



## Spread of Buddhism in Ladakh (From 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE to 9<sup>th</sup> CE)

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**Abstract:** *Jammu and Kashmir State of India is still a blooming orchard of Buddhism. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse how Buddhism reached Ladakh and why it is flourishing there till date. Oral traditions have also been used in this study. During the course of present study, Interdisciplinary approach of research methodology has been applied.*

**Key Words:** Ladakh, Buddhism, Bon-chos, Lamaism, Tantra, Tibetan Buddhism

**Introduction:** Buddhism as a new religion was born in India and soon became the faith of multitude especially in the Gangetic region. It got the patronage of some powerful monarchs especially Asoka Maurya and Kaniska . It is generally believed that Buddhism spread to the other regions of India as well as outside the India due to the zealous efforts of missionaries for which monasteries provided a strong base. Kashmir the immediate neighbor of Ladakh got the gospel of Buddha as depicted in some primary sources regarding the history of Kashmir like Rajtarangini as early as 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE. Kashmir remained the hub of Buddhism for next 11 centuries till it was ousted from Kashmir as from the other parts of India. Ladakh is perhaps the only region in India where Buddhism not only remained till date but flourished as well. It even was able to sustain itself after the introduction of Islam to this region by Syed Ali Hamdani. What matters most here is to know when and to whom was the gospel of Buddha preached in Ladakh. Ladakh remained a cross road and hence was prone to consistent immigrations. In such a situation where demographic changes are high and the immigrations are constant, it is quite hard to say then when and how any religion reached this land and most interestingly from where. Further the cardinal religio-cultural ties with the Tibet is another aspect that needs to be taken in consideration while discussing the religious aspect of Ladakh in proper and Western Himalaya in general. In this paper we will try to understand this phenomenon from three aspects. First of all what was the religion practiced prior to the introduction of Buddhism. Second, who were the earlier inhabitants to whom the Buddhism was preached or who were the first people who brought Buddhism into Ladakh. Third, from where Buddhism was introduced to Ladakh. We will also try to address the issue from the perspective of Silk-route trade as well.

The first point that what was the religion of the people in Ladakh prior to the introduction of Buddhism which is generally considered in between 2<sup>nd</sup>BCE and 1<sup>st</sup>CE. O.C Handa who has made a lot of research on the western Himalayan region from political and religious aspects believes that prior to the introduction of Buddhism into this region, Bon-chos was the only thing in the name of religion not only in the region under study but almost all the central Asia.<sup>1</sup>In order to better understand Bon-chos or the Bon religion we are describing it here separately.

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<sup>1</sup>O.C.Handa, *Buddhist Western Himalaya, Part-I, A Politico-Religious History*,p.254, Indus Publishing Company, Tagore Garden , New Delhi.

### 1. Bon-chos:

The belief that Bon-chos was the religion in the region which is normally called as Western Himalaya of which the present area of study, Ladakh is a part is attested by both literary sources as well as archaeological sources. In addition to historical sources, the living traditions also attest the existence of Bon-chos in Ladakh. Bon-chos has been generally accepted as a religion based on animism and nature worship with sorcery and magic as ingredients. The history of Ladakh is clouded till the 9<sup>th</sup>CE in mystery. The earlier settlers seemed to have been nomads, mostly on toes in such a lethal climate that didn't allowed them to stay for longer spells. It can also be noticed that sedentary life seems to began in the pockets drained by Indus with a limited vegetation like oasis in deserts. What makes us to believe that Bon-chos could have thrived well across Ladakh in addition to the historical sources is that , it seems to had little contact with Kashmir initially, otherwise we could have found at least mention of Ladakh in Rajtarangini and Nilmat Purana or Desopadesa like historical works. It seems suffice from the religious need of the earlier settlers to have practiced Bon religion before the advent of Buddhism to Ladakh, because of the various stages Bon-chos itself passed. We believe that Bon-chos could have remained the main religion of the Ladakh because of two reasons. First of all we find a lot of rock carvings in Ladakh and in other parts like Spiti etc. These rock carvings depict a series of things. The main sites where there carvings in Ladakh can be found are Khalatse, Channigund, Alchin, Dha, Byama and Mang-yu. The rocks of different shapes and sizes, unevenly flat have been used for this purpose. These rocks, geologically metamorphosed igneous rocks, generally face east and the carvings have been made in horizontal position. Some of these rocks were repeatedly used due to the superimposition of the figures inscribed. The main figure as per Handa and other scholars of these carvings is the Ibex which is still a symbol of faith in Ladakh. Most of these rock art carvings are attributed to pre-Buddhist Bon-chos, an animistic religious cult.<sup>2</sup> These rock carvings may be defined broadly in three different categories on thematic and stylistic considerations that may define sequential stages in the evolution of indigenous Bon-po culture from the totemic primitivism to the nomadic way of life.

Among these three categories, the earliest and the most primitive one may be the ones with Ibex as the chief motif. The Ibex is depicted either singly or in herds with other cult devices like swastika, sun and yoni etc. All these devices formed the integral part of Bon-chos. The nature of these devices is often considered totemic and with a fertility vision, which is not rare among the other cults.<sup>3</sup> The second category of the carvings shows a vivid development as the stylized anthropomorphic devices in the main field and the ibexes and other cult devices are at peripheries. O.C.Handa on the basis of universal tribal cultism believes that such motifs depict rejoicing especially on the birth of a child.<sup>4</sup> The third category with motifs like horses and

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<sup>2</sup>During my field study, the carvings I encountered had some extra things than observed by Handa. For the sake of example there is a caravan scene, people dancing and some people are hunting the game animals which seems to an antelope or capra (Markhor). In another carving the mating scene of Ibex is depicted. As these sites are not preserved except one at Alchin, they are prone to natural decay because most of them are on the banks of Indus which is prone to floods and also a road has been built which could have damaged many such carvings.

<sup>3</sup>Opcit. O.C.Handa,p.255.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

panthers depicts a developed stage of life and shows the theme of taming of animals. It shows the navigation from the primeval totemic cult towards the nomadic system. It further shows the systematic evolution of social setup from an earlier hunting gathering to the socially nomadic stage. If we compare Burzhom at this stage with the Ladakh, we may find a lot of similarity especially in the religious sphere. We do find the hunting scene inscribed on a stone slab with two suns. Though we cannot categorically say that the Burzhom and Ladakh had the same religious concepts but the comparison shows that existence of such cults was not rare.

Secondly, we observe in the whole course of Ladakh history that Tibet played a pivotal role in its religio-cultural and political sphere. Though some scholars believe that politically it was a separate entity<sup>5</sup> but from the perspective of religio-cultural ethos, it was an integral part of Tibet. From the literary sources pertaining to Ladakh and Tibet like The Chronicle of Kings of Ladakh and Bus-ton, we find the existence of Bon-chos as a strong faith prior to the coming of Buddhism and even during the course of Buddhism. We even encounter the bloody clashes between the two especially in the reign of pro Bon king Lang Darma (c.838-842 CE). It means that being the primitive and the oldest religious cult, it flourished well till the onset of 8<sup>th</sup>CE when Buddhism after many efforts overshadowed it. Bon-chos was not replaced by Buddhism; rather it was amalgamated into Buddhism which gave rise to what we call now the Tibetan Buddhism with many gods of the Bon-nature.<sup>6</sup> As we have earlier quoted that the area was held by nomads and it is possible that via their seasonal journeys, the Bon-chos could have gained impetus in the Ladakh.

It is very hard to get a historically clear picture of the Bon-chos prior to the rise of Buddhism. As it is quite possible that the Buddhism as a rival school to the Bon School could have doctored their image and could have brought up biased and polluted concepts regarding Bon-chos. As mentioned earlier that there was a tussle between the two faiths, that compelled the king Trishong Detsen who ascended the throne of Tibet in 727 CE to invite the master Padmasambhava (c.717-762 CE) to Tibet in order to neutralize the Bon effect. As Padmasambhava with tactics amalgamated the Bon elements into Buddhism and converted masses to Buddhism, hence it is quite natural that the pristine form of Bon-chos is extremely hard to either find as a living legend or from the texts of the contemporary period. It may not be neglected that in order to protect their faith, the Bon-pos (Adherents of Bon religion) could have devised some policy to withstand the Buddhist onslaught.

The profound influence of Bon-chos on the Buddhism is apparent from the traditions that are even associated with famous monasteries like Lamayuru which has a *gYung-drung-bon* legend associated with its foundation.<sup>7</sup> Francke has sought some other examples as well like that of bundling up a spirit in twigs from the Maru Monastery and installing it in Hemis by Senge Namgayal. Another legend is about the catching of the wind in clay pots and depositing them in a stupa to stop it from destructing Ladakh.<sup>8</sup> It was not a one sided process, but a give and take process in

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<sup>5</sup> Sridhar Kaul&H.N.Kaul, *Ladak through the Aes Towards a New Identity*,p.38.Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi.

<sup>6</sup>Opcit.O.C.Handa,pp.270-276.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.p.261.

<sup>8</sup>Opcit.A.H.Francke.p.81.

which Bon-chos influenced Buddhism and itself was influenced by Buddhism. Handa quotes an interesting example regarding this deal. The Bon mystic mantra *Om-ma-trihmou-ye-sa-lah-du* was adopted after the Buddhist mantra *Om-mani-padme-hum*.<sup>9</sup> A.H.Francke states that the Bon-pos had the practice of erecting Bon-chos structures in Ladakh at Meru and elsewhere that may indicate that there had existed some sort of reciprocity between Buddhism and Bon-chos and both have benefited from it.<sup>10</sup> Historically speaking, since the time of Buddhism was introduced in Tibet, Bon-chos could not find favour with kings. The brief period of three years between about 838-842 CE, when the anti-Buddhist king Langdarma reigned, is the only time when it remained triumphant due to the royal patronage over Buddhism. The Bon-chos largely remained in conflict, but subservient to Buddhism, increasingly identifying itself covertly and overtly with Nyingmapa Buddhism of Tibet with the passage of time. As Sarat Chandra Das notes, that the Nyingmapa has much of its sectarian literature in common with the Bon-pos, although with little difference in clad.<sup>11</sup>

Still Bon-chos has managed to survive precariously in many isolated pockets in Ladakh, Lahul and Spiti. In the initial decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Francke identified an old but deserted Bon-po temple below the Lamayuru monastery with almost obliterated murals of the Bon-chos deities done in black, blue and red pigments.<sup>12</sup> The famous *chamms* or the devil dance of Ladakh is also considered a link between the Bon-chos and Buddhism where the tussle between the two is depicted by devil dance.<sup>13</sup>

The second question that to whom was the gospel of Buddha preached and who were the earlier missionaries of Buddhism needs a bit elaborated answer. It is because of the reason that we have to know the earlier people of Ladakh and those who brought the message of Buddha to this barren region. We are going to discuss this segment as the following:

## 2. **Buddhism in Ladakh:**

Historically it is believed that Dards and Mons were the earlier settlers in Ladakh. But on the basis of archaeological sources mostly collected by Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, the existence of man in this region dates back to 6000 years ago.<sup>14</sup> As we above mentioned that Bon-chos in its various phases ranging from evolutionary totemic to institutionalized religion remained what we call the faith of the masses prior to the coming of Buddhism. So, we have a people who settled either permanently or temporarily in Ladakh to whom the gospel is believed to be brought around 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE, right at the time when it was brought to Kashmir, the immediate neighbor of Ladakh.. No, doubt, Dards and Mons came to Ladakh, but they may have been as immigrants and not the natives of Ladakh. In fact in Ladakh like difficult region, the avenues for population growth seems to be limited. It is also a fact as put forth by Janet Rizvi that being a cross road, it could have increased the changes for dramatic demographic and ethnic change.

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<sup>9</sup>Opcit.O.C.Handa.p.261.

<sup>10</sup> Opcit.A.H.Francke.p.66.

<sup>11</sup>Sarat Chandra Dass, JASB,Vol.L,p.202.

<sup>12</sup>Opcit.A.H.Francke.p.97.

<sup>13</sup>Opcit.O.C.Handa.p.262.

<sup>14</sup> Janet Rizvi, *Ladakh Crossroads of High Asia*,p.62. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Though it is agreed upon by almost all the scholars that Buddhism reached Ladakh from the Indian side i.e.; from Kashmir much earlier than Tibet. In such a situation there are apparently two waves which spread Buddhism in Ladakh. We need to address them separately in order to have better insight.

**a. First Spread:**

It is generally considered that Buddhism reached Ladakh from Kashmir<sup>15</sup>. It becomes necessary to know in a historical way that when it itself reached Kashmir from where it was immediately or later on transported to Ladakh by the zealous Buddhist missionaries. It also makes us to know that if the Buddhist Sangha, the conglomeration of missionaries had developed to that extent that it could carry the gospel beyond the plains into the gigantic mountainous regions, difficult for survival. In this regard the era of Asoka Maurya seems the suitable one who himself patronaged the Buddhism as Dhamma or universal savior of humanity. Another factor which attracts in such situation is the social setup of the Tarai region which was inhibited by the so called outcastes from the Brahmanical point of view.<sup>16</sup> So, it seems but natural that such social groups could have overwhelmingly responded to the call of Buddha. It signals towards the spread of the Buddhism much before the efforts of Asoka. One such example has been traced by O.C.Handa regarding the existence of pre-Asokan institutionalized Buddhism in Kashmir. The statement is based on the authority of Rajtarangiuni, in which Kalhana reports that prior to Asoka, a king namely Surendra built many Buddhist Viharas in Kashmir. One of these was built at Saurasa, the present day Soura, birth place of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah where SKIMS is located. If Kalhana is believed, then certainly Buddhism flourished as an institutionalized faith in Kashmir much earlier than the Asokan period. According to Dr. Sunil Chandra Ray, Buddhism seems to have obtained a footing in Kashmir as early as the 3rd century B.C. the Ceylonese Chronicle *Mahavamsa* preserves an account of the introduction of Buddhism in the valley by Majjahtika.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore the numismatic sources depicting the Buddhist devices inscribed on them belonging to the western Himalaya also attest the presence of Buddhism in this region prior to Asoka.<sup>18</sup> The essential message of Buddhism seems to have echoed in the barren ruggedness of the western trans-Himalaya within decades after the great Decease through the missionary activities of the Sthavira Angira around Kailash region and of Kanakavatsa around Kashmir states O.C.Handa. He further believes that the people residing in these regions were mostly nomadic and the permanent settlements were thin with least chances for institutional infrastructure<sup>19</sup>. The argument is attested by the claim of A.H.Francke who found a Brahmi inscription near Khalatse on the Indus to suggest the existence of the required centre for institutionalization of Buddhism prior to Asoka.<sup>20</sup>

The efforts of Asoka to preach and propagate the Dhamma are renowned. Buddhism spread and established its institutional infrastructure in the entire western

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<sup>15</sup> David L. Snellgrove and TadeuszSkorupski, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*, p.6. Aris & Phillips Ltd. Warminster, England.

<sup>16</sup> Opcit. O.C. handa. pp.15-17.

<sup>17</sup> Wihelm Geiger, Tr. Maabel Haynes Bode, *Mahavamsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, Asian Educational Service, HauzKhas, Delhi, XII. 3

<sup>18</sup> Opcit. O.C. Handa. p.18.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.263.

<sup>20</sup> Opcit. A.H. Francke. p.97.

Himalaya, of which Ladakh is a part and parcel, very vigorously under the aegis of Emperor Asoka (c.268-232 BCE). The empire inherited by him stretched from the Gandhara in the north-west to Mysore in the south and from Bihar in the east to Saurashtra in the west. He further extended his realm by annexing Kalinga, in which the loss of human blood is believed to have changed his heart and he accepted Buddhism. It is believed that he deputized missions to distant lands for the peaceful conversion of different countries on the advice of his mentor Moggaliputta Tissa. Out of these missions Majjhantika led the mission to Kashmir and Gandhara.<sup>21</sup> It seems that either with this mission, the message of Buddha reached Ladakh or sometime after it. Though historically we are unfortunately left in darkness regarding the earlier missionaries to Ladakh for the period under discussion, but of the later Kushan period, we have got some historical sources.

During the Kushana age, particularly under the emperor Kaniska, Buddhism with adequate institutional base, proliferated in the interior of the region under study due to the Kaniska's policy of religio-political expansionism. Numerous structural and sculptural evidences found in Zaskar and Purig area in the lower Ladakh affirm the extension of Indian Buddhism from Kashmir, and its establishment among the native population in this area before that was overtaken by the later Buddhist movement from the Tibet. Since this expansion was initiated from the western side (Kashmir), its impact remained confined to the adjoining valleys of the Suru and Zaskar rivers in the lower Ladakh (Sham). The earlier spell of this spread could have remained confined to moral, intellectual and ethical domain. Nevertheless, such teachings could not have received receptivity among the people deeply steeped in the primitive animism (Bon-chos) we earlier discussed. Higher teachings of Buddhism notwithstanding, the people seem to have continued to adhere to their traditional animistic beliefs and dogmas under the Bon-chos. The situation could be taken at par with the consequences of initial introduction of Buddhism under Trhisong Detsen with the intellectual guidelines from Shantarakshita which later led to the inviting of Tantric expert Padmasambhava. Whatsoever minimal shine the moral culture of Buddhism had imparted to the native traditions seems to have withered away in the absence of adequate feedback from the north-western heartland of Buddhism in Kashmir during the following centuries. The reasons for it could be the loss of patronage after the decline of Kushanas and the coming of Huns into the scene for which Kashmir remained a stronghold. We often encounter their top figures like Mihirakula in *Rajtarangini*.<sup>22</sup> It seems that after the extinction of the connection with the main source Kashmir, Buddhism could hardly have been able to register any significant victory in Ladakh and could have continued to be in the old rut, following the traditional faiths and beliefs under Bon-chos. The picture of the Buddhist culture that emerges out of the extant material and traditional sources in the region is thus quite hazy. It however does establish the fact that the Indian Buddhism had succeeded in setting up an institutional network at least in lower Ladakh. We find many rock carvings in deep relief as opposed to the shallow relief of the later style in Kargil, Zaskar, Dras, Khalatse and Mulbekh. The best known among these is the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.p.19.

<sup>22</sup>Pandit Kalhana, *Rajtarangini* (English Translation With Introduction And Notes By Sir Aurel Stein Indian Edition 1961), Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Pvt.Ltd. New Delhi.pp.128, 182

Bodhisattva Maitreya at Mulbekh,<sup>23</sup> on right side of the Srinagar-Leh road engraved on a large rock. It is estimated that they date to 8<sup>th</sup> Century CE. What is interesting is their style which is purely Indian.<sup>24</sup> After the downfall of the Kushanas, the Guptas came to power and the seat of power transferred from North-West to the South-East on the Ganges. The north-western area was thus thrown into the religious oblivion in the absence of intellectual and material support. Thus the people of Ladakh and other Western Himalayan region began to revert back to the traditional Bon-chos. It was only after the efforts of Buddhist Tibetan Kings that Padmasambhava appeared on the scene which unleashed the second spread of Buddhism across the Tibet and consequently to Ladakh as well. Hence, the Mahayanic Buddhism got replaced by Vajrayana and the whole region began to practice the now called Tibetan Buddhism which is still alive in Ladakh.

**b. Second Spread:**

As we just discussed that the first wave of Buddhism was from western side or Kashmir and how it was sooner or later blurred due to the lack of consistent intellectual and material support. We still find and see the role of Kashmiri missionaries and artists in the development of Buddhism in Ladakh. It may be concluded that the Buddhism brought from some other region got established and the Kashmiri missionaries zealously helped in that venture. The second spread of Buddhism was from Tibetan side. Lucciano Petech<sup>25</sup> even don't agrees with the statement that the second spread was initiated after the coming of Skilde Nemagon to the remote western Tibetan territory (collectively Ladakh). It was due to him that more and more Tibetans came and settled in this region overshadowing the demography of the earlier settlers Mons and Dards. It was with the coming of Tibetans that Buddhism once again was reestablished in Ladakh under royal patronage. Further, it is also possible that the missionaries could have found it more safe to preach in Ladakh than the politically turbulent Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> CE. In such a situation to know the nature of Buddhism which was propagated from Tibet, we need to know a bit about the spread of Buddhism in Tibet itself.

Until the dawn of 7<sup>th</sup> Century CE, Tibet was the land of primitive darkness and abject savagery. Politically it was a ruthless region where the strength of sword decided the fate and was far from the intellectual activities. On the strength of such militant activities, Songsten Gampo, the ruthless king had tormented its neighbors in China and Nepal. The historicity of Buddhism in Tibet is traced to the matrimonial ties developed with Nepal and China in the aftermath of this warrior era. It is attributed by scholars as the main cause of Buddhism entering Tibet and the reason were two women, a Chinese Princess Kong-Jo-Wencheng and a Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti. These two are today called as White and Green Tara.<sup>26</sup> Songten is also known for giving a script to the Tibetan and the introduction of literacy to Tibet. Interesting thing is that in order to prepare a script, he sent Thomi to Kashmir. It shows the legacy of Kashmir as the flourishing centre for literature in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>23</sup> Plate

<sup>24</sup> Opcit. Janet Rizvi. p.64.

<sup>25</sup> Lucciano Petech, *The Kingdom of Ladakh C.950-1842 A.D.*, p.165. Istituto Italiano Per II. Medio Ed Estremo Oriente. 1977. Roma

<sup>26</sup> Maj. M.L.A Gompertz, *Magic Ladakh.*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi. p.83

It also signals at the ties between Tibet and Kashmir may be for trade or religious guidance. It seems that Buddhism might have penetrated to Tibet from the Kashmir but was not institutionalized which was later done by Padmasambhava. In the Chronicle of the Kings of Ladakh, we find that Trishong Detsen, born to a Chinese Buddhist mother became the first guardian of Buddhism. The presence of Acharya Shantarakshita, a Buddhist luminary from Nalanda University made the path for the establishment easier. From the presence of this luminary, it also comes to forefront that Tibet had religiously remained in contact with India both from Kashmir side and the mainland side probably via Kulu. It further shows that in order to introduce Buddhism to Tibet, missions may have got commissioned but due to the lethality of the political arena they could have met the little success. P.N.K.Bamzai on the authority of P.C.Bagchi has mentioned that many Kashmiri monks were on way to China for the purpose of translation and propagation of the Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> What all we can infer from such scenario is that the message had reached Tibet along with Ladakh and China, but in Tibet as mentioned earlier due to the presence of Bon-chos as well as the lethal political environment, the further development could have come to a halt.

The earlier attempts to establish Buddhism institutionally was perhaps made by the Acharya Shantarakshita ( c.705-762 CE) under the aegis of Trhisong Detsen. As Acharya had been a luminary and renowned thinker of the Madhyamika philosophy and the Yogacara doctrine at Nalanda University. His eloquent sermons on the doctrine seemed to have ran over the heads of the Bon occupied Tibetans. There was a coincidence as well in which a chain of calamities cordoned off the Tibet. The Bon adherents naturally attributed the calamities to the new faith. In the rising protest against Buddhism, Shantarakshita found that the Philosophical Buddhism was not going to make any advances in a population used to witchcraft, magic spells and sorcery. It was in these situations that he advised the king Trhide Tsuktsen to invite the master of Tantra, Padmasambhava from the Nalanada to cope up the situation in Tibet. Though prior to invite Padmasambhava, the King expired. In 747 CE Trhisong Detsen ascended the throne and he sent an invitation to Padmasambhava (c. 7117-762 CE) to visit Tibet and eliminate the demonic forces that were inimical to Buddhism.

Padmasambhava arrived in Tibet in 747 CE.<sup>28</sup> He soon realized that the Tibetans were superstitious (because of age old dominance of Bon-chos) and it is hard for them to understand the humanistic and intellectual aspects of Buddhism to adopt it. As a solution to demand of the time, he initiated a version of Tantric Buddhism by admitting most of the native demonic deities as the defenders of the new religion, so that this version would be able to fetch popularity among the Bon-chos plagued masses. The personality of Padmasambhava was equally decisive in this regard. His very birth was narrated as miraculous as his name depicts which means Lotus Born. Regarding Tantra, he belonged to Udayana (believed to be in the modern Swat valley in the North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan) which was a centre of tantra and out of which the Indian school of Yogara adopted a lot of practices.<sup>29</sup> Attesting the similar phenomenon in other parts of the world, Handa quotes an example from Japan

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<sup>27</sup>P.N.K.Bamzai *Culture And Political History of Kashmir Vol.I*, M.D Publications Pvt. Ltd, M.D House 11 Darya Ganj, New Delhi.p. 86

<sup>28</sup> Weddell, *Lhasa and its Mysteries*, Sanskaran Prakashak, 1905 ,p.24, Foot Note.6.

<sup>29</sup>Opcit.O.C.Handa.p.268.

where Kobo Daishi accorded the Shinto deities Buddhist sanctity to encourage conversion among the Shintoist masses.<sup>30</sup> The same phenomenon can be seen in case of spread of Islam to Kashmir as well. It is traditionally believed that Mir Syed Ali Hamdani allowed the new converts to recite his collection *Aurad al Fathia* at high pitch in mosques which is otherwise prohibited in Islam. Anyway, the Dhamma propagated by Padmasambhava was therefore, not much different from the cults that existed in Tibet at that time. In the scheme of this Unreformed religion, there was emphasis on the propitiation and appeasement of the demons in their fierce aspects, which also included several indigenous sacraments. Perhaps, to counter this Unreformed Dhamma we later on see the mushrooming of many Reformation schools like Gelukpa.

Traditionally it is often stated that the state patronage makes a religion popular. But in case of Tibet, it seems improper to credit the state wholly as we have seen earlier that even having the state patronage Buddhism failed to establish itself firmly for which later on Padmasambhava was invited. It is also a fact that the content of the religion has remained a must for mass conversion. Any way with the immense support of the state and the zealous efforts of Padmasambhava, Buddhism (unreformed version with plenty of Bon- deities and traditions) became popular and people were swept with the new wave of religious resurgence and they flocked *en masse* to the new religion. It was really a new religion because it was more like a hybrid of the Tantric Buddhism and Bon-chos. We need to be careful while dealing with Buddhism in such situations and must remember that it was Buddhism with assimilations from Bon. The intensity of the popularity can be understood from the fact that Padmasambhava, the real founder of Buddhism in Tibet was accorded the position of the second Buddha in the new Dharma. A majority of the Tibetan Buddhists even held him in a higher esteem than the Buddha and regarded him as more deserving of worship than the latter. The title Tibetans accorded to Padmasambhava depicts this reverence, *Guru Rinpoche* (The Precious Teacher) to this day.

One of the major achievements of the Padmasambhava was the establishment of the institutionalized Buddhism in Tibet along with the mystic verse “*Om mane padme hum*” which has all the virtues. It is inscribed on the stones and pile up *mane* walls of them and the devils flee.<sup>31</sup> In 749 CE, he established the first monastery for the disciplined preaching of the Dhamma in Tibet at Samya. The establishment came after two years of his arrival in Tibet. These two years must have been consumed in preparation of congenial atmosphere for the new religion to take root and proliferate. O.C.Handa narrates that there were Kashmiri translators as well in Tibet who probably translated the tantra sutras into Tibetan. One of them namely Anant hold a remarkable position. His inscribed portrait along with Shantipa (Shantarakshita) may be seen in the Alchi Chos –Khor of Ladakh. He also figures in the Tengyur. It shows that the masters from almost all the main hubs of Buddhism used to visit Tibet and it became a centre in making for the proliferation of Buddhism into further North.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Opcit.Maj.M.L.A Gomperz,p.94.

It is perhaps the result of these efforts that Buddhism in Tibet and Ladakh still exists because of the solid foundation laid by these great masters and their able successors.

The introduction of Buddhism in Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century CE was at such a juncture, when the monastic institutions in India had already developed into multi-functional and multi-disciplinary establishments, with colleges, temples, living chambers, halls and libraries all set in one complex. In other words they were transformed into modern university type campuses. This sort of monastic concept was applied to Samya in Tibet which effloresced further into *gyagaryi khang* or the Indian style of architecture in the following centuries in the Tibetan world. The initial phase of Buddhism in Tibet remained infested with innumerable adversities despite the vigorous Tantric and religio-magical efforts of Padmasambhava. After having received the initial shock, the bon clergy became active to muster popular support against the Buddhist incursion. Bon-pos were joined by Chinese<sup>32</sup> and they jointly resisted the mounting popularity of the new religion. This pressure even paved way for the departure of Padmasambhava from Tibet, but it was with the efforts of King Ralpachen (c. 816-838 CE) who endowed most of the monasteries with material means for their subsistence. The richer monasteries attracted more people but it also ignited the spark of jealousy in the orthodox Bon-pos which ultimately resulted in the outright proscription of Buddhism under Langdarma (c.838-842 CE), who captured the throne after assassinating his elder brother Ralpachen. Though he inflicted a considerable damage to monastic Buddhism but his reign was too short to oust Buddhism completely. It is reported that Langdarma confessed that in his last wish, that Why he persecuted Buddhism and if persecuted then why didn't fully.<sup>33</sup>

With the accession of Langdarma, the Buddhist institutional activities of the first epoch 749-838 CE had come to the grinding halt, but the movement continued in a dormant state in the outlying areas. Struggle for the throne continued among the contenders. The Tibetan Empire continued to be dividing, re-divided and united repeatedly. It was during this phase that Skilde Nymagon escaped from Tibet and established what today we know as Ladakh via his dynasty. In 930 CE, he divided his empire between his three sons. One of these newfound kingdoms was the kingdom of Guge in Western Tibet. This kingdom became a stronghold of Buddhism in the Tibetan world under its sagacious king Lha-Lama Yeshe-O (c.967-1040 CE). He himself became a monk and toiled hard to maintain the monasteries and invite the teachers of Buddhism from India. In doing so he even spent some time in jail of the King of Garhwal.<sup>34</sup> He made hard efforts to bring Atisa to Guge in order to strengthen the Dhamma and may be to reform it. He is also credited with the development of Rinchen Sangpo (958-1055 CE) as Lotsava by financing his study in India. Rinchen Sangpo emerged as the champion of resurgence of Buddhism in Tibet. The period of 60 years from 990-1055 may aptly be called the Rinchen Sangpo age in the history of Tibet and Ladakh. He is credited with the founding of as many as 108 temples and monasteries in the length and breadth of the region. Almost all the earlier monasteries

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<sup>32</sup>Trhisong Detsen, the patron of Shantarakshita was born from a Chinese mother Chin-Cheng, but preferred the Indian Buddhism against the Chinese of his mother. It further shows that Buddhism in China reached much before it established itself in Tibet.

<sup>33</sup>Opcit.O.C.Handa.p.275.

<sup>34</sup>Opcit.O.C.Handa.p.275.

in Ladakh are attributed to him<sup>35</sup> especially the ancient monastery of Nyar-ma in 1000 CE.<sup>36</sup> Those establishments, many of them now lost, paved way for the overall development of Buddhism and ushered in an era of religio-scholastic resurgence in the Tibetan World, Ladakh being a part of it.

Arrival of Atisa was another great event in the Buddhism in Tibet. It is reported that he sojourned on his arrival in the monastery of Tholing established by Rinchen Sangpo in 1025 CE. The arrival of Atisa is itself an interesting tale. As we earlier mentioned that Yeshe-O toiled hard to get him in Guge but it was the King Chang-Chub-O in whose reign Atisa arrived. It is stated that he was moved by the story of the Yeshe-O and decided to leave Vikramsila, a famous university he was in charge of at the age of 60.<sup>37</sup> Atisa immediately after his arrival initiated his activities of revitalizing and purging Buddhism of the impurities that have cropped into it since its introduction by Padmasambhava. During his three years stay, he wrote a lot of books and also got translated many books by the Lochavs (bilingual). He went to Purang in 1044 CE and here he met his lay disciple Dromton (*Brom-ston*). From Purang he shifted to Samya in 1047 CE and thence to Yarva in 1050 CE. He set into motion the process of reformation by prescribing several austere measures. Those who supported his reformative measures in the Old Order were organized into the semi-reformed sect, the Kahdampa that he founded. He passed away at the age of 73 in 1054 CE in the Tara Temple of Nyethang. That action however triggered a process of formation of several semi-reformed and reformed schools and sub-schools out of existing ones in the Tibetan Buddhism. Thus between 1042 CE, when Kahdampa was founded and 1407 CE when Gelukpa was founded, as many as thirteen notable schools and sub-schools have been founded in Tibetan world. These schools exist in Ladakh as well. A brief description of some of these schools seems necessary here.

- 1. Kahdampa:** Atisa set to reform the Buddhism in Tibet on the pattern of austere Indian Buddhist traditions by introducing the practice of celibacy and abstinence. He synthesized the higher ideals of the Hinayana and Mahayana traditions in the New Order of the Buddhism in Tibet. That reformed and purged Buddhist school came to be known as Kahdampa. Dromton (c.1003-63 CE) was made the founder-head of that school and he founded the first monastery of the new school in 1058 CE at Ra-deng towards the north-east of Lhasa. The sect in the course of a couple of centuries and a half of its foundation, developed into Gelukpa which in the course of time dominated over all other sects in Tibet and Ladakh. The monks of this sect support *samar* (red hat) quite similar to its unreformed counterparts of the Nyingma sect. However the hat worn by Kahdampa monks is of the peak like conical type with longish dangling lappets. The ascetic austerities of the Kahdampa were considered by some of its followers too tough to live with. Therefore further schism became inevitable and they parted away from it to form new schools, in which they introduced some of the old lax provisions. Thus, two schematic schools came into being from the austere Kahdampa, one was the Kargyupa

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<sup>35</sup>Opcit.David.L.Snellgrove.p.15.

<sup>36</sup>GiuseppeTucci,*Indo-Tibetica*RealeAccademiad'Italia, 1932,pp.63-64. Rome 1962.

<sup>37</sup>Opcit.H.N Kaul.p.125.

(1050 CE) and the other was Sakyapa (1071 CE). The former was founded by Lama Marpa whereas the latter was founded by Khon Konchhok Gyelpo.

2. **Kargyupa:** Among the semi-reformed schools, Kargyupa was the most reformed school after the Gelukpa (developed Kahdampa). This school was founded by Lama Marpa (1012-1097 CE), one of the most famous saint scholars of the Tibet. Although he was destined to give an organizational form to his school of thought, yet he is regarded its spiritual founder. Kargyupa literally means a follower of the successive orders. Obviously its spiritual lineage follows a successive pattern from the Indian saint-scholar **Tilopa**(988-1069 CE). **Naropa**(1016-1100 CE) succeeded Tilopa in that spiritual lineage. Marpa followed Naropa in that succession. The origin of this school is thus related to the direct spiritual succession from the famous Indian saint-scholar Tilopa, which may establish the fact that this school acted as a vehicle or medium to pass on the message inherited by it through spiritual communication. The emphasis of this school remained on meditation in the seclusion of caves and other solitary places. Mystic insight under the spiritual discipline of this school could be developed through the Mahamudra, the great posture by contemplating on the *Sum-kar-bSdus-sum*, a tantric scripture formulated by Marpa himself. The reasons responsible for the schism in Kahdampa into the Kargyupa and Sakyapa were responsible for split in the Kargyupa also. The austerities of the hermitage made this school lusterless for those of the monks who longed for easier ways, consequently many sub-schools Karmapa, Northern Dugpa, Southern Dugpa, Drigungpa and Talungpa branched out of the Kargyupa in the alter half of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.
3. **Sakyapa:** It was one of the most powerful semi-reformed schools of Buddhism in Tibet (when we say Tibet regarding the religious aspect, Ladakh is included in it). The founder of this school was Khon Konchhok Gyelpo who was born at Sakya in the Wood Dog year (1034 CE) and died in Water horse Year (1102-03 CE) at the age of sixty-nine. He founded a monastery at Sakya in 1073-74 CE. Though some scholars like Weddell have assigned the year as 1071 CE.<sup>38</sup> He was initiated into Tantric discipline by Drokmi.<sup>39</sup>Drokmi himself was a student of the famous Shantibhadra and Shantipa at the famous Vikramsila.<sup>40</sup>Since Khon Khonchhok Gyelpo claimed inspiration from Bodhisattva Manjushri Manjughosha through the Tantric lineage initiated by Nagarjuna down to Vasuputra, the great Indian theoreticians and philosophers of the yore. The Sakya head lama came to be regarded his reincarnation. Vasuputra has been identified with probability by O.C. Handa with Vasubandhu, the brother of Asanga.<sup>41</sup>This sect of Sakyapa initiated the custom of Dalai Lama. The tutelary deity of this school is *Vajra-phurbu*. For the fulfillment of the ritual-worship of this deity, the Sakyapa monks have adopted the Nyingmapa Terma text of *Dorje Phuba chhichhoga*. They also adopted

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<sup>38</sup>Opcit.Weddell.p.69.

<sup>39</sup>Opcit. O.C.Handa.p.289.

<sup>40</sup>Tārānātha,*The Blue Annals*,.Tr. G.N Roerich (The Blue Annals) Vol-VII.The Asiatic Society Monograph Series 1949.pp.206-11

<sup>41</sup>Opcit.O.C.Handa.p.289.

deities Samvara (*bDe-chhog*), Vajrasana (*Dorjr-Den-zi*) and other Vajra deities from the different later schools. After Khon Konchhok Gyelpo, the sectarian hierarchy was continued by Bari Lotsaba (1082-1149 CE). Sakya-pa split up into two reformed sub-schools Chonangpa and Ngorpa. The major difference between the two lies in the places of their establishment.

- 4. Nyingmapa:** It can be called the oldest school founded by Padmasambhava himself. Those of the Buddhist monks, who could not reconcile with the reforms brought about in the religion, choose to adhere to the Old Order, its beliefs and practices. Those were identified as *Nan-pas* which literally means the followers of the old order. Since the formation of the Kahdampa, a schematic process had been set into motion and various factions had come up out of the *Nan-pas* to join those new sects and schools. Each of those schools differed from one another in various peculiarities which included the principal sect deity, source of divine inspiration, place of occurrence and the inspired person, system of mystical insight, substance for the mystical or tantric revelations, the tutelary and guardian deities, sectarian symbols, creedal dress etc. Under such volatile conditions, it became necessary for the *Nan-pas* to make their presence evident as a different sect with all these peculiarities. Thus they organized themselves under a new identity in 1062 CE.<sup>42</sup> This unreformed sect came to be known as the Ninmapa or Nyingmapa. It differed from the other new semi-reformed and reformed schools to the extent that it adhered to the old Tantra texts against the new schools that followed the Tantra doctrines introduced in Tibet during the Second Epoch (Rinchen Sangpo Era). Padmasambhava, the apostle of Buddhism in Tibet is regarded the highest apostle of this sect, placed only second to Buddha. It is believed that he and his disciples wrote many esoteric works. Those works form the bedrock of this school. As the tradition has it, they sealed all those works in different caves in Tibet so that those could be discovered and retrieved at appropriate time later by predestined revealers for the benefit of the future generations. That class of the revealed literature came to be known as the *Terma* which in Bhoti language means a Treasure and the revealers are called as the *Ter-ston* or simply Terma Masters. They were supposed to be the embodiments of Padmasambhava's disciples. Since all of them have been initiated into the meanings of those texts in their earlier births by Padmasambhava, only they were capable of revealing and interpreting them in their next births. Like the Indian Puranas, facts- historical and physical may be found interfused with fantastic imagery in the *Terma* literature. According to Weddell, since the 14<sup>th</sup> Century CE, as many as thirty such hidden revelations have surfaced in Tibet at different times, each of them is believed to be found by a different revealer, who in fact had been the creator in disguise. He even gives the names of many of them as *Thus-yiggser-preng* found by Sang-gyas Lingpa, *Padma bKai-thang* found by Terchen Urgyan Lingpa etc.<sup>43</sup> Apart from the *Terma*, the most important basic text of the Nyingmapa is a famous

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.p.285.

<sup>43</sup>Opcit.Waddell.pp.165-66.

tantric scripture, the *Sangwa Nyingpo*, translated into Bhoti from the original Sanskrit text during the First Epoch. The monks of this school are identified by the *sa-mar*, Red Hat. Because of the red colour of their hat, the outsiders also call this sect as the Red Hat Sect. The typical sectarian headgear looks like a paper boat with its folded lappets. The pre-Lamaistic or Buddhist Bonpos are identified by the *sa-nak*, The Black Hat. Within the broad framework of the Nyingmapa, many sub-sects developed. Some of these are Dzokchhenpa, Mintrl-lingpa, Kartokpa and Nadakpa etc.

Nyingmapa, Gelukpa (Kahdampa) and Sakyapa along with other sects are found in Ladakh.

**Conclusion:** From the above discussion, we can conclude that Buddhism came to Ladakh in two apparent phases. Its first spread was from Kashmir where Buddhism is no more existing but till 11<sup>th</sup> century remained a hub of Buddhism. The monastery of Harwan now in ruins shows the splendid past which could have acted as a launch pad for the missionaries to Ladakh and adjoining areas. The region of lower Ladakh has the archaeological and sculptural evidences of this spread even now which have been discussed in details above. The Buddhism that came from Kashmir was mainly Mahayana Buddhism with ideals of humanism and universal compassion. After the decline of Kushanas, we see a decline in the missionary activities as well. The second phase of the spread of Buddhism was from Tibetan side. As noted in the above paragraphs, Padmasambhava compromised with the Bon-pos and included many deities and sacraments of Bon-chos into Buddhism to make it popular. This time the type of Buddhism propagated was esoteric Buddhism. With the passage of time we see the mushrooming of many sects which aimed at reforming the Bon plagued version of Buddhism. Anyway, the monastic Buddhism develops in whole Tibet including Ladakh. As earlier mentioned when we say Tibet in the religious perspective, we include Ladakh in it. Among the most ancient monasteries in Ladakh we find the monastery of Lamayuru for this purpose. A network of monasteries like Alchi, Mang-yu, Sumda etc were established later on to guard the gospel of Buddha within the Ladakh. The elements of pre-Buddhist religious cults are evident in the living traditions as well as the ancient rock carvings that are spread in length and breadth of Ladakh especially in the Indus basin. Though the thematic meaning of these carvings do not seem purely religious in nature which needs further research from the iconographic perspective. Further the tradition of keeping the flappers with the mystic verse or mantra Om Mani Padme hum written and inscribed on the stones and heaped up on manes also shows the presence of those Bon elements. In fact while in Ladakh, we find the stones piled upon one another like a chorten, flappers waving all around, even written on the small flags and tied to the motor bikes etc to defend oneself or the property from the demonic influence. Out of the two waves which spread Buddhism in Ladakh, the latter from Tibet got established and that is why we find Esoteric Buddhism under the name of Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism flourishing in Ladakh.

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