

Dogra ascedency and intergeration of ladakh with the state of Jammu and Kashmir (1834-1846)

Phunstog Angmo

Abstract

The bifurcation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, has invited the world attention on the already existing Kashmir issue, albeit this time a part of focus expanded to incorporate a lesser known part of the erstwhile state i.e. Ladakh.

The discourse on the bifurcation of the state has raised many issues concerned with the formation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. At this stage it becomes imperative to reflect on the historical events which led to the foundation of the state. Most of the historical text on this subject has focused on Kashmir centric studies, deliberating on the events leading to the establishment of the Dogra ascendancy in Kashmir with the treaty of Amritsar (1846). The contextualization of this event in the history of India as the integration of only two region of Jammu and Kashmir has abated one important aspect of this event its due share of recognition. In doing so, we also tend to subvert the ambitious and the most daring expedition ever attempted by any Indian ruler (Gulab Singh) and his general (Zorawar Singh).

From the perspective of the regional history of Ladakh, the Dogra conquest was one of the most important events on its historical trajectory. This event transformed the political dynamics of the region with Ladakh losing its independent existence. Not only the peaceful existence of Ladakh was disturbed but for the first time it was also exposed to a bigger political platform where two great powers of Dogras and British were already contesting, contending and converging with each other. At this stage Ladakh also got involved in the ensuing political and commercial imbroglio between these two powers.

In this paper, I have investigated this important phase in the history of Ladakh, when it was subsumed under the larger domain of the Dogra Empire. The factors leading to the conquest of Ladakh assessed on the bases of the written primary sources on Dogras, and the travelogues of European explorer in the western Himalayas. The archival records also constitute the major part of the sources particularly relevant in understanding the political

scenario of Ladakh at the time of Dogra subjugation. Other sources collectively incorporating the translation of the local historical text have been used extensively in writing this paper. Through this paper an attempt has been made to provide a holistic approach while studying the foundation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, with details concerning the integration of Ladakh forming the main theme.

Key words: *Dogras, Ladakh, Tibet, Shawl wool, Kashmir, Western Tibet, Treaty of Amritsar, Sikhs, Dogra- Wazir, Baltistan*

Three years have now passed in the hope of assistance from the English Government, but I have received from it no answer good or bad. I am now in great distress, and if the English Government will now assist me, I beg that it (will) send seven or eight officers with troops in this direction.¹

The above quote is from a letter that was sent in 1837, by the Ladakhi ruler addressed to the British agent at Sabathu (office of the British Political Agent at Shimla) in the wake of the Dogra invasion that had taken pace in 1834.² The letter showed desperation and at the same time hope for the assistance from the British government. The raja's desperate plea, however went unattended, although the letter was acknowledged, and sympathies were expressed regarding the 'melancholy' fate of the raja. In fact the British authorities at Sabathu were lauded by the government of India for refraining from entering into any correspondence with the raja of Ladakh.³

The raja in reference here was the crown prince *Chosprul* of Ladakh, who had fled to Spiti, hoping to gather assistance from the British even after his father king Tsepal Namgyal (1792-1834) had submitted to the Dogras and became a vassal subjected to an annual tribute of 20,000 rupees and a war indemnity of 50,000 rupees to the Dogra maharaja Gulab Singh.⁴ The prince frantically sought the British assistance, ignorant of the friendly developments that had been established between the Dogras and the British. As both the powers were heading towards a friendly alliance and even before the conquest of Ladakh, Gulab Singh had made a confidential inquiry, whether the company would have any objection to such a campaign.⁵

Ladakh, is a region which is always encapsulated in the study of Tibet due to its close religious and cultural ties. It also earned the appellation of 'Little Tibet', 'Western Tibet' and 'Indian Tibet' as found in most of the academic literature. This shared cultural identity and territorial proximity with Tibet also caused ambiguity among the early travellers of the Trans Himalayas. When Jesuit priest Ippolito Disederi passed through Ladakh in 1715, while on his way to Tibet to reopen the missionary there, he had known only about 'Little Tibet' and the 'Great Tibet', and all the while he thought that 'Le' was the capital of 'Greatest Tibet' and hence the place where the Jesuit mission existed.⁶ The conflated history between Ladakh and Tibet was also instrumental in shaping the historical identity of Ladakh. The

cultural and commercial connectivity that Ladakh provided to the Tibetan region was one of the most important phenomena that was capitalised by the external forces, when it came to devising policy towards Ladakh. In the domain of commercial ties, Ladakh provided the link between the wool producing region of the western Tibet and the shawl producing region of Kashmir. Ladakh remained an independent territorial entity as long as it succeeded in sustaining the flow of shawl wool to Kashmir. And this very independent status of the region was obliterated by the Dogras, for whom controlling the wool trade was a significant determinant in shaping their expansionist policy towards Ladakh.

The paper attempts to rescale an important event of the past which helps in constructing the historical identity of the region that now stands eroded. It seeks to invite the larger attention towards a region, which has become a focal point in the public discourse due to the recent political developments. Understanding such important events becomes relevant in order to comprehend the present situation.

Emergence of the Ladakhi Identity

The emergence of Ladakh as a regional identity is directly connected with the political developments of Tibet. The events that took place in Tibet in the ninth century CE had two very significant consequences on the history of Ladakh. On one hand, the breakup of Yarlung dynasty (sixth to ninth century CE) of Tibet in 842 CE led a Tibetan prince to flee his country from central Tibet and establish his rule in western Tibet. Western Tibet which was known as *Naris-Skor-Sum* in the traditional Tibetan literature, comprised of Guge, Purang, Rudhok (all in Tibet now) and Spiti (now in Himachal Pradesh) lies in the eastern part of Ladakh, that has become the centre of geo political conflict between India and China in the present time. Geographical contiguity has always played a very important role in building the historical identity of Ladakh. The very genesis of the Ladakhi kingdom and its cultural identity was due to its geographical juxtaposition with western Tibet. The political and regional identity of Ladakh was built up after the foundation of the Ladakhi kingdom in the tenth century. Prior to that, the entire region was ruled by several territorial chiefs from amongst the earliest inhabitants of the region. There was essentially an amalgamation, after a long period of association, of three groups of people, namely, the 'Dards'⁷ from the lower reaches of Ladakh in the Indus belt comprising of Baltistan, 'Mons' from the plains (from the regions of Kashmir and beyond) of India and 'Mongoloid Tibetans' from Tibet.⁸ A regional identity with these three communities, predominated by 'Mongoloid Tibetans' as a base was forged in the upper Ladakh region, which emerged as the centre of Ladakhi kingdom.

Spal-Ki-Gon, (930 CE) the founder of the first dynasty (Lhachen) of Ladakh, thus originated from the family of Strongstan Gampo (b.569-650) the first Buddhist king of Tibet.⁹ The second important aspects of Ladakhi identity which is also connected with western Tibet

was the foundation of the its religious identity. Even though the introduction of Buddhism to Ladakh took place from Kashmir, other important region whose territory lies in contiguity to Ladakh.¹⁰ But the consolidation of Buddhism was directly related to the cultural developments that took place in western Tibet around the same period. The period is coterminous with the coming of great Buddhist scholars like Rinchen Zangpo (tenth century) and Atisha (eleventh century) to Ladakh.¹¹ In the history of Buddhism, the period is associated with the second phase of dissemination (*phyidar* in Tibetan) beginning from the tenth century (The first phase refers to the dissemination of Buddhism that took place upon the accession of the first Buddhist Tibetan monarch in the eight century). The second phase started from western Tibet during the reign of king Yeshe-Od, who had sent twelve Tibetan monks to Kashmir and India to study Buddhism. Rinchen Zangpo was one among them who returned to Tibet in 978 CE along with some Indian scholars and thus began the second diffusion of Buddhism.¹² Ladakh came in the ambit of this religious expansion with Buddhism taking a strong roots in the region. The evidence of expansion of Buddhism during this period is found with the establishment of the earliest monasteries viz. Nyarma, Alchi, Mangue, Sumda, Likir and Tabo (now in Himachal Pradesh), all in Ladakh and built during the rule of the Lhachen dynasty.

Ladakh remained under the rule of Lhachen dynasty till the second half of the fifteenth century, during which nearly seventeen rulers ruled. In this period of six centuries, the kingdom witnessed a peaceful political era marked by the growth of religious and cultural identity. However this scenario was to change from the fifteenth century onwards, with the changes taking place in the neighbouring states, especially in Kashmir. It was the period during which the fortune of Ladakh was bound up with those of her neighbours.¹³ According to Luciano Petech, the establishment of Sultanate in Kashmir (1339 CE) brought a new element of instability to the western Himalayan region because of the imperialistic trends of some of the Kashmir Sultans, some of them under the mantle of Holy war against the infidels.¹⁴

Direct and Indirect Invasions

Ladakh was a region surrounded by high mountain ranges ; Karakoram in the north, Kailash range on which Ladakh itself rests extending to the east, and the Zaskar range to the south. All these mountain ranges are among the highest in the world and beyond them lay Ladakh's neighbours, the various central Asian states in the north, Tibet in the east and Kashmir to its south-west. While Ladakh's natural boundaries gave it a seeming sense of isolation, but it was not a deterrent in the way of the movements of goods and people including invaders as well.

Pertinent to mention here, are the various forms of direct or indirect invasions that Ladakh had to face with the changing political dynamics of Kashmir. Beginning with sultan Shihab

ud din (1359-1378), whose invasion is believed to have extended from Baltistan to Tibet.¹⁵ But the inconsequential results of the invasion, makes it an event of less importance, however, what can be concluded is that a strong threat perception regarding an invasion from Kashmir prevailed in the entire region of Ladakh. This was followed by comparatively an impactful invasion under sultan Sikander (1389-1413) particularly in the region of Baltistan.¹⁶ Even though Ladakh did not directly face the brunt of this invasion, but Baltistan temporarily came under the Kashmir sultanate. The presence of a strong Muslim state in the neighbourhood was set to have an impact on the future course of Ladakh history.¹⁷ And a more consequential invasion occurred during the reign of sultan Zainul Abidin (1420-1470), when Ladakh came to acknowledge a loose suzerainty of Kashmir.¹⁸

Thus, till the late sixteenth century, Ladakh was subjected to raids and invasions from Kashmir and incidents of such raids had a partial impact on Ladakh. An important consequence of these invasions was the boost it gave to the spread of Islam in Baltistan and the Purig area around Kargil comprising the Suru Valley, Pashkyum, Mulbeg, Bodh Kharbu and Shakar Chiktan, which consisted at that time a number of small principalities bound in loose quazi-feudal relationship to Ladakhi monarchy. On the other hand, central Ladakh did not come under the control of the invaders; neither was there any instance of conversion taking place under their influence. One common factor, which proved a great hindrance in the way of the invaders in all these expeditions was the harshness of the climate and the difficulty of the terrain. The rulers of Kashmir, even after a successful attack, never felt motivated to redeem their position of political as well as religious ascendancy over Ladakh.

A significant change in Ladakh's ties with Kashmir was witnessed after latter became a part of the Mughal empire in 1586. Ladakh now sensed a bigger threat of invasion from Kashmir and wasted no time in accepting the authority of the Mughals. As has been mentioned in the Akbarnama that during Akbar's visit to Kashmir in 1589, ambassadors namely M. Beg to the ruler of 'Little Tibet' (Baltistan), and Mulla Talib Isfahani and Mihtar Yari to the ruler of 'Great Tibet' (Ladakh) were sent, and both of them showed obedience and as per past practice continued sending presents to Kashmir.¹⁹

After submitting to the Mughals, the ruler of 'Little Tibet' Ali Mir also offered his daughter in marriage to prince Salim.²⁰ This alliance with the Mughals proved detrimental to Ladakh as with the support of the Mughals, Ali Mir carried a successful campaign against Ladakh, made its ruler Jamyang Namgyal (1595-1616) a prisoner, and proceeded to his country after gathering abundant booty.²¹ The Mughal influence in Baltistan was a matter of great apprehension for Ladakh. The probability of Ladakh coming into conflict with the Mughals became more with their presence in Baltistan. It became a regular phenomenon, that Ladakh remained in a state of perpetual fear of an impending attack from the Mughal governors of Kashmir.

The Mughal political ascendancy in Baltistan was established during the reign of Shahjahan under the command of Kashmir governor Zafar Khan in 1638.²² Though Zafar Khan found it expedient to restore the authority to the ruler of Baltistan, but under the Mughal protection. This position of Baltistan caused an imbalance in its ties with Ladakh. Having emboldened, Baltistan sought the help of Mughals to invade Ladakh in wake of the expansion caused by the Namgyal dynasty ruler Singge Namgyal (1616-1642) in the Purig region. Leading to the first occasion of Ladakh's interface with the Mughals, who while assisting Baltistan, defeated the Ladakhi ruler and secured a tribute.²³ This contact with the Mughals did not leave any long-lasting consequences on Ladakh. Singge Namgyal's promise to pay the tribute was not seriously adhered to and he never honoured it, nor did the Mughals try to enforce it during his reign.²⁴

However, later when Aurangzeb visited Kashmir in the summer of 1664, the presence of a Mughal emperor in the vicinity of Ladakh caused a fair amount of anxiety to the then ruler of Ladakh Deldan Namgyal (1640-1675) considering the fact that Ladakh had not been paying regular tribute to the Mughals.²⁵ Deldan Namgyal renewed the tribute and loyalty of Ladakh to the Mughal governor of Kashmir which again went into disarray once Aurangzeb left Kashmir. On this Saif Khan the governor of Kashmir, who has the reputation of coming down with a heavy hand on the rebels, took prompt action and sent a force to Ladakh to restore the compliance of the agreement entered with the Mughals. This time, in addition to the tribute, Ladakhi ruler was also asked to embrace Islam, read Khutba, and mint coins in the name of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Deldan Namgyal even agreed to build a mosque at Leh.²⁶

Among all the conditions imposed on the ruler of Ladakh only one seems to have brought a long-lasting impact. This was the foundation of the mosque in Ladakh, erected by Sheikh Muhi-ud-din in 1666-67, which stands as the evidence even today as the great Jama Masjid of Leh.²⁷ Besides this, many things reverted to as they were, as the king himself reverted back to Buddhism and the tribute being so nominal was discontinued. However, whatever reservations the Ladakh king may have had, the Mughals regarded him as their tributary.

The establishment of such close ties with Kashmir was later galvanised towards securing an alliance during the Tibeto- Mongol invasion (1679-1684).²⁸ It was due to the assistance and intervention provided by Kashmir that Ladakh could uphold its territorial integrity.

In the ensuing years Ladakh faced the greatest invasion from Tibet, in what is known as the historic Tibeto- Mongol invasion (1679-1684). Ladakh could turn the course of this war in their favour only due to the timely assistance provided by the Mughal governor of Kashmir. It is to be noted here that Kashmir was not motivated to provide assistance to Ladakh against the Tibeto-Mongol forces to establish political ascendancy there. Rather it was the economic reasons that led to the involvement of Kashmir in the wars of Ladakh.

The Kashmiri officials realized that the Tibetan possession of Ladakh would adversely affect the flow of the shawl wool into Kashmir, which was deeply connected to the economy of the valley. The Mughal emperor was thus ready to protect their tributary from falling into the hands of Tibet. And what stands out among all other conditions imposed on Ladakh by Kashmir with the treaty of Timmisgang (1684) signed at the end of the war, was the effectiveness in maintaining the monopoly of Kashmiri traders in the wool trade.²⁹ And this postulate of the treaty later became one important determinant in the shaping the Dogra policy towards Ladakh.

Even after the decline of the Mughals and the subjugation of Kashmir by the Afghans in 1752, the relations between Ladakh and Kashmir remained the same. Ladakh readily recognised the suzerainty of the Afghan governors, who also never bothered to change the status quo as long as Kashmir enjoyed the monopoly of the wool trade. With the change of government in Kashmir and with its occupation by the Sikhs in 1819, things continued to remain the same vis-a-vis Ladakh. Ladakh again quickly acknowledged the Sikh authority and the wool trade continued on the same pattern.³⁰

However, the recognition of the Sikh authority was accompanied with a great sense of uncertainty and apprehension, which Ladakh now came to register and confide with the external agency found in the British. As evident from the records of Moorcroft, who received a plea for seeking British protection, when he visited Leh in 1820.³¹ This fear was found on the grounds, that the Sikh governors of Kashmir had been demanding tribute from Ladakh, but Ladakhi ruler had succeeded to avoid its acceptance owing to the distant location.³² However, a subtle and continual apprehension of the invasion of the Sikh governors of Kashmir sustained among the Ladakhis in this period. Which in reality was quite unlikely to occur at this juncture as the governors of Kashmir province were so frequently changed and watched over by Gulab Singh and his brothers to be able to carry out such a design and Dhyani Singh, brother of Gulab Singh had resolved that no one but his brother should obtain the possession of Ladakh and Baltistan.³³

In this anticipation, the grounds for a favourable condition was made in Lahore durbar with the collective efforts of all the three Dogra brothers (Gulab Singh, Dhyani Singh and Suchet Singh) which helped Gulab Singh not only to extend his authority over the brother Rajpoot but also eventually to Ladakh.³⁴ And as predicted, the greatest external invasion which was to transform the political dynamics of Ladakh took place under the Dogras and not the Sikhs in the coming decades of nineteenth century making it one of the most important periods in the history of Ladakh. It was the Dogras, who disturbed the peaceful and independent existence of Ladakh with its final subjugation in 1842 CE. Not only the peaceful existence of Ladakh was disturbed but for the first time Ladakh was also exposed to a bigger political platform where two great powers of Dogras and British India were already contesting and contending with each other in a diplomatic and judicious manner. At this

stage Ladakh also got involved in the ensuing political and commercial imbroglio between these two powers.

Collapse of Ladakhi kingdom and Dogra Ascendency

Gulab Singh had joined Ranjit Singh's army as an ordinary trooper in 1809, he soon rose in power and by 1820, succeeded in getting the whole province of Jammu as a Jagir and was even became the hereditary raja of Jammu.³⁵ Gulab Singh came in contact with the British, when they were involved in a war with the Afghans. The garrison at Jallalabad was being besieged and to relieve it a British force was equipped at Peshawar. At this, the British sought the cooperation of Sikhs, who agreed to provide protection to the British even though reluctantly, and deputed Gulab Singh who was at Hazara at that time working as one of the trusted commanders of Lahore durbar. 'Here he took the fullest advantage of his powerful position and the distress of the British and ingratiated himself with Henry Lawrence, in securing British help in acquiring independent status for his newly formed state of Jammu. Being a far-sighted politician, he visualized the early breakup of the Sikh state and its annexation by the British and rendered valuable services to the expedition for which he earned the gratitude of the British.'³⁶

Gulab Singh was shrewd enough to realize the importance of the British cooperation at a time when the relation between the British and Sikh was deteriorating and at time when, there was a political turmoil at Sikh durbar after the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839. It was his desire to capitalise the opportunity and turn it to his own benefit, as has been stated by, P.N.K Bamzai in these words;

He realised the dark consequences of the war for the Sikhs and immediately entered into negotiations with the British Government with the view to securing as honorable a peace as possible before it became too late. At the same time, the British realised the importance of conciliating Gulab Singh who had a fresh and disciplined force of Dogras under his command, which if brought into action against them would have proved disastrous to their interest.³⁷

The British had been judicious in their undertaking, and by entering into an agreement with Gulab Singh envisaged on founding a rajpoot territory of the Hill district, to weaken the Sikh nation before its government gets re-established and considered their action as appropriate in view of the rajpoot dynasty acting as a counterpoise against the power of the Sikh chiefs.³⁸ And for Gulab Singh it seemed pertinent at this stage to ingratiate the confidence of both British and the Sikhs to support his ambitious overtures towards Ladakh and Tibet. When Gulab Singh decided to attack Ladakh in 1834, he made a confidential enquiry of the company and on being informed that the British government had no objection to his expedition, a well-equipped force was prepared under general Zorawar Singh to carry his most ambitious expedition.³⁹

Though there was no sign to curtail Gulab Singh's overture in the Himalayas from the Sikh durbar, yet a bitter sense of ambiguity prevailed for leading such an arduous expedition to a difficult terrain extending up to Tibet. Ranjit Singh had already formed an opinion regarding the Tibetan terrain on the basis of the information provided by the French Botanist Victor Jaquemont during his visit to Lahore durbar in 1831 and had decided that he would never bother to conquer such a difficult and poor country.⁴⁰ But for Gulab Singh one of the most important sources of motivation for leading this expedition was to grasp the potentialities of shawl wool⁴¹ trade of Ladakh.⁴²

The routes connecting Ladakh from the eastern frontier was most significant from the commercial point of view as the trade taking place from this part of the country involved the shawl wool. This route connected Ladakh with *Naris-Skor-Sum* in the western Tibet, the region which was the main supplier of shawl wool to the industries of Kashmir, on which the economy of Kashmir depended. The commercial significance of the region developed as there was an increased proliferation of the demand of shawl wool in Kashmir and Punjab. As mentioned earlier the Kashmiri traders enjoyed monopoly in this trade since seventeenth century as per the treaty of Temmisingang (1684) concluded between Tibet, Ladakh and Mughal Kashmir. Gulab Singh wanted to divert the wool going for the shawl industries of Amritsar and Nurpur from Kashmir and wanted a direct route through Kishtwar.⁴³ His ambition was not only limited to Ladakh rather he wanted to conquer the entire wool producing region of western Tibet. This led to an emergence of a chink in the friendly alliance formed with the British and even Ranjit Singh seemed bit vary, when Zorawar Singh expressed his readiness to invade Tibet during his meeting after the first expedition of Ladakh in 1836. Ranjit Singh politely declined him from undertaking such an expedition.⁴⁴ And for the British greatest concern was caused, when Zorawar Singh went ahead and invaded Tibet in 1842 which was expected to cause decline in the supply of shawl wool to the industries of British India.⁴⁵ Concern also grew in Gharwal sector for British, from where the Bhutia traders were involved in the trade with western Tibet, as the Dogra movement in Tibet was expected to have a repercussion on this trade as well.⁴⁶

However, the objections based on these concerns by the British surfaced only, after the Dogras had already invaded Ladakh and were making inroads in western Tibet. On the other hand, Sikhs governors pejorative attitude on Gulab Singh's movements in Ladakh was based on the grounds that it was an attempt to divert the flow of shawl wool to Kishtawar from Kashmir. Repeated complaints were sent to Ranjit Singh by the governor of Kashmir in 1834, but Raja Dhyani Singh, the brother of Gulab Singh at Lahore durbar, manipulated and ensured that such reports never reach the maharaja and even when, the matter was brought before the maharaja it was put to rest.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding these concerns, Gulab Singh went ahead with his expedition and he could not have asked for a better opportunity, when he was invited to settle a dispute by the

Trambis *Cho*, a territorial chief in Ladakh. It so happened that since the olden times, the Kashmiri traders used to travel by traditional highway; Dras-Shimshi-Kharbu-Chanigund to Kargil. But in 1830, a delegation of Kashmiri traders crossed over to the Stagpa-la pass into the Suru valley in the jurisdiction of the Trambis *Cho*, who objected to this unauthorised passage and clash ensued resulting in casualties on both the sides. This matter was taken to the Leh court, where the Trambis *Cho* did not get a fair deal and was humiliated. So in order to wreak vengeance he approached Mohammed Togh Singh of Kishtawar and conveyed news of the chaotic condition of Ladakh giving an opportune time to annex it. In July 1834, Wazir Zorawar Singh, the general of Gulab Singh after the approval from his master, quietly entered Suru Valley without any resistance.⁴⁸ The route taken by the Dogra force was not the traditional route through Kashmir, for the obvious reason of avoiding it on the grounds of hinderance expected to be caused by the Sikh governor of Kashmir, leading general Zorawar to enter Ladakh through Kishtawar.

The Dogra army descended on the province of Purig, Ladakh was taken by surprise, but they collected about 5000 men in haste and on 16th August attempted to stop the Dogras at Sanku. In this clash Ladakhi forces were badly defeated, Kartse the capital of Purig also fell in the hands of the Dogras, but Zorawar Singh followed a systematic policy of leaving small garrison in the forts with a sufficient supply of arms.⁴⁹ Though the Dogra army had to face many risk due to the severe cold climate and at times their capacity was weakened by these weather conditions, yet it was no match for the Ladakhi forces, the Dogras were far superior and experienced from their participation in several Indian wars and were also equipped with superior arms.⁵⁰ Zorawar Singh advanced unchecked and in the meanwhile he deputed emissaries to negotiate peace on the condition that a tribute of Rs. 10,000 is paid by the king of Ladakh, who was ready to accept the deal, but at that moment the queen insisted of defending the motherland, instead of surrendering.⁵¹ This was followed by a battle in which Ladakhis were completely defeated and the king Tsepel Namgyal came down to Basgo⁵² with presents to beg pardon. And the second round of negotiation took place at Leh, where Zorawar decides to restore the whole kingdom to the king. The raja Tsepel Namgyal was asked to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 20,000 and a war indemnity of Rs.50,000, out of which only Rs.37,000 were to be paid at once in cash and jewels, 6000 after one month and 7000 after four months.⁵³

However, the raja readily accepted an opportunity of driving away the Dogras, when under the instigation of Mahan Singh the Sikh governor of Kashmir, the Ladakhis decides to throw away the Dogra authority and raised a revolt.⁵⁴ 'At this Zorawar Singh again marched towards Leh with his troops and deposed raja Tsepel Namgyal made him the Jagirdar of the village Stok and his minister Marup Stanzin was given the charge of the administration, Dogra official Magna Thanedar with 300 troops was left at Leh fort to strengthen Morup's authority. An annual Nazrana of Rs. 9000 was fixed and the internal collection of the revenue was left in the hands of Marup Stanzin.'⁵⁵

After every event of negotiation, Zorawar Singh would retreat to Jammu to avoid the winter in Ladakh. This absence kept the fire of revolt alive in the heart of Ladakh raja and would start seeking support and assistance of rajas in his neighbourhood.⁵⁶ And also about this time in 1840, around the neighbouring country of Baltistan, an insurrection had been stirred up against the Dogras under the leadership of a person named Sukamir in the Purig province, in whose support the Ladakhi raja gathered a force, but before it could be brought to use, Zorawar Singh reached Ladakh and arrested Sukamir along with other Purig leaders.⁵⁷ What followed next was sending forces to the neighbouring regions of Ladakh, and in this attempt, the service of Ladakhis proved most advantageous to the Dogras.

Dogra while carrying the invasion of Baltistan, forced the vanquished Ladakhi ruler Tsepal Namgyal (1792-1834) and his ministers to accompany them to Skardo. It was considered as a great service by the Ladakhi ruler, who used his influence with the raja of Khapulu to facilitate passage of the Dogra arms to Skardu.⁵⁸ But during this campaign the Ladakhi king and his ministers came under the grip of small pox, as Baltistan was in the epidemic at that time and all of them lost their life.⁵⁹ The Dogra forces were not affected by this as they all had been vaccinated. Later when Zorawar Singh made a further inroad in Tibet, along with the Ladakh forces, he also forced, Ahmad Shah, the ruler of Skardo and his son Mohammad Ali Khan to accompany them in their Tibetan campaign. Following the defeat of Dogras at the hand of Tibetans, the Skardo ruler was taken as prisoner to Tibet and he died there.

After this successful campaign in Baltistan Zorawar Singh returned to Leh and geared up to carry his expedition towards Tibet. As mentioned earlier, Ranjit Singh had discouraged Zorawar Singh from advancing in such a tough terrain, but after his death in 1839, he had a better luck with the maharaja's successor Sher Singh who agreed to his proposal.⁶⁰ Immediately after the conquest of Baltistan, Zorawar Singh gathered a huge force of around 6000-7000 soldiers comprising of Ladakhis, Baltis and Dogras and set on his Tibetan campaign in 1841. The Dogra forces entered western Tibet without much resistance, and succeeded in capturing the fort of Purang, where the Dogra commander Basti Ram held a garrison of about five hundred men. Before that, Zorawar had reached the villages around Mansarovar and had acquired these territories.⁶¹ However, by this time the Tibetans had gathered a strong force under the command of general Pishi and gave a tough resistance to the Dogra forces, in this the approaching winter also worked in favour of the Tibetan, who succeeded in recapturing the provinces of Purang, Guge and Rudok and while resisting the Tibetans, Zorawar Singh lost his life on 12th December.⁶²

The disastrous defeat of the Dogras in the Tibet had its implications on Ladakh also. The Ladakhis again hoped to assert their independence, with the help of the Tibetans as the Tibetan army under general Pishi had even reached Leh.⁶³ The news of this disastrous

defeat was carried to the maharaja Gulab Singh, by Mehta Basti Ram, who managed to escape from Tibet, after which fresh troops were sent from Jammu under Pahlwan Singh, which was further strengthened by reinforcement sent under Diwan Hari Chand and wazir Ratnu.⁶⁴ As the two powers headed towards a clash, many of the Tibetan forces, including general Pishi along with some Ladakhi ministers fled towards east hearing about the reinforcement of Dogra forces. Arriving at Pangong at the western end of Tangtse, the fugitive party was joined by a Tibetan army under Kalon Raga Shah, Kalon Razchak and Chhakjot, who jointly decided to face the Dogra forces.⁶⁵ In the clash that followed the Tibetans were completely defeated, most of them were routed with some taken as prisoners along with their general Ragasha considered to be a great catch to revenge the death of their general Zorawar Singh.⁶⁶

The Tibetans sued for peace and a treaty was signed between the Dogras and the Tibetans in 1842, an agreement of great significance, it had far reaching consequences on the political and commercial history of Ladakh. It was a peace treaty signed by Wazir Ratnu and Diwan Hari Chand from the Dogra side and Kalon from the Tibetan side. The treaty signed at Leh, determined the existing boundary between Ladakh and Tibet and to continue the peaceful relations between the two countries. It was a treaty which had both political and commercial connotation and in the domain of later, the ties between these two powers got more reinforced. In this regards the important clause of the treaty stressed that 'in conformity with the ancient ways, tea and Pashmina shawl wool shall be transmitted by the Ladakh road and the old conditions shall remain in force without interruption and whatever customs formally existed shall be renewed and continue to prevail.'⁶⁷

From 1834 to 1846, Ladakh came ostensibly under the suzerainty of the Sikh maharaja but its actual administration was under the control of raja Gulab Singh.⁶⁸ As the case was after the submission, the first tribute from Ladakh was sent to the Sikh maharaja Ranjit Singh. The tribute was presented by Dogra officer Raja Dhyan Singh at the durbar of Sikh maharaja, consisting of Rs. 30,000 of Ladakh currency (each rupee averaging 4 or 5 ana of Indian Rupee), five ponies, 25 grams of 'Nirbasi' a precious drug brought from China and 25 pieces of Chinese silk.⁶⁹ The acceptance of this tribute by the Sikh maharaja confirmed the authority of Gulab Singh over Ladakh, but the Sikh regarded the country of Ladakh as a dependency of Kashmir and its ruler treated in that relation by the Sikh governors of Kashmir.

The treaty of Amritsar was signed between the Dogras and the British in 1846, granting independent possession of the territories lying between eastward of river Indus and westward of river Ravi.⁷⁰ The historic significance of the treaty as imbedded on the common understanding of the people lies in the fact that the region of Kashmir was ceded to maharaja Gulab Singh for a sum of rupees seventy-five lakhs. But the final submission of Kashmir was yet to be achieved and 'it was only a legal title transferred to him'⁷¹, what lies in the possession of the Dogras at this juncture was the entire territory of Ladakh and Baltistan,

as the final restoration of the Dogra authority in the region had already taken place by 1842. And in context of Ladakh, the advent of the Dogras brought some important modification in the territorial structure of the region.

Ladakh and Baltistan shared close political and cultural ties since the beginning of the empire, however lately a state of uneasiness and mutual distrust had emerged between the two regions. And it was the Dogras, which succeeded in unifying Ladakh and Baltistan for the last time, it was the threat of the invasion which provided an opportunity for both the regions to come together to launch a resistance in which the combined forces of Ladakh and Baltistan were defeated by the Dogras.⁷² In 1889, Baltistan, Ladakh and Gilgit were all conglomerated into a single border district by the Dogra administration. The decision for the amalgamation of all the three frontier districts of the state was taken after working out all the modalities involved in it. In this regards the feasibility report provided by Pt. Radha Kishan Kaul, the Dogra wazir of Ladakh expediated the amalgamation process with the advantage of making Skardo as the headquarter of the whole region for it being at equal distance from both Ladakh and Gilgit.⁷³ After two years, the Ladakh district was formed comprising Leh, Kargil and Skardo tehsil under the administration of the Skardo wazarat. Leh and Skardo were made the winter and summer headquarters of the wazir wazarat, who stayed from September to March at Skardo, followed by three months in Kargil and then three months at Leh.

At the same time, under the Dogra regime, there was a territorial delimitation of Ladakh. The kingdom of Ladakh whose border in the south till then included the district of Spiti had to lose them to British. Spiti was detached from Ladakh and added to the British possessions of Kangra, Kullu and Mandi.⁷⁴ Technically the sphere of administration and the domain of revenue collection from Ladakh under the Dogras were reduced. But in reality the Dogra authorities at Leh went on receiving the tribute from the Zamindars in Lahaul, even after it had been acceded to British. On this the British raised their objection and conveyed their resentment to the Dogra maharaja in 1867, the Dogras pleaded their innocence on the ground that they had been accepting the tribute as a matter of custom as existed during the rule of native kings.⁷⁵

It took Dogras a period of eight years to complete the conquest of Ladakh. But the displacement of the government of native rulers (*Gyalpo*) with miniscule changes had started from the first invasion in 1834. The whole country of Ladakh was divided into five districts; Ladakh, Zaskar, Kargil, Dras and Nubra. These districts were placed under the command of a Thanedar, who exercised both military command and civil authority.⁷⁶ These Thanedars were independent of each other and were responsible to raja Gulab Singh. The most powerful Thanedar among them was the Thanedar of Leh. The first Thanedar was Magna, the brother-in-law of Zorawar Singh, who was left in charge of Ladakh after the first invasion of Ladakh and remained in office from 1841-1845.

Magna Thanedar was succeeded by Basti Ram; a native of Kishtawar, who was a petty officer of wazir Zorawar Singh at the time of his first invasion of Ladakh in 1834. Later he played an important role in the further Dogra conquest of Baltistan and he survived the disastrous defeat at the hands of Tibetan forces to bring the tragic news of wazir Zorawars death at Tibet to Maharaja Sahib Bahadur.⁷⁷ Basti Ram was succeeded by his son Mangalju, generally known as Mehter Mangal around 1860. Next in line came, Shibsaran as the Thanedar of Ladakh. He was succeeded by Sayyid Ali Akbar (1865-1868), first as the Wazir, because from him onwards, the designation of the chief Dogra administrator of Ladakh changed to Wazir, which remained till the independence.⁷⁸ Wazir Sayyid Ali was followed by two Englishmen Fredrick Drew (1868-1871) and Mr. Johnson (1871-1882) to the office of Wazir at Ladakh. Mr Johnson was succeeded by Pandit Radha Kishan Kaul, who remained in office till 1886.

Conclusion

Thus, the political unification of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, was brought into effect with the treaty of Amritsar in 1846. This unification was limited to the territorial unification only. It becomes difficult to find uniformity in the administrative structure which came to be established under the Dogra rule in Ladakh and Kashmir. The circumstances and process by which both Kashmir and Ladakh was brought under the Dogras authority, were different, hence their methods of establishing the claim on the two territories also varied. The Dogras legitimised their claim over Kashmir for having bought it for 75 Lakhs rupees, hence they have the propriety rights of lands of Kashmir and the Dogra Maharaja was the sole owner of the lands, forest, mountains' etc. in the valley and the tillers of the land and agriculturist and Zamindars were only tenants at will.⁷⁹ However, Ladakh was brought under Dogras by using force, and the rule of native kings has been replaced by the maharaja, hence all the villages belonging to the kings were appropriated by the Maharaja.⁸⁰

Ladakh provided a platform to the Dogras and the British to share their ties based on commerce and control of the frontier region, but also divided by complex calibrations of outdoing each other in establishing a stronger influence on the people and the place. While formulating the administrative structure in the newly acquired territory of Ladakh, it was considered expedient to maintain the old system of administration in a region, which was so distant and so distinct from the rest of the state. It was necessary for the efficient administration that the office of the old native state agencies are kept without any change, the office of the *Kalon* (prime minster) and the *Kharpon* (fort in charge) was kept intact and they discharged the administrative duties for the Dogras.⁸¹ This view of the Dogras was also shared by the British, who also believed that; 'The purely traditional institutions and customs that can be retained the better, and no changes to foreign institutions should be made, unless absolutely necessary for the good of the majority.'⁸²

Thus, having lost its independence, coming subservient to an external power and getting integrated within the domain of a larger state; Ladakh witnessed various forms of transition in the political system. But the Dogra policy, based on the perception of maintaining the traditional ways of life, without introducing any foreign institute, unless absolutely necessary for the good of the majority was upheld throughout its rule. And this policy was used as an instrument of sublimation having mutual advantages to the subject as well as to the state.

End Note :

- ¹ National Archives of India (NAI) Delhi. File No. 8, *Translation from Persian of the original letter received from the prince of Ladakh from Spiti*. Foreign Dept. Political Section, Year 1837.
- ² The raja mentioned in the letter was actually prince Chosprul, in whose favour his father king Tsepal Namgyal, the last ruler of Ladakh had abdicated the throne in 1830. Chosprul was addressed as king in the British records. After the Dogra invasion, ruler of Ladakh Tsepal Namgyal was reinstated on the throne of Ladakh but only as a vassal of the Dogra maharaja Gulab Singh. More on this, Luciano Petech, *Kingdom of Ladakh*, 1977, pp.135-140.
- ³ NAI, File No.9, *Letter from the British Agent Shimla*, Foreign Deptt. Political Sec. Year 1837.
- ⁴ Luciano Petech. 1977. *The Kingdom of Ladakh C.950-1842 A.D*, p. 140. Rome: Instituto Italiano Per Il Medio Ed Estremo Oriente.
- ⁵ A. H. Francke. 1995. (Reprint) *A History of Western Tibet*, pp.137-138. Delhi: Asian Educational services.
- ⁶ H. Hosten, 1998. (Reprint) *Missionary in Tibet; Letters and Other Papers of Ippolito Desideri*, p. 12. Delhi: Cosmo Publication.
- ⁷ The *Mons* and *Dards* were the earliest inhabitants. *Mons* migrated towards Ladakh from the Indian side (Kashmir) and *Dards* inhabited the areas around Baltistan, before the Tibetanization of Ladakh took place. More on this in Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, pp. 12-26.
- ⁸ Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, pp.19-37.
- ⁹ Luciano Petech, 1939 (Reprint) 1999. *Study on the Chronicles of Ladakh*, p. 47. Delhi: Low Price Publications.
- ¹⁰ Buddhism was the first evidence of close historical ties between Ladakh and Kashmir. It was during the reign of Ashoka, the Buddhist scholars from Kashmir disseminated to its neighbouring places including Ladakh. This was further strengthened during the Kushan period, when Kanishka's (78-101 CE), vast empire from Bihar in the east to Khoristan (Afghanistan) in west from Khotan (eastern Turkistan) in north to Konkan in the south, in all probability covered the territory of Ladakh also. Jyoteeshwar Pathik, 1997, *Glimpses of history of Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 89. Delhi: Anmol Publication.
- ¹¹ Tashi Ragais. 2018. (Reprint) *Trans. The History of Maryul Ladakh*, pp.40-42. Delhi: Jayyed Press.
- ¹² John Powers. 2007. *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, pp.155-158. New York: Snowlion Publication.
- ¹³ Neil Howard, 1993. What happened between 1450 and 1550? And other question from the history of Ladakh. In: Osmaston and N. Tsering (eds.) *Recent Research On Ladakh* 6, p.135. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publisher.
- ¹⁴ Petech, *Kingdom of Ladakh*, p.22.

- 15 K. N. Pandita. 2016. (Reprint) *Baharistan-i-Shahi A Chronical of Medieval Kashmir*, p.26. Srinagar: Gulshan books.
- 16 G. D. M. Sufi, 1996. *Kashir, being the history of Kashir from earliest time to our time*, Vol. I., p.144. Delhi: Capital Publishing House.
- 17 Petech, *Study on the Chronicles*, p. 115.
- 18 Neil Howard. 2011. 'Sulatr Zinul Abidin's raid into Ladakh,' In: John Bray (ed.) *Ladakhi Histories, Local and Regional Perspective*, pp.137-143. Dharamshala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- 19 Abul Fazal. 1902. *Akbarnama*, tr. Beveridge .H, Vol. III, p.838. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.
- 20 Simon Digby. 1998. 'Travels in Ladakh', *Asian Affairs Journal*, p.304.
- 21 Fazl, Abul. *Akbarnama*, Vol. III., pp. 1091-1092.
- 22 Abdul Hamid Lahori. 1875. *Shahjahanama* (ed.) H M Eliot, pp.67-68, Lahore.
- 23 Lahori, *Shahjahanama*, pp.72-73.
- 24 Jigar Mohammad. 2011. 'Mughal sources on Medieval Ladakh, Baltistan and Western Tibet', *Ladakhi Histories Local and Regional Perspectives*, p.157. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- 25 Sufi. *Kashir*. p. 274. .
- 26 Francios Bernier. 1891. *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, pp.422-424. London: Archibald Constable.
- 27 Pascale Dolfuss. 1995. 'History of Muslims in Central Ladakh,' *Tibet Journal*, Vol.20. (37).
- 28 It was the only occasion when Tibet followed an expansionist policy towards Ladakh in the Tibeto-Mongol war (1679-1684). The war was projected as a sectarian clash, in which the Tibetan army was commanded by a Mongolian leader Gursi Khan who was an ardent follower of the *Geylug pa* sect headed by the Fifth Dalai Lama. On the other hand, Ladakh was under the influence of the *Drug pa* sect. However, later study proved that the war cannot be termed as a purely sectarian clash, rather economic factors were also responsible for this war. More on this in Nawang Jenpa, 2015. 'Why Did Tibet and Ladakh Clash in the 17th Century? Rethinking the Background to the 'Mongol War' in Ngari (1679-1684)' *Tibet Journal Special issue, Ladakh historical perspective and social change*.
- 29 Janet Rizvi. 1999. *Trans-Himalayan Caravan*, pp.53-55. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 30 C.L Dutta. 1977. *Ladakh in Western Himalayan*, pp.81-82. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- 31 William Moorcroft was a British veterinarian working as the in charge of a stud. He was the first British official to visit Ladakh. He stayed in Ladakh for two years from 1820-1822, waiting for a permission from the Chinese government to carry out his further journey to Central Asia. But he was not permitted to continue his journey and had to return to Kashmir. Moorcroft records provide a detail description about Ladakh making it an important source on the 19th century Ladakh. W. Moorcroft & G Trebeck, 1898. *Travels in Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and Punjab*, p.420. Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- 32 J.D Cunningham. 1849. *History of the Sikh*, p.213. London: John Murray.
- 33 Alexander Cunningham, 1970. *Ladakh Statistical, Physical and Historical*, pp. 330-331. Delhi: Sagar Publication.
- 34 Cunningham, *Sikhs*, p.190.

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- 35 K. M. Pannikar. 1930. *Ghulab Singh (1792-1858) Founder of Kashmir*, p.29. London: Martin Hopkinson Ltd.
- 36 P.N.K Bamzai. 1973 "History of Kashmir", pp.651-652. Delhi: Metropolitan Book Company.
- 37 Ibid., pp.652-653
- 38 NAI, File No. 76-79, Foreign Dep'tt. Political A Branch, Year 1868.
- 39 Pannikar, *Gulab Singh*, pp. 76-77
- 40 Inderjeet Singh.. 2018. 'Revisiting Zorawar Singh's campaign in Tibet in 1842', p. 20, *Tibet Journal*.
- 41 The wool consisted of raw unprocessed wool called 'Pashmina' extracted from under fleece of the goats reared in the high-elevated areas of Western Tibet. It also included another material called 'Toosh' or 'Tus', often referred to as 'aasli' or genuine 'Tus', a fibre even softer then the ordinary Pashmina also had considerable commercial value. This is extracted primarily from the Chiru or Tibetan antelope
- 42 Dutta, *Ladakh in Western Himalaya*, p.93.
- 43 Ibid., p. 93.
- 44 Singh, *Zorawar Singh*, p.20
- 45 R. Huttenback. 1961. 'Gulab Singh and the creation of Dogra state of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.20, No.4, p.482.
- 46 NAI, File No. 19-20, Year 1841, Foreign Dept. Secret Section, Delhi.
- 47 Dutta, *Ladakh in Western Himalaya*, p. 94.
- 48 S.S Gergan. 1979. 'Critical Introduction' In: (ed.) Francke, *A History of Ladakh*, pp. 36-37. Delhi: Sterling Publications.
- 49 Pannikar, *Gulab Singh*, p.77.
- 50 Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, pp. 138-139
- 51 Gergan, 'Critical', p.36
- 52 Basgo lies at a distance of 40 kms from Leh, towards the southern direction became an important historical Centre, where a palace and a fort was built, it was at the fort of Basgo the Tibeto-Mongol war (1679-1684) was fought.
- 53 Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, p.147.
- 54 Diwan Kripa Ram. 1977. *Gulabnama*, (trans.), pp.209-210. Delhi: Light and Life publisher.
- 55 Jammu and Kashmir State Archives, Srinagar (JKSA-S): File No. 1875, Year 1908 Ladakh Settlement by Chaudhri Mohd, Settlement officer.
- 56 Diwan, *Gulabnama*, p.208.
- 57 Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, pp.154-155.
- 58 JKSA-S: File No.1875, Ladakh Settlement by Chaudhri Khushi Mohd. Settlement Officer Ladakh Printed at Ranbir Prakash Press, 1908.
- 59 Rabgias, *Maryul*, p.209.
- 60 Singh, *Zorawar Singh*, p.20.
- 61 Diwan, *Gulabnama*, pp. 241-215.

- ⁶² Dutta, *Ladakh in Western Himalaya*, pp 137-139.
- ⁶³ Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, p.165.
- ⁶⁴ JKSA-S: File No. 1875, 1908.
- ⁶⁵ Diwan, *Gulabnama*, p. 221.
- ⁶⁶ Francke, *History of Western Tibet*, p.167
- ⁶⁷ NAI: File No. 61-63 “*Translation of treaty between the Chinese and Sikhs*” Foreign Section Secret C, 17TH Oct. 1842.
- ⁶⁸ Dutta, *Ladakh in Western Himalaya*, p. 38.
- ⁶⁹ NAI: File No. 28-29, Foreign Department, Political Section 1838.
- ⁷⁰ Pannikar, *Gulab Singh*, p.111.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.117.
- ⁷² Cunningham, *Ladakh*, pp. 343-344.
- ⁷³ District Archives Leh (DAL): File No.15, *Memo on the Amalgamation of the three frontier district of Ladakh, Baltistan and Gilgit for purpose of administration*. 1889, Ladakh.
- ⁷⁴ Dutta, *Ladakh in the Western Himalaya*, p.186.
- ⁷⁵ NAI: File No. 125-129, *Tribute of Lahaal remitted by the Maharaja of Jammu*. Foreign Department, Political A. 1867.
- ⁷⁶ Cunningham, *Ladakh*, pp.273-274.
- ⁷⁷ JKSA-S: Account No.1875, 1908.
- ⁷⁸ H.N. Kaul. 1992. *Ladakh Through the Ages*, p.103. Delhi: Indus Publications.
- ⁷⁹ Robert Thorp. 1980. (Reprint), *Kashmir Misgovernment*, (ed.) F.M Hassnain, p.26. Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers.
- ⁸⁰ Cunningham, *Ladakh*, p.270.
- ⁸¹ NAI: File No. 67-70, Foreign Department, Secret Section, 1867.
- ⁸² NAI: File No. 1-7, *Memorandum by Mr. Nay Elias, on the administration of Ladakh and Revenue Settlement*. Foreign Department, Secret F., 1886.

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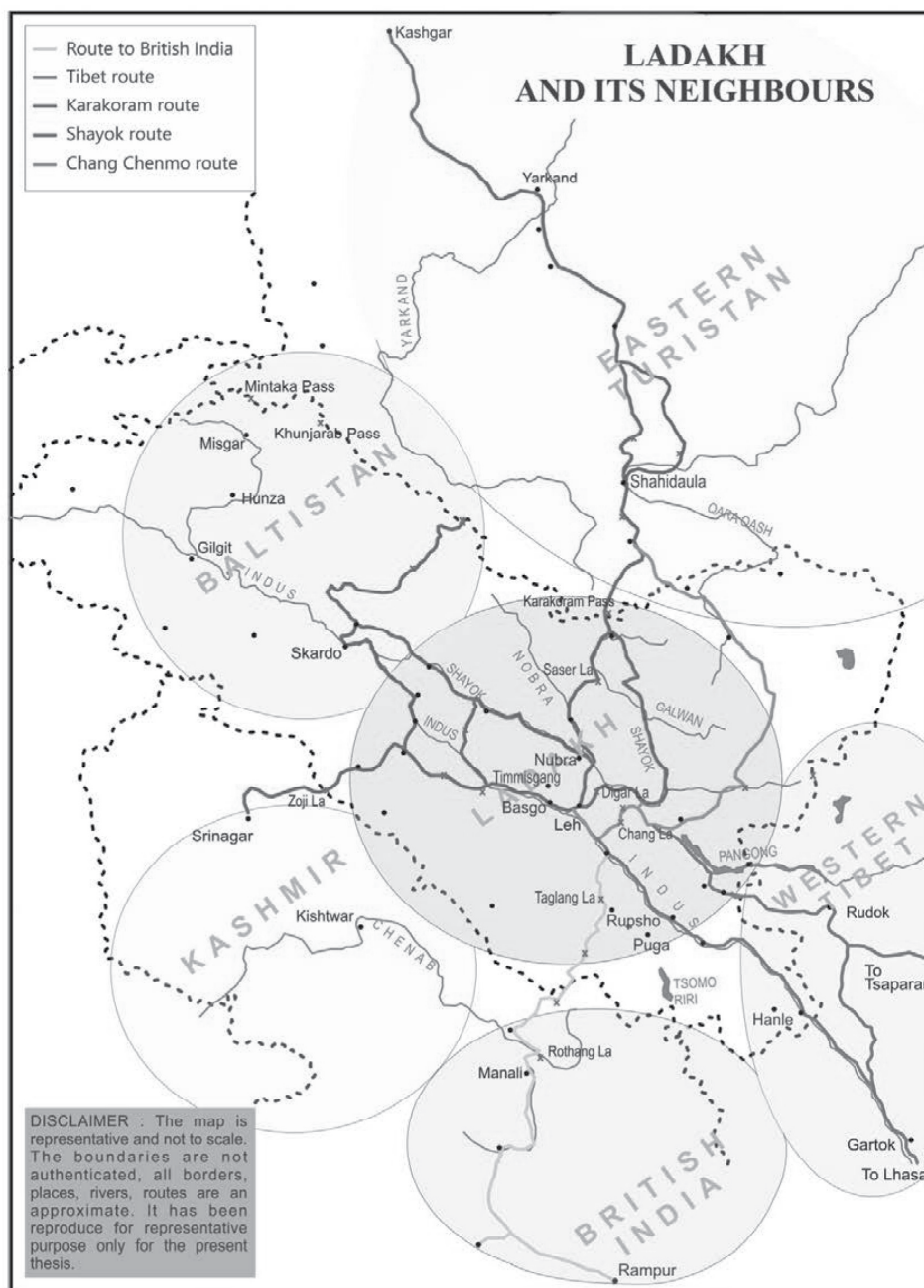
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Map 01. Ladakh and its Neighbours(19th Century), Map redrawn from Janet Rizvi's Trans Himalayan Caravan (1999)



Source: Wikipedia

Fig.01. Zorawar Fort, Leh

Bio Profile of the Author:

Assistant professor (history)

University of Ladakh

Ud Ladakh