan monastery in the year 1408 A.D. and established the order known as dGa'-lDan Pa'i-Lugs which later on became famous as the dGe-Lugs-Pa School. The third hierarch of this order named bSod-Nams rGya-mTsho who lived in the 16th century was conferred the title of Tale bLama by the Mongol emperor Altan Khan which in the Mongolian language meant the same as the Tibetan word rGya-mTsho or Ocean. The first hierarchy too was recognised in retrospect as the first Tale Lama and the subsequent successors were recognised as the Avatars or re-incarnations of the Tale Lama, a term which came to pronounced as Dalai Lama in the subsequent years.

The fate of Ladakh or western Tibet was more linked with Turkestan and central Asia during the early 13th century although Lhasa remained the religious pilgrimage/centre and sanctum sanctorum. In 1207 A.D. during the rule of bKra-Shis-dGon, the Mongol terror Jenghis Khan overran this region during his victory march and the king was compelled to surrender. Not much is known about the genealogy of the succession of kings following bKra-shis dGon. One of the later rulers who ruled in the year 1533 A.D. had his capital in Leh. He established a monastery and installed there in a huge statue of Maitreya Buddha and another of Avalokiteswara. His palace is in ruins though the monastery stands till this day. He seems to have been adept in warfare and annexed Baltistan, Guge as well as some regions in the west. He is also reputed to have thwarted the invasion by Mirza Haider in 1549 A.D. In 1675 A.D., the next king Jamyang rNam-rGyal was captured by the Balti ruler Ali Mir and was forced to embrace the Islamic faith. Ali Mir gave his daughter in marriage to the royal captive and eventually allowed him conditional freedom. His Tibetan wife bore him a son named Senge rNam-rGyal who shifted the capital to Basgo. He was a powerful king and a patron of learning. Many Sanskrit texts were translated during his time and some books were printed in letters of silver and gold. He amassed a fortune through his conquests and even made an abortive attempt to conquer Lhasa. His son Deleg too was a mighty king who quelled innumerable rebellions. The famous Shey monastery was built by him. He died in a disaster in the year 1645 A.D. This king died as Muslim proselyte since he was forced to accept the Islamic faith after his defeat at the hands of the Mughals. He even built a mosque in Ladakh and remained the rest of his life in Kashmir. His son and successor Nyima rNam-rGyal established peace and once again paved the way for progress in various fields like art, literature and small industries like publication of manuscripts in calligraphy and even setting up a paper marking factory. He also built memorials in the form of chaityas or mChod-rTen and monasteries in Zaskar, Rupsu and Nubra districts. Nyima rNam-rGyal who ascended the throne in the year 1705 A.D., died in 1734 A.D. bringing to a close three memorable decades of progress, peace and prosperity. Following his death, there were regular incursions by Muslims from Turkestan and Tibet. Ladakh lost huge tracts of pastureland and gold fields which seriously jeopardised its overland trade and commerce. Heavy war indemnities and taxes exacted by the conquerors further impoverished and destituted the inhabitants of Ladakh. Despite all such reverses, the Ladakhis dauntlessly held on to their faith in the Dharma with fortitude and devotion. The downfall of the Mughal empire gave Ladakh some moments of

respite but the sanguinary designs of the Dogra chief Zorawar Singh for the conquest of Tibet once again blew the clouds of war over its sky. The Dogra ruler had to pay dearly with his life while clashing his sword with the Tibetan army.

In the year 1843, Gulab Singh the Dogra ruler of Kashmir annexed Ladakh with Lahyul-Spiti with the concurrence given by the British. In the wake of this, many of the monasteries of Ladakh were plundered and the king of Ladakh who was also the head of Hemis monastery was banished to Stok. In due course of time, the British took back Lahyul and Spiti from Sardar Gulab Sing in exchange for some other areas with a view to enhance their inland trade with Tibet and Central Asia. Eric Shipton was the last political agent in Kashgar upto 1947.

After the partition in 1947, Ladakh became a part of the Indian Union along with Jammu and Kashmir. The western part of Gilgit and Baltistan came under the domain of the Republic of Pakistan in 1984 and a portion of the eastern part of Aksai Chin was annexed by China in 1962. All these developments left their impact from the geo-political stance and enhanced the strategic importance of Ladakh which had to face the brunt of Pakistan's belligerence during the Indo-Pakistan war. Despite all such vagaries of events, the theistic favour of the people of Ladakh remained wholly intact and firm. Ladakh still remains a stronghold of the Buddhist faith. Monks as well as the laity still throng the precincts of the monasteries during festive occasions to absorb the lilting melody of the ritual symphony, blending with the rich baritone of the chanting monks.... which is proof of the fact that the Enlightened one still lives in the hearts of the people of Ladakh and His doctrine continues to pervade all the quarters of Ladakh.

GOMPAS ON THE WAY FROM SRINAGAR TO LEH

PART II

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GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Main cultural and religious centres of Ladakhi Buddhists are the Gompas (Gon-Pa) the solitary place of meditation.

There are sixteen big and extensive gompas in Ladakh of all the sects of Mahayana Buddhism. Besides, each village has its own Gompa-with many walls, chortens, mendok and stones carved with Om Mani Padme Hum everywhere. Ladakh or Western Tibet is thus carrying the tradition of Buddhism from 10th century A.D. - when this religion suffered in the Capital Lhasa. From the Srinagar-Leh bus route which followed the former caravan route at the ancient travellers route-ancient ruins of gompas or chorten can be seen after crossing the Zo-zila (11,570') which was once the boundary of Kashmir and Tibet. After the partition-Karghil the capital of Baltistan inhabited by Muslims of Sunni and Shia sects was annexed to Ladakh-thus changing the environment.

After crossing Zo-zila-there is a halting place in Dras-which is the second coldest place in the world. Two ruined statues-known as Avalokiteswara and his companion can be seen with nearly obliterated rock carvings. North of this place reside Dards and Baltis-converted now to Islam. Then comes Karghil-now second city of Ladakh inhabited mainly by Muslim people of high and important position. After this comes the first Gompa-

(1) namely Shargola-Particularly from here the Buddhist region begins. It is a cave temple on a high hill, mainly of black stone-except the front which is painted white. It means morning star (as it faces east). On the bank of Waka river-built by a Tibetan lama of Drukpa sect who named it as Ma-Khang (House of the mother) now it belongs to Gelugpa order or Yellow Hat Sect.

(2) The road then leads to a flat land-Mulbeik pronounced Mulbek-where a twenty feet High Maitreya (designated as a future Buddha) statue carved on rock in Indian style-with knee length sacred thread. The dress is kingly with a crown a top the head, with anklets in both hands reminding one of Vishnu. In the four hands there are prayer wheel and Abhaya Mudra and beads (Rosary Wheel) and lotus on the left hand.

It was built by the famous lotsawa (translator) Rin-Chen bZang-Po during the reign of saintly king Gu-ge Ye-Shes-'od in 1054. Due to arid climate, it still exists after 1000 years, the face of the statue is fully wrought with contemplative aura.

Below the alter, there is a small underground gompa with a beautiful reclining figure of Avalokiteswara with eleven hands on each side and nine heads. In a cave nearby there are stone and metal statue of Sakyamuni, Padmasambhava and Tara as well as of Kusak Bakula, Tashi lama and Dalai Lama, with a small library. It belongs to the red hat Drukpa sect built by an unknown lama.

After passing Naika-la (flying Pillars) 12220'- is Bodh Kharbu with statue of Avalokiteswara now in ruins. This was once the capital of king Dilden (1620-40) but defeated by the Muslim invaders. Then came Khaltsc (means snowy mountain) with some

statues of different Buddhist pantheon and some rock carvings of the Dards both in Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts with figures of ibex and fighting scenes with bow and arrow. In this area mostly Dards and Mons live-now embraced Islam.

From Khaltse one has to cross another 13470' Fatu la pass-again to descend 2000' ft. to Lamayuru-the oldest of the gompas built by Naropa in 12th century. It belongs to Brigunpa sect and is now under the Tobdan Bakula of Bhutan (detailed later) It was built on a lake dried up by the divine power of Naropa.

East of Khaltse is Basgo-capital of Ladakh during the reign of Sengya Namgyal-Apart from the ruins of old palace there was a beautiful statue of maitreya Buddha-now broken. Next comes the village of Saspol where the ruins of the old monastery spread in a wide area. It was built 400 years ago. It was destroyed by the Balti invaders during the reign of Deleg Namgyal (1640-1680).

From Saspol-one has to reach the famous Alchi Gumpa on the other side of the Indus river. It was also built by Rinchen Zangpo-1000 years ago with a huge statue of Avalokiteswara, manuscripts with a historical chronicle of Ladakhi kings. Rinchen Zangpo appointed some of Kashmiri artists-as proved by the decorations on the wooden arch (Details later).

Next comes another famous gumpa Likir of the Gelugpa Sect on the wayside hill on the road from Saspol to Nymo. Then comes Phyang means External forces-which is situated 25 Km from the road to Leh. It belongs to Brigunpa Sect also. There is a statue of Buddha of exquisite beauty with long ears (one of the signs of greatness in Buddhist belief). There is a good library also besides other statues (Later described in detail) near the airport on a hill. It belongs to Yellow Hat Sect-founded by the great teacher Tsongkhapa-whose big statue draws the attention of visitors and worth seeing. There is a huge statue of Mahakal covered with tinkers.

REPORT ON THE MAIN GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Report on some main gompas of Ladakh are given here so that the life-style and history of Ladakhese can be learnt. The root word of Gumpa is Gon-pa (secluded place), by verbal utterance it is transformed to Gumpa. Most of gumpa are situated on roadside of the trade route, the merchants used to take shelter here. The Gompas in brief are named as follows:

1. Lamayuru : Of all the gompas this is the oldest in Ladakh. At present this is the monastery of the Brigunpa community. The chief of this community lives in the monastery of Bhutan-teachings and appointments are done from there. It is said and written in old books too that here was a lake in the past. According to the legend, the illustrious Siddhacarya Naropa meditated in this cave during his life. The whole valley was a lake which Naropa is said to have dried by spell of mantra before founding this monastery in 990 A.D. On one side in the low land there is a loess of yellow earth indicating existence of lake in the past. By the side of Hoang-ho river in China such yellowish sandy-earth loess of this type are renowned. Sang-gang is the oldest of the temples of this place, built somewhat in a style which resembles Tabo of Spiti - this again is thought to be built imitating Ajanta. Below this old temple exists Yung-Drung temple of Bons (Yungdrung/Swastika) - though the frescos are now illegible and spoilt. The sign of Swastika is well-known token of welfare among the followers of

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Bon religion and Mongolians.

This gumpa is situated on the top of a 12000 ft. high mountain below two thousand feet from the pass. The height of the temple is 30-31 ft., the roof is a square and plain. On the roof exist six flags and one Trishul on which fly-whisk and horn of sheep are tied. Two big Mani-chakras and various images are there in several rooms. Statues of Padmasambhava, Kushak (guru-preceptor) Atish Dipankar, Sakya Thupa are there, a big image of Avalokiteshvara is there, besides, image of Tara etc. goddesses with gold and silver plates. Apart all this, Thanka is there, i.e., pictures on wall or silk of Buddha on ten postures, six types of movements, the king Yama, the preceptor Lama, heaven and hell. On the other side wrapped in silk, Buddhist canonical works Kanjur and Tanjur are preserved. Water in small bowls and lamps of female yak butter ('Bri-Mar) are placed in front of each image. Ritual worship is held four times a day by lamas under an aged lama. On the other side, in small caves of a high mountain, lamas used to live-when in 1925 A.D. Roerichs came here, they used these caves. From yore, the lamas live in a mendicant life take lessons and impart doctrinal teachings to noviciate.

In the eleventh century the king of Ladakh brought the famous translator Rinchen Zangpo (Ratna bhadra) in Ladakh-he then built 108 monasteries in the whole country. Amongst these, Lamayuru was the central gumpa. The temples around are tottering condition hence Lama do not reside here. At that time this area was under the influence of Kadampa community initiated by Atisha Dipankara. About the end of the sixteenth century, leprosy of king Jamyang Namgyal was cured by a lama of Brigungpa community named Namu-Dhan-Math-Sang. In exchange, the king gave him this place and monastery in charity. About one and quarter kilometre of this place of all four sides are considered as holy place. A revenue free village was endowed to meet the expenditure of this monastery. The gompas of the village below also belong to this community. Festivities with dance are held for three in March. The chief of this place is called Kushab Tobdang. Brigungpa community have two gompas in Ladakh-Phiyang and Bodhkharbutey.

2. Likhyr : means Sarpamondal (Klu-dKyil) or Akashbedis on way to Nyema after Saspull (Saspol) proceeding a little West from roads, on the north of Sindhu river near the old trade route but crossing the small river one has to climb a few step. We followed the route for going to Khalsey from Basgo, the old route is a long round - about way. This was built at the time of La-chen Gal-Pore (1050-80 A.D.). It is learnt from the stone inscriptions that this is a gumpa of the Gelugpa community. The prayer hall has provision of sixty-seventy square seats. There are images and wall pictures around the walls of the room. Crossing three gateways and climbing steps at a height of 14000 ft. we were very tired. The Lamas accorded us receptions by uttering 'Jule Juley' (welcome) and showed us the hall. On one side of the alter we found a community emblem of the community of the present lama and a big board with a signature of the lama. The walls and wooden beams are full of decorative art works. All the pictures of are of gods and goddesses of Mahayana Pantheon. There is statue of the first Dalai Lama Gedundup (Gyalwa Rinpoche). The facial expressions of the lama preceptor and gods and goddesses are calm and noble. At the middle are retained 'Mendoke' or memorial mounds (Stupa) with relics of dead and famous Lama e.g., nail, hair, teeth mixed with gold and silver. Images of gods and goddesses abound all around. A side room is some-

what dark, one has to use lamp even in day time. The manuscripts wrapped in cloth are retained in wooden shelves on one side-apart from this there are big images of Sakya thubpa, Manjusri along with many small images. The facial expression of them are pleasant and compassionate. Outside are drawn pictures of Lord Buddha and Potala palace of Lhasa (main residential place of Dalai Lama). I was allowed to enter a small side-room, whatever I could, I saw from outside. I learnt earlier and it also appeared to my mind that-this room probably contained weapons previously, may be they are existing even now. In the past, if invasion of outside enemies occurred, these weapons were preserved for defence.

Next we were taken to roof by the lamas. Snow capped Karakoran mountain ranges were visible. The Kailash mountain seen far was mentioned as 'Ti-Si' by the lamas. From here the panorama all around is well visible. On the west lied the river Sindhu or Senge Khabab. The wealth, movable and immovable properties and the number of this Gompa almost equal of that of Hemis. There is good demand of earthen pots and other objects made of earth of this place. The sun is visible for long hours as the altitude of this place is high.

3. Alchi : To reach Al-Chi one has to go from Saspole crossing the hanging bridge over the river Sindhu. This was constructed about thousand years ago by the chief priest of the king of Ladakh and famous translator Richen Zangpo. This is situated at seventy Kilometres distance from Leh. The influence of Kashmir style is explicit in its architecture. Six temples are here. At the time of Khri-Sen-Namgyal during 1500-1532 A.D. the temple at the middle was renovated. We saw very costly and rare shawl with various fine needle-work and wooden objects with artwork of decorative flowers and plants. The chief temple is small 3m x 3m. On the three side walls of the room are retained innumerable images-on the right is a statue of Avalokitesvara. There are three images of three storey height made of earth in a narrow lane. The images are painted in various hues. In 985 A.D. the king of Ladakh brought Kashmir artisans for wall painting or frescos. This was once a centre for study of doctrine and cultural aspects of Buddhism. Here is preserved the hand-written manuscript. 'Ladakh Chronicles' - (Ladakh Gyalrab) - the history of kings of Ladakh are narrated here. But now the condition of Alchi is not good-the wall pictures are fading-they were getting spoilt with water of molten snow percolated from roof. Their wealth is lesser and number of lamas too is small.

4. Pe-Thub (Spituk) : The meaning is peak. This three storied Gompa is situated at five miles distance from Leh-on the southern bank of the river Sindhu near the aerodrome. The Gompa is situated at height, to reach it one has to get on steps. The old one has been renovated, besides a new temple too has been constructed. The images are six hundred years old and are wrapped in cloth-the Lamas uncovered them and showed to us. A large image of Mahakala cover by cloth is retained in the old temple, the cover is removed and shown to devotees on festive days. Images of Tamdin, Chamunda Kali etc. are there. Besides, there are few gilt images of Tara also. All the images are glittering - that means they are well looked after. But Sangka-pa image is the chief one. At the time of King Crag-Bumida (1410-1440 A.D) the famous Sangka-pa sent two ambassadors. The incarnate Lama of Kushak Bakula or Gelupa community reside here. He is the religious head of all Gelupa monasteries and temple of Ladakh.

5. Hemis : The meaning is thought of Wisdom (Bodhi-Chinta Chara). This Gompa is the principal and largest of all in Ladakh. The distance is forty kilometre from Leh-one has to cross the bridge on river Sindhu to reach the monastery. There is also a mountainous path but is not visible easily, after crossing the river on proceeding some distance chorten or white Chaityas are viewed, then one can presume the existence of this Gompa. All around is the Hemis village. In the beginning this belonged to Nyingmapa order, at present it is possessed by Karju-pa sect. King of Ladakh is the chief of this monastery. He went to Lhasa to acquire religious education in 1947-48 A.D., but did not come back. Later on, a child of five years among the refugees of Tibetan camp was found as his incarnation. He was consecrated as the abbot of the Gompa after being successful in various examinations - and then he was taken inside the Hemis with his parents. Now he is aged twenty years only. As a chief he is seated on the throne to witness the great festival that displayed in Hemis in June. Above the Hemis mountain, there is another mountain Gosang (gateway to Heaven). There, he will have to stay for few years, he will be under the tutelage with both internal and external teachings before he is finally enthroned as religious chief of Gompa after he succeed in final examination.

Religious ceremonies and fairs are held in Hemis in June after considering the lunar day. Hence, very many people can participate and witness this festival. Other gompas of Ladakh hold their ceremonies in winter. Hence, men from outside cannot witness them. There are some ceremonies which must be observed everywhere such as New Year (Losar), worship of books and defeat of evil power. We reached there just two days prior to witness the ceremonies. We were permitted to stay inside in a room of Lama for two days, so we got an opportunity to see good portion of the arrangements inside.

A good number of Gompas were looted during the Dogra king Pratap Singh's reign. Then the chief of Hemis monastery of Ladakh arranged for shelter and provision for the Dogra soldiers, as a result the intruders left the monastery unharm. It also achieved the favour of Dogra king. Many images are enshrined there, most of them are plated with gold and silver. Large images of Sakyamuni, gods and goddesses of Mahayana pantheon are placed on the altar. There is another statue, that of Madarparva, consort of Padmasambhava. From the almost illegible fresco illustrations of Sisshacharya and their miraculous powers on the opposite of the main entrance dwelling, it may be guessed that this Gompa previously belonged to Druk-pa or Nyingmapa community. This Hemis gompa covers a land area is five bighas surrounded by mountains on all sides. The Gompa is five hundred years old, but the images belonged to the tenth or eleventh century, Images have been picked up from the locality of Miru or Meru and placed here. There are many small and big monasteries under Hemis. The biggest of the ceremonies is the famous lama Dance held in June - the dance is about defeating evil power by benevolent power. The Lamas participate in this ceremony of two days. The first day covers-emergence and spread of evil power and on the second day, driving away of that evil power by persons holding spiritual power. That is the main theme. (Detailed descriptions of this ceremony are found in many ritual books).

These shown through display of play at dance and instrumental music-Besides, large and picturesque "Thanka" painted on silk or specially prepared paper are unwrapped and shown open every eleventh year-1990 was one such year. On this occasion, the fair held for three-four days is attended by people from far and wide-many commodities are brought and sold. The name of Hemis is Byang-Chu Sam-ras-chin, it means 'thought of wisdom'. Senge

Namgyal (1599-1640), one of the Drukpa community Mohanta (chief) Tag-Sangra prepared it for the Chinese. Construction of this gumpa started in 1602 A.D. and completed in 1642 A.D. This community followed the Druk-pa community of Bhutan. But some images of tenth and eleventh centuries from the ruins of Miru or Meru gumpa in Rupshu have been brought here. Hence, Meru is called "Mother of Hemis".

GOMPAS AROUND LEH

(1) **TIKSE** - situated on a hill 14 Km away from Leh. It has a huge statue of Buddha with 7 small temples with beautiful frescos within.

(2) **SHEY** - situated at a distance of 16 Km. from Leh, on Leh Manali Road on hillock. A 7.5 m. high Buddha statue made of white copper from Zaskar with gold plating in one of the biggest statue of its kind built by Delden Namgyal, son of Seng Namgyal, in memory of his father who was imprisoned and forced to embrace Islam religion by his captors and banished in Kashmir by the Moghul rulers. A butter lamp burns throughout the year. It was built by a Nepalese sculptor with the help of three Ladakhi craftsmen. Five Kg. of gold was required for plating.

(3) **STOK GOMPA** - was built in a village across the Indus when the king of Ladakh was banished from Leh by the Dogra ruler. He was the head of Hemis Gumpa upto his death.

(4) **TSEMO-GOMPA** - is on the top of a hillock built in 1400 A.D. by the king Takspa Bumde. It's statue of Maitreya Buddha resembles that of statue at Mulbeik (13.7m high) with Manjusree on left and Avalokitesvara on right. It is built by Mahayani Buddhists.

(5) **SANKAR GOMPA** - is 3 km. from Leh. It has many golden icons built 100 years back. Stories of Panchatantra are painted on the walls around. Kushok Bakula, M.P. (present) is the head of this one.

There are gompas as Deskit and Tegart in Rupshy by Gelugpa Karjupa and Nyingmapa Sects also have some but most of them are only 100 years old.

(6) **ZANSKAR** - This district lay south of Leh, has many ancient gompas, namely: Mather, Taklat, Takram, Karsha, Rangdom, Karoha and Phutcol. The last one is situated on a high hill-famous for the visit of a Hungarian and renowned scholar and Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Körös (1784-1842) during some months in 1823-1826. He travelled through Central Asia routes and Karakoram and was stopped at Leh. The adventurous traveller D. Moorcraft requested him to stay at Yangla in Zaskar. During his stay for some months he prepared a Grammar and dictionary in Tibetan language before proceeded to Calcutta. His name is engraved in a piece of stone here. He started for Lhasa in 1842 and died on way at Darjeeling.

(7) **GILGIT** - (D. Ladakh) During 1931 a mass of brick-bark and a few paper manuscripts were found in Naupore near Gilgit cantonment in a circular chamber 7 ft. 9 1/2" diameter inside the dome of a stupa. These ascribes to 6th or 7th century A.D. These were published later in 7 volumes. They present Sanskrit texts - many of which are only known through their Chinese and Tibetan translations, now discovered first in Indian soil. These include a number

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of Sutras, PRAJNAPARAMITA, SADDHARMA-PUNDARIKA and the Sanskrit VINAYA PITAKA of MULA-SARVASTI-VADINS. Apart from the manuscripts, the relic chamber yielded hundreds of small votive clay-stupas containing within the Buddhist creed and relieved plaques.

Concluding Remarks :

After 1959, when Tibet was occupied by the Chinese Government after the exile of Dalai Lama from Lhasa, Ladakh is considered as the main centre of Tibetan Buddhism by all the Tibetans in exile. Still some noteworthy ceremonies like Kala-Chakra have been conducted by the present Dalai Lama (1) in Leh (1986), (2) Bodh Gaya in 1988, (3) Saranth in 1991-92. Thousands of lamas and devotees from here and abroad attended these in large number facing great natural hazards.

List of illustration of Gompas

1. SHERGOLA
2. MAITREYA BUDDHA (20 ft.) ROCK-CARVED STATUE at MUZBE
3. AVALOKITESWARA with 11 hands on each side of hands at Mulbeik.
4. LAMAYURU - the oldest gumpa.
5. PHIYANG - Statue of Buddha
6. LIKYIR - Gumpa
7. SPITUK - (Near Airport)
- 8-9. ALCIII - Wooden carvings of the gate and large statue of Avalokiteswara (standing) inside.
10. Way of Hemis Gumpa
11. FRONT OF HEMIS
- 12-13. Decorations on the wall and Frescos inside Hemis Gumpa.
14. Statue of Founder (inside) Hemis.
15. GOSANG cave above Hemis.
16. TIKSHE MONASTERY - Statue of Buddha.
17. Buddha statue in Sher Gumpa.
- 18-19. RANGDOM and KAROHA Gumpa - Zanskar.
- 20-21. Decorations of Front page on Gilgit Manuscripts.

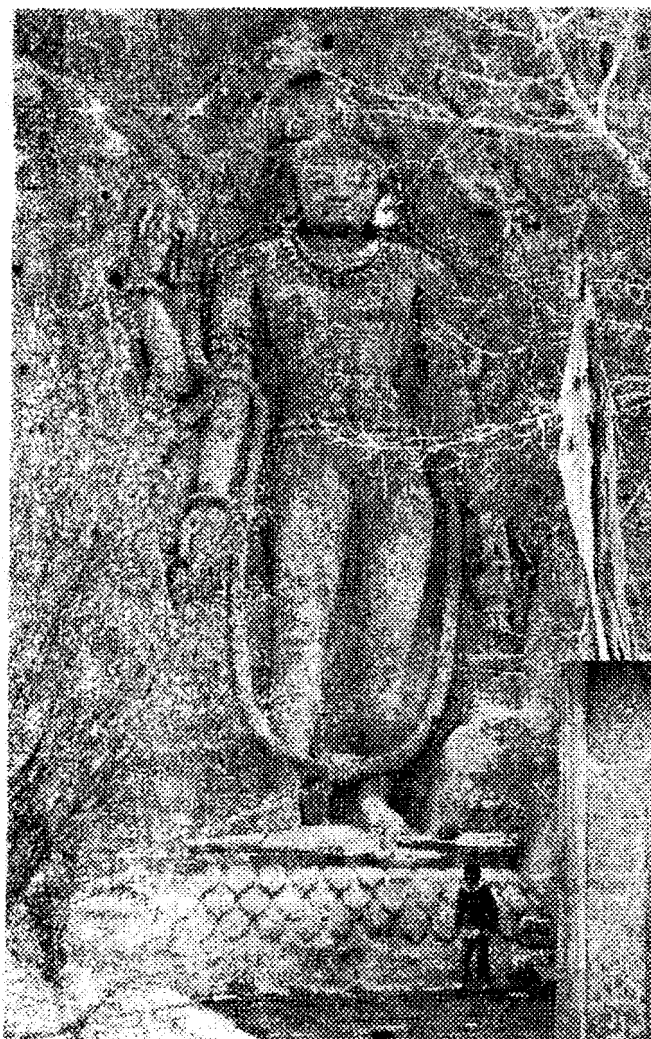
Acknowledgement

1. Photographs 1-16 : Taken by Shri Sushanta Chattopadhyay of Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.
2. -Do- 17-18 : Were taken by Ms. Sunanda Banerjee.
3. 2 Decorated Covers from a newspapers.



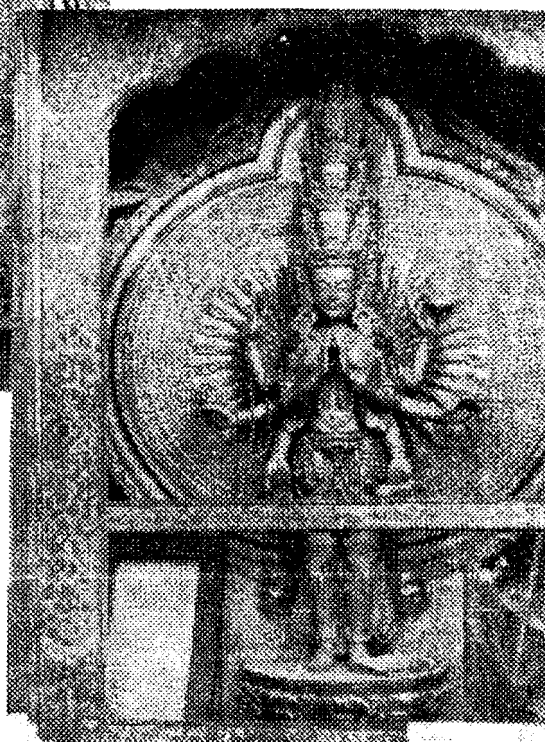
SHER-GOLA
The 1st Buddhist Gumpa of the East after Kargil.

No - 2



Towards Mulbeik
Maitreya Buddha ^(20')
Mulbeik Rock carving

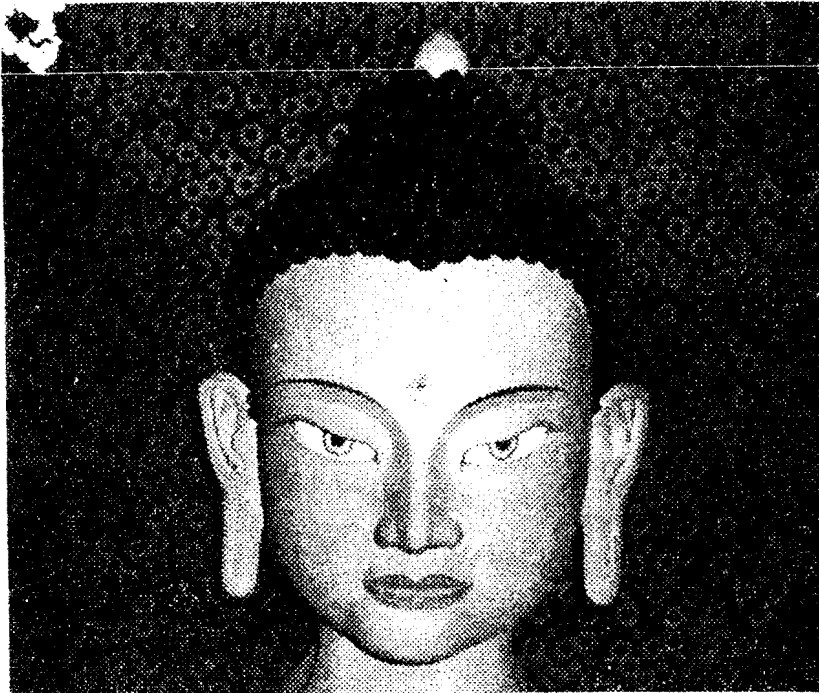
No - 3



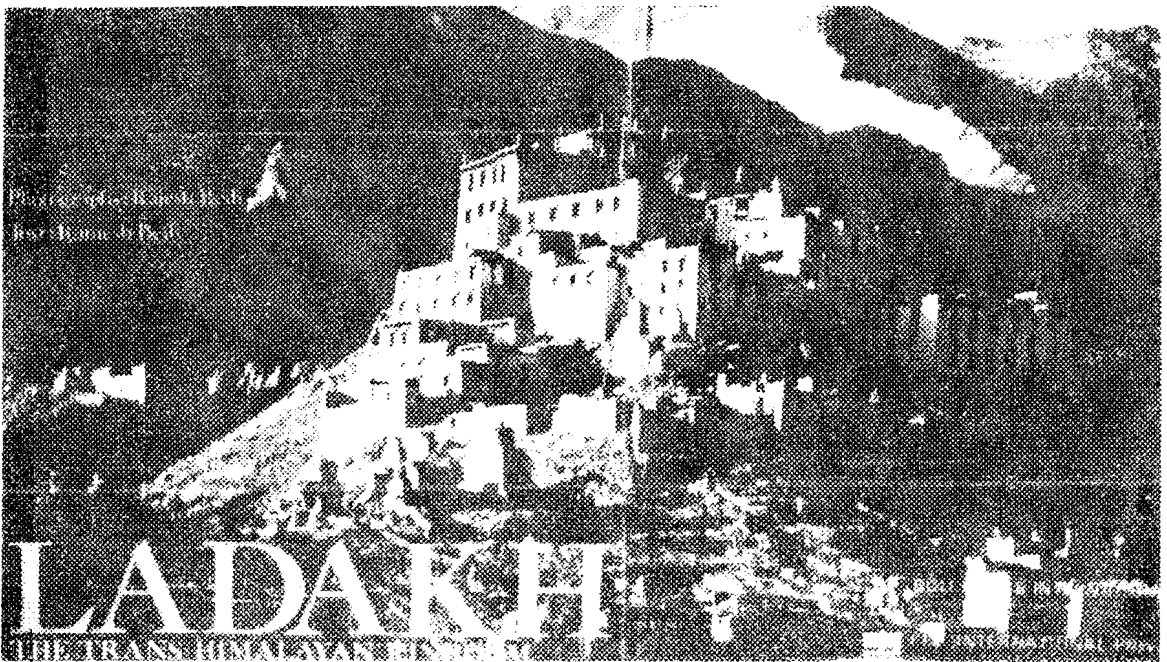
Avolokiteswara



Lamayuru
The oldest gompha



Phyang Gompa
Buddha Statue.

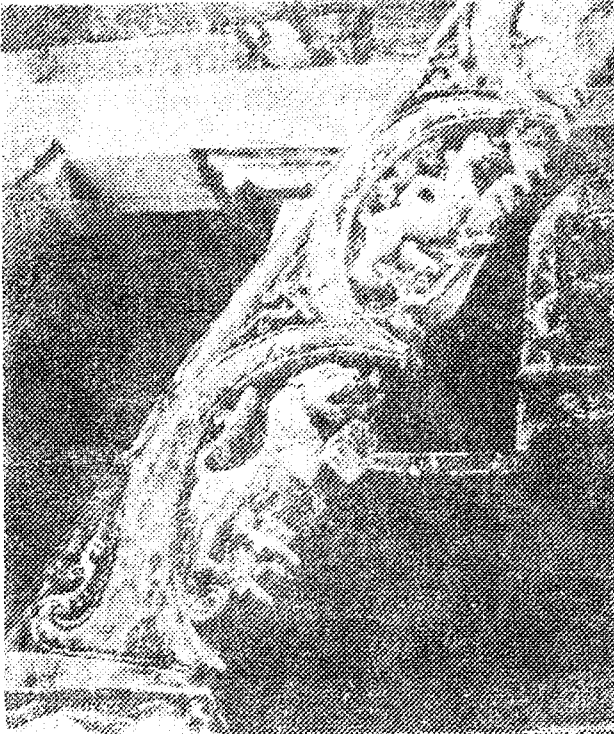


(Likir Gompa) It was lake, drained by Naropa to build the Temple.



Spitak

Al-chi Compa
Wood carving on gate.



No - 9



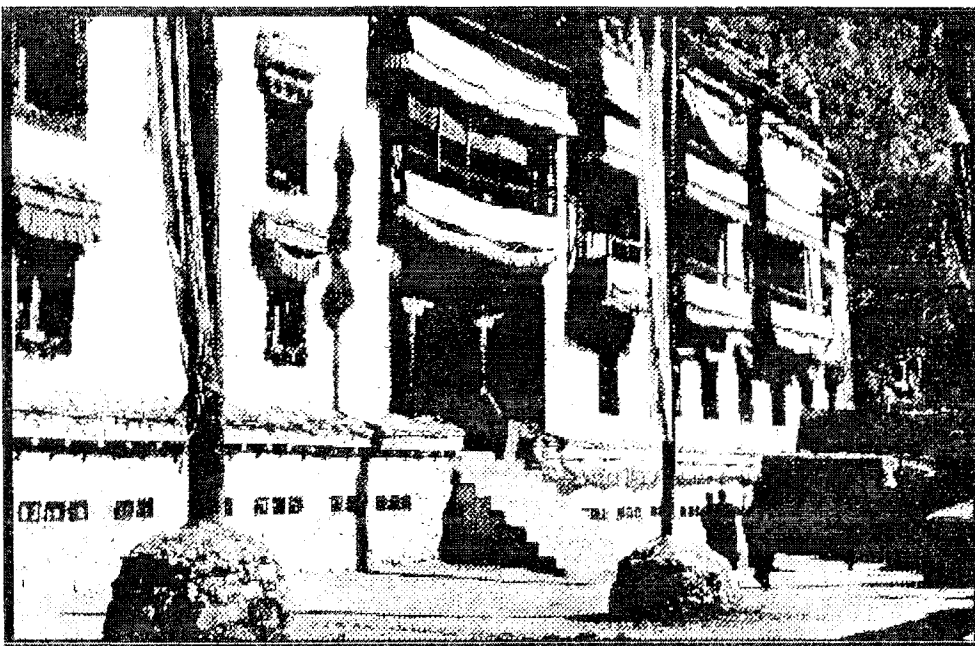
Avalokiteswara in Al-Chi

No - 10



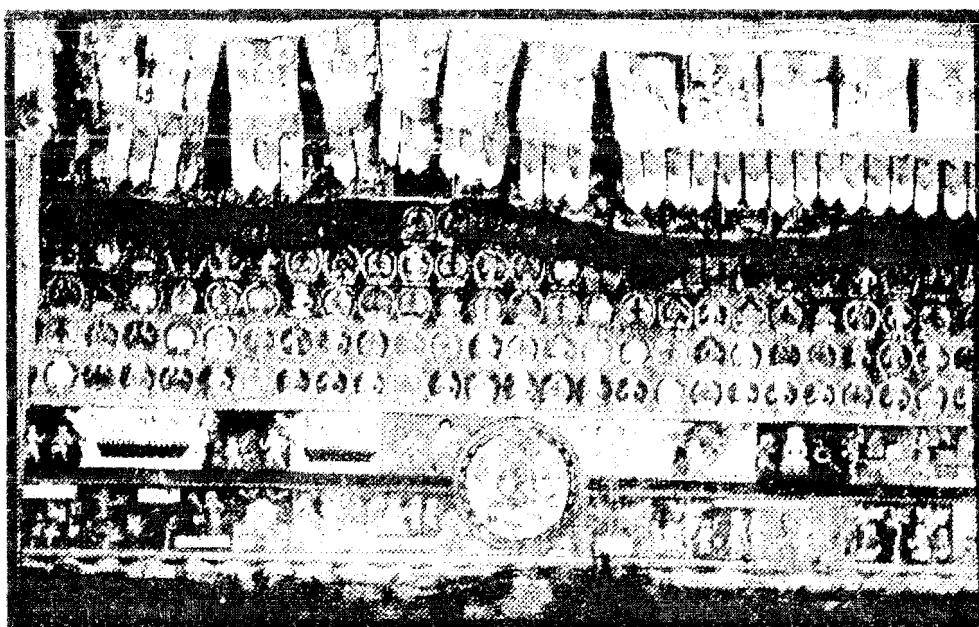
Way to Hemis

No - 11



Front of Hemis

No - 12



The famous Thangka - Shown every 11th year

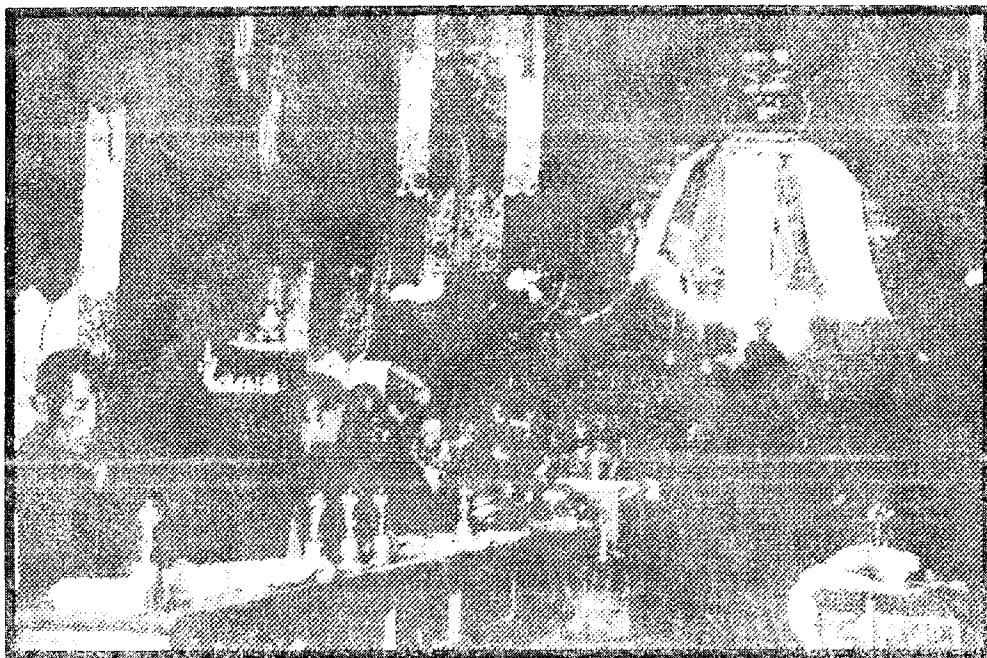
No - 13



Frescoes of Hemis

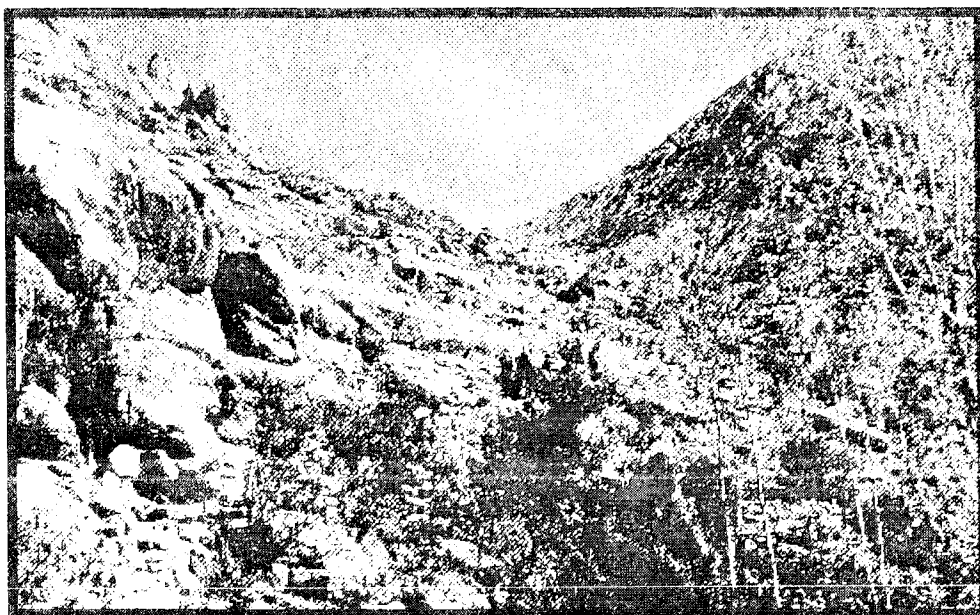
No - 14

Gosang (Door to Heaven)



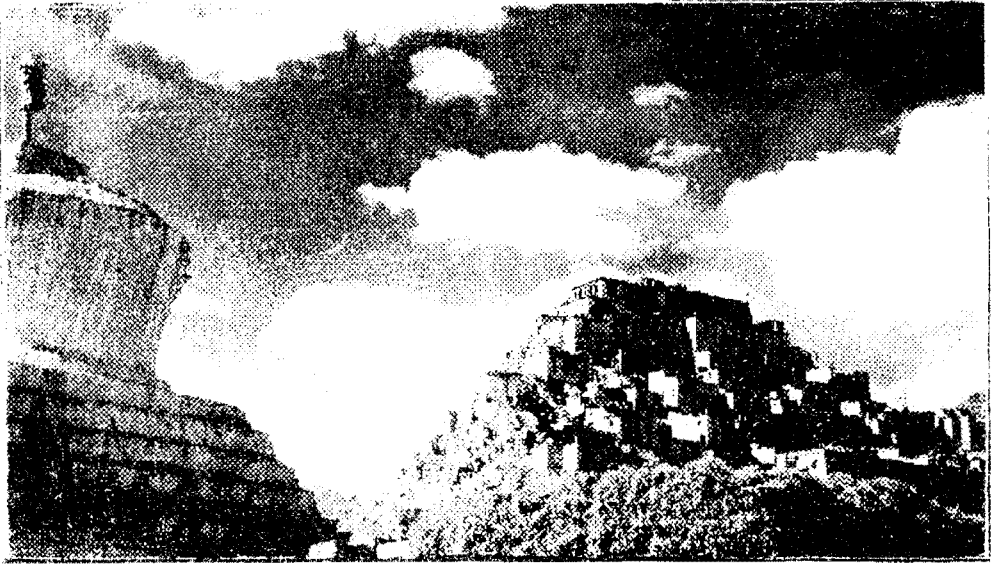
Hemis - Stupa, Front Side (Founder)

No - 15



Gosang Cave

No - 16



Tikse

No - 17



Shey Gompa
Buddha Statue

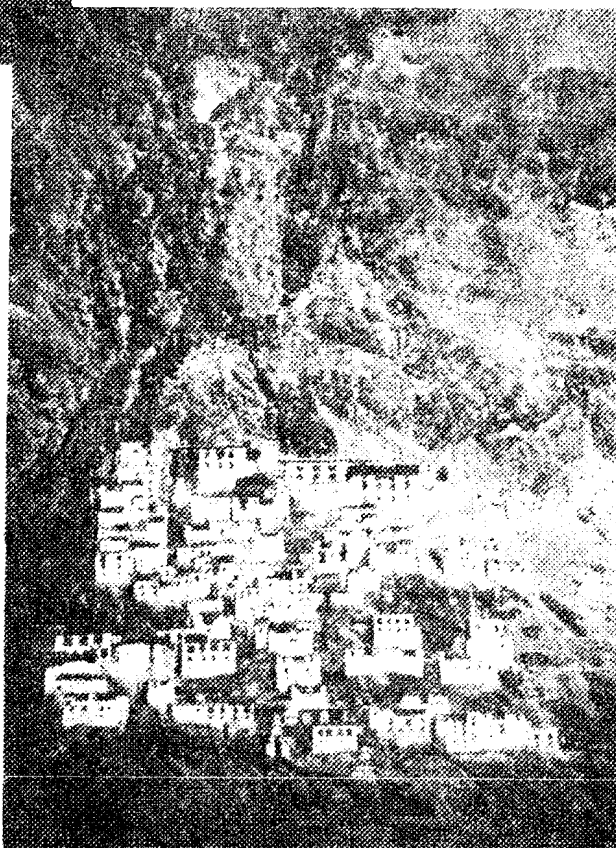


No - 18

Rangdom (Zaskar)

No - 19

Karoha (Zaskar)



No - 20



Decorations on cover of some Manuscripts found in Gilgit (West of Leh)

No - 21

