

NO PRESENT WITHOUT PAST
The 1989 Agitation in Ladakh

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The paper seeks to present a critique of representations of recent political developments in Ladakh, with a focus on the agitation for greater autonomy which escalated in 1989. Our critique is centered on two issues: first, much of what has been written on recent developments in Ladakh has suffered from a fundamental lack of historical depth. Secondly, many publications take local representations of the agitation and its causes at face value. These two major shortcomings, both theoretical and methodological, have perpetuated a myopic interpretation of Ladakhi society, politics, and their dynamics.

We intend to offer a remedial analysis of modern Ladakhi politics, using extensive historical and contemporary documentation, as well as a comprehensive series of interviews with people who have played prominent parts in Ladakhi politics over the last fifty years. This paper can only deal with a small part of the material we have collected over the past two years during field work in Ladakh. As such, it is part of a work in progress.

As our analysis shows, any understanding of Ladakhi politics and society requires an appreciation of the historical construction of Ladakhi society and its representations. Specifically, one needs to take into account colonial and nationalist policies and practices of administration and classification, and their use and contestation in Ladakh. The most basic conclusion that follows from our research must be that Ladakhi politics (and society) cannot be understood through the received frames of interpretation, such as religious or ethnic identities. More fundamentally, we propose that it is only through a critical examination of local and supralocal forces,

diachronically as well as synchronically, including socio-cultural, political, and economic processes, one may arrive at a more adequate understanding of Ladakh. A reduction of Ladakh and its politics to Buddhistness, or Tibetanness, fails to do justice to its complexities.

Introduction

In the summer of 1989, after a series of rather minor clashes between Buddhist and Muslim youths in and around Leh, a movement was launched in Ladakh against the Government of Jammu and Kashmir by a group who called themselves the 'Ladakh People's Movement for Union Territory Status'. Within weeks, the All-Ladakh cachet was dropped, and the Ladakh Buddhist Association came forward as the driving force behind an agitation that quickly turned communal, at least in its articulation. A social boycott of the Muslim population was called and rigorously enforced, initially through force, and later more systematically through a system of social pressure, fines, and force. Although there was some opposition against the communal nature of the agitation from within the Buddhist community, this resistance was stifled effectively through persuasion, threats, and indeed physical force.

A number of publications has seen the light since the start of the agitation which seek to elucidate its genesis, rationale, and methods. Only rarely the agitation is put in its historical context and are the claims of the protagonists critically examined.¹ Rather, we are presented a picture of two homogeneous communities that come into conflict because one is receiving 'stepmotherly' treatment by the State. When this conflict is at all put in a wider historical context, post-1974 social and economic development, broadly understood as 'modernization' tends to be blamed (e.g. Norberg-Hodge 1991 and Crook 1994).

The present paper makes two substantive claims. First, we will show that neither form, nor content of the agitation can be understood without a thorough study of the modern political history of Ladakh. The agitation is but the most recent expression of Ladakhi (and not

1. For such more critical analyses, see Bray 1991, Srinivas 1991 & 1993.

necessarily Buddhist) demands that date back at least sixty years. Moreover, modernization, understood as "*substituting a single monoculture and economic system for regional diversity and self-reliance*" (Norberg-Hodge 1991: 143), alone does not provide a sufficient explanation for these events. We must look at the changes in the nature of Ladakh's incorporation in supraregional political and economic frames. Secondly, to use 'community' as the frame for an analysis of modern Ladakhi politics obscures the underlying processes and forces that have produced not only the most recent, but also previous agitations.

Representations of Ladakhiness

1. History

The central theme of our presentation is the question of representation and identification. The two are not identical, of course, but intimately related. In the contemporary world with its hegemonic discourses of nation/people/community and (liberal) democracy, belonging (and in the nation-state context citizenship) has a fundamentally different form, content and meaning than in the past. Although there is no time or space here to rehearse the argument in detail, the process of formation of national states, with the concurrent ideology of nation, citizenship, and rights, is of central importance in the emergence of this community/people discourse. The nation-state's legitimacy is premised upon its ability to fulfill the goals of the national project: a just (read: equitable) distribution of wealth and well-being among the citizenry. Differences among communities, if recognized at all, are either seen as remnants of the pre-national past, to be erased through a process of nation-building, or as expressing 'unity in diversity': both views understand 'communities' as relatively undifferentiated, unambiguously bounded, and stable. Inequities, understood primarily as inequities between communities, are to be resolved through differential allocation of resources.

This imagining of bureaucrats and politicians finds a reflection -- and often justification -- in the imaginings of social scientists. The

social sciences co-evolved with the nation-state. Indeed, the moral statisticians of the late 19th century were very much engaged in national projects. Enumeration, classification, and statistical evaluation were from the very beginning shared preoccupations of scientists and bureaucrats. The grids of classification devised by bureaucrats and academics came to be seen -- and continue to be seen -- as valid, if not sufficient, representations of society, or the nation. A key element in colonial administration, the census (and its 'handy' companion, the gazetteer) was above all instrumental in providing a single, comprehensive frame for the often elusive and confusing multiplicity of social actors 'out there'. While in the metropolitan states internal differentiation was generally understood in terms of occupation, region, or class, the colonial world was seen to be inhabited by a population comprised of distinct, irreducible and unambiguously bounded tribes, castes, communities.²

This imagining of the colonial subject -- not individuals but communities -- corroborated by the work of census takers and social scientists, provided the basis for the administrative practices of the colonial state. Hence, in the case of India, the 'essential' characteristic of the society was its organisation along religious and caste lines. This normative frame of classification and identification itself became in turn the foundation for political organisation. When franchise became extended to include parts of the Indian population, separate electorates were instituted for Muslims and Hindus. Not surprisingly, the principle of ensuring representation on the basis of religious community was applied also when the Praja Sabha was created in the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1934:

"Our scale would give one Muslim and one Buddhist member to Gilgit; but in view of the scattered and diverse population of Ladakh we recommend that two Muslims and two Buddhist members should be nominated for the Wazarat. One of the Muslim members should represent Skardu Tehsil and the other Kargil." (Govt. of J&K 1934: 6)

2. For a detailed discussion of the classification of Ladakh's population in the Census, see van Beek's "Contested Classifications of People in Ladakh: and Analysis of the Census of Jammu and Kashmir, 1891-1941", in: Ernst Steinkellner (ed.), (in press), *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the IATS*, Graz 1995.

In an effort to ensure representation of the Buddhist community in the State -- comprising a few neo-Buddhist Pandits and about 50,000 Ladakhi Buddhists -- the Kashmir Raj Bodhi Maha Sabha (KRBMS) had approached the Glancy Commission in 1931 with a memorandum listing the grievances of the Buddhists of Ladakh. The memorandum itself was drafted by one of the initiators of the KRBMS, Shridhar Kaul, alias Shri Dullu. The only Ladakhi member of the delegation to present the memorandum was Sonam Norbu who later rose to fame in State politics. The memorandum is very interesting in that it not only seeks to establish the distinctiveness of the Buddhists of Ladakh as such, but in order to make its case also refers to many of the administrative practices mentioned above:

"We respectfully beg to place before you the extremely deplorable condition to which the Buddhists of Ladakh have been reduced as a result of various circumstances and to suggest measures to remedy the same, measures which in order to effectively save this important section of His Highness' subjects from annihilation should be immediately enforced by the Government." (The Mahabodhi 1932: 127)

"Their backwardness in education has led to their economic exploitation and to their being deprived of their share in Public Services. Only a negligible number of Buddhists have so far been employed as extremely low-paid clerks or Primary School teachers; menial work of the hardest and least lucrative type is their only means of securing a starvation wage." (Mahabodhi 1932: 128)

"While all sects in the State, viz. the Muslims, the Hindus, the Sikhs, the Christians and the Zoroastrians have been granted lands in the Chief towns of the State for the erection of Shrines and for other religious purposes, Buddhists have not so far been provided with any such facilities for their religious needs. To call these people dumb-driven cattle would be no exaggeration. There is no organisation to represent them and that is why their grievances have remained unventilated." (Mahabodhi 1932: 128-9)

More could be said about the representation of certain distinct 'Ladakhi' traits in the memorandum, but here it will suffice to say that there are striking parallels with the 1989-agitation pamphlets, demands, etc. Both in form and content, there is evident continuity between the two moments, in spite of the lapse of sixty years.

In 1935, the KRBMS produced a 'Triennial Report' which contains a very elaborate recapitulation of the main points of the representation to the Glancy Commission. Of considerable interest is the enclosure of a letter from Staksang Raspa, dated 6 December 1932, giving the sole right to representation of Ladakhi Buddhists to the KRBMS. It is important to note that at this time (1931-1932) no local Ladakhi organisation existed. It would seem apparent, given the lack of local organisation, absence of people with modern education, and the generally poor state of knowledge about events in India, constitutional law, etc., that Ladakhis themselves played little or no part at this stage in their own representation. Rather, we are faced with a small group of outsiders who, combining their experience and knowledge of the Indian political process and their imagining of Ladakh, proceeded to construct a 'representation' of Ladakh: essentially Buddhist, and under threat from Islam.

It is indeed in the 'educational' activities of Shri Dullu and other outsiders, such as the former headmaster Gobind Lal Shah, that we must locate the roots of Buddhist organisation in Ladakh. These outsiders were the driving force (and more) behind the formation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association in April 1937.³ Moreover, they were the inspiration and drafters of the Abolition of Polyandrous Marriages Act (1941) and the change in the inheritance laws of Ladakh (1943).⁴

When we move to later agitations, presentations of demands, etc., in Ladakh, it becomes clear that sometimes, but certainly not always Buddhistness is emphasized as the justification for demands for a greater share of resources, special status within the State, and so on. Rather, with the exception of the 1969 and 1989 agitations, demands

3. The YMBA was founded in March 1934, but was not registered officially until April 1937 according to documents in the archives of the LBA in Leh.

4. For a more comprehensive treatment of early modern Buddhism and the role of the KRBMS, see Bertelsen's "Early Modern Buddhism in Ladakh" in this volume.

are presented on behalf of and in cooperation with other 'communities'. The most prolonged and arguably most successful movement was the All Ladakh Action Committee for Declaration of Ladakh as Scheduled Tribe (henceforth ST-Committee), which was emphatically *Ladakhi*, both in its composition and demands.⁵ Our first conclusion must therefore be that apparently Ladakhi political sensibility did *not* focus around their religious identification, or at least not *always* and certainly not *naturally*.

For example, a memorandum of the ST committee, written after a visit to Ladakh by representatives of the State Cabinet, says:

"Their visit was followed by a maligned conspiracy to wage a communal riot in Leh which fortunately was a unknown thing to Ladakhis and failed in totality and Ladakhis maintained their age old fraternity and communal harmony as usual." (LAC 1982: 2)

Similarly, a submission prepared by the Kargil branch of the Congress Party makes it clear that:

"The populace in Kargil district including Ladakh as well having same 'classes of citizens' with backwardness to the same degree, the entire region and populace thereof requires to be declared as scheduled area and scheduled tribes." (DCC Kargil, n.d.: 2)

Still, this leaves us with the 'anomaly' of the communal agitations of 1969 and 1989. Before dealing at length with the 1989 agitation, it is necessary to deal with some myths about the 1969 agitation.

The 1969 agitation was triggered by an incident in the village of Sabu: apparently a long-standing family dispute over distribution of property had taken a communal turn since the family was of mixed Buddhist-Muslim composition. The Buddhist branch of the family wanted to celebrate the marriage of a son in the part of the house which they occupied. For one reason or another - our sources are

5. Members included Buddhists and Muslims from both Leh and Kargil Tehsil. See also van Beek's "The Importance of Being Tribal" in this volume.

not univocal about this - the marriage was never celebrated in the house. Instead, the Buddhist branch of the family occupied a small hut near the main house and fixed prayerflags to their dwelling. According to the sources, these flags were removed, possibly desecrated by members of the Muslim branch of the family. Buddhist protests to the authorities had no effect, and soon the feeling of neglect on the part of the Buddhists was translated into a full-fledged campaign for more general political demands, the more important of which included:

1. Ladakhis be declared Scheduled Tribes;
2. Union Territory Status for Ladakh;
3. Permission for Buddhists to construct a temple at Kargil;
4. Bodhi language to be recognized as medium of instruction in primary school;
5. Resettlement of Tibetan refugees under a planned scheme;
6. Conversion "from one religion to another" to be stopped for an initial 20-year period.⁶

Another important issue at the time was the lack of Buddhist representation in the State Cabinet since 1967. As the Buddhists were internally divided in terms of political organisation, it is not entirely unlikely, as some informants have suggested, that the communal card was played at this time in order to secure broad backing in the community. As a result of the agitation, Sonam Wangyal was appointed as Cabinet Minister, albeit with a rather insignificant portfolio. Although the agreement among agitation leaders had been to continue the agitation until all demands were met, soon after Sonam Wangyal's appointment the agitation was stopped. In particular, the demand for ST-Status was not met, and several Buddhist leaders had argued that Sonam Norbu would be the most suitable candidate for a Cabinet post.

The 1969 agitation left many issues unresolved and further strained the uneasy relationship between the State Government and the District. Not surprisingly, concerted efforts to secure both ST-Status and Central rule got under way soon after. What needs to be emphasized here is that the Ladakhi Buddhists did not really act as a

6. For the complete list of Buddhist demands, see "Buddhist agitation is likely to continue", *Hindustan Times*, June 2, 1969.

community during the 1969 agitation. Divisiveness and incompatible interests on the individual level turned out to be more important than the pursuit of political goals as a community. This internal articulation of difference and dissent calls into question the idea of *the* Buddhist community.

By now, it will be clear that the roots of the 1989 agitation do not lie simply in the dislocations caused by post-1974 development activities, as some authors seem to imply. Rather, we find recurring attempts to secure a better deal for Ladakh (and not just for the Buddhists) beginning from as early as the 1930s, and arguably as early as the days after the Dogra conquest. Although dislocation of village economy and other forces certainly are important in understanding the desire of some sections of Ladakh's population for some kind of special arrangement for the region, it does not automatically follow from this that such articulations of demands should take a communal form.

We have already repeatedly questioned the 'naturalness' of coalescence around religious 'identity'. We will now take a closer look at the 1989 agitation and its making to show how such a community frame fails to do justice to what actually happened. We will again go into some detail regarding Ladakhi political history, in order to show how internal Buddhist and trans-community antagonisms and struggles must be taken into consideration.

2. Community

"The Ladakhis perception of their common fate has focussed their political sensibility around the central feature of their lives in common, namely their Buddhist culture." (Crook 1994: 815)

This quote allows us to ask two fundamental questions: first, who are 'the Ladakhis' who perceive *their common* fate, who live in *common*? Secondly, and relatedly, it is necessary to ask whether Buddhist culture is *the* central feature of their lives. The language used by Crook is illustrative of a particular view of the social. It

assumes unambiguous, homogenous communities or peoples who have common culture, language, history, etc. It is the language of nationalism. If we accept such a view of the world, then the LBA-led agitation of '89 might be seen -- as Crook appears to do -- as the 'awakening' of a Ladakhi (or rather Buddhist) nation, 'naturally' resisting its 'foreign' rulers and demanding its legitimate place.

In fact, when we look at the language used in the pamphlets produced by the LBA during the agitation, this 'nationalism' is clearly present:

"We are a separate nation by all the tests - race, language, religion, culture - determining nationality, the only link connecting us with other people of the state being the bond of common ruler. [...] The right to self-determination claimed by us cannot be claimed with equal force by the people of Baltistan including Skardu and part of Kargil tehsils predominantly peopled by Muslims, as they are connected by the ties of religion with the majority community in Jammu & Kashmir, nor by the people of Gilgit who came under Dogra rule through conquest after the annexation of Kashmir and whom not only identity of religion but of race as well binds them to the majority community of Jammu & Kashmir." (Memorandum of Ladakh Buddhists through LBA and Ladakh Gonpa Society, n.d.: 2-3)

"Ladakh is not just another backward region of the country. It is a region with a unique culture, typical geoclimatic conditions and a distinctive socio-economic order, besides being a sensitive border region. As such, Ladakh needs to be treated as a distinct religio-cultural entity rather than one of the districts of India. Being strategically located, Ladakh needs to be drawn into the national mainstream, while providing safeguards to its identity. This could only be done by separating Ladakh from Kashmir, where the line between nationalism and separatism runs very thin. In demanding Union Territory, Ladakh's primary concern is to protect its identity. Under Kashmir's rule Ladakh has suffered enormous cultural onslaught from fundamentalist organisations of the valley. It is, therefore, important for the

Ladakh Buddhist Association to keep up its struggle for a Union Territory for Ladakh.

Yours, etc.

*Rigzin Jora, Ladakh Buddhist Association.
T. Wangchuk, People's Movement for U.T. for Ladakh.
T. Samphel, MLA, Leh District."
(Hindustan Times, letter to the editor, October 17, 1989)*

It is important to note that in the course of the agitation several important shifts occurred with regard to who was claiming what on whose behalf. Initially, after the first clashes between Buddhist and Muslim youths, an organisation calling itself the Ladakh People's Movement for Union Territory Status took on the role of leadership in the agitation. It was this organisation which produced the much-quoted pamphlet listing the grievances of the Buddhists of Ladakh. And indeed, to the outside world a picture was sought to be presented which reflected this all-Ladakh claim:

"Asked as to the support base of the Ladakh People's Movement for Union Territory Status among the other religious minorities, the spokesman indicated that excluding the Sunni Muslims with terrorist connections, all other communities supported their agitation." (Hindustan Times, August 8, 1989)

However, as mentioned above, this all-Ladakh cachet was dropped rather rapidly, and the LBA came out into the open as the driving force behind the agitation. A social boycott was imposed on Muslim Ladakhis and rigorously enforced. After negotiations with the Central and State Governments in late 1993, Muslims and Christians were once again invited to join the movement and the social boycott was lifted. Subsequent negotiations with the Centre and State were conducted by delegations comprising representatives of the different religious communities. So, is or was this communalisation of the agitation simply an expression of Buddhist political awareness? In the light of the historical evidence, it would seem rather incongruous to suggest that the 1989 agitation was an expression of just a Buddhist political awakening. At the same time, the agitation

was indeed communal, both in its form and content. How can we make sense of this?

Again, as history clarifies, the Buddhists of Ladakh were the first to be mobilized along religious lines. For decades the representatives to the Lok Sabha were Buddhists, as the population of Kargil voted without consideration of religious affiliation. Moreover, Leh district can boast of a strong tradition of modern education, many political figures studied in Delhi and Jammu, and several have law degrees. This, combined with a historical imagining of a Buddhist community being under threat, produced a young and radical elite among them who took the initiative for launching the present movement. Earlier movements had failed, often because of personal antagonisms among their leaders. The present younger generation felt, as one of them put it, that "*we had to use religion to create a sustained movement.*" Of course, this communalisation was much resented in Kargil. In a conversation in September 1989, the late Agha Hyder, one of the most important Shia leaders in the Suru Valley, expressed his disillusionment with the LBA. He stressed that: "*We Ladakhis all suffer under Kashmir. We should fight together.*"

While it is necessary to take into account this 'slippage' between Buddhist and Ladakhi identifications and claims, we must also take a closer look at the 'Buddhist community'. Its internal cohesion and relative homogeneity is generally taken for granted by most authors writing about the events of 1989 and after. But can we assume this stability even in the 1989 events? When we look at Ladakh's modern political history, several important and surprisingly stable 'fault lines' appear within the Buddhist community and across the population of the region as a whole.

First, there are important regional and class antagonisms which -- far from being merely the imaginings of social scientists -- have profoundly shaped Ladakhi politics. Key moments in this political history include the removal from power of the Kalon family of Leh by a concerted effort of a number of individuals. This 'Coup at Choglamsar Bridge', as one of our sources coined it, took place in the summer of 1949 during a visit to Ladakh by Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah. At this time Kushok Bakula was made District

President of the National Conference. Today, some people interpret the events as either a Muslim conspiracy, or as the natural rise to power of Ladakh's 'Head Lama', but neither interpretation does justice to the complexity of the coalition involved in the making of Bakula as a political leader. First, the 'conspirators' included a Christian, Buddhists, and Muslims. Secondly, at the time, and even more so today, Bakula is certainly not the undisputed political and spiritual leader of Ladakh that several publications make him out to be.⁷ We cannot go into detail here, but will give one example to illustrate this point.

When elections were finally held in Ladakh in 1961, a small group of relatively young and well-educated people decided to put forward a counter candidate against the Kushok. It can hardly be considered a coincidence that all of the initiators were from families that were *shyin-bdag* of Hemis monastery, the wealthiest and most important monastery of Ladakh.⁸ The men convinced Tsering Phuntsog Shunnu to stand as an independent candidate. While they gathered very few votes, they in effect initiated the modern political process in Ladakh.⁹ This Bakula centred politics continued until the early 1980s. Its culmination was the formation of the Congress party in Ladakh. This took place on the initiative of some of the same players around 1963-64. Soon after, however, as a consequence of a Centre-State deal, National Conference and Congress merged in Kashmir, and Bakula was given the Congress ticket. This led to the existence of two Congress parties in Ladakh, which were distinguished as 'A' and 'B'. The former was the 'official' Bakula party, the latter the rebellious coalition of young Buddhists and Muslims.¹⁰

7. See for example: Kaul and Kaul 1991; Shakspo 1988.

8. At this time, the young Staksang Raspa was in Tibet, where he had gone for further studies in 1953. The absence of this potential rival to Bakula was thus conveniently out of the way. There are several different interpretations about the circumstances of his leaving Ladakh. Some say it was simply his father who collected him for studies and to meet his mother in Tibet. Others say that Bakula much encouraged his departure.

9. This they did at great personal expense. Some were put under a social boycott, effectively excommunicating them. Those who were in government service found themselves transferred all over the State.

10. Again, we cannot discuss A-B politics in detail. Suffice it to say that the divisions ran so deep that Thikse monastery itself for a while had a small 'A' branch, which staged its own '*chams*' and which fought pitched battles with the main 'B' monastery. See our forthcoming dissertations for a more extensive

This political division, which cross-cut religious 'community', dominated Ladakhi political and social life for more than a decade in the late '60s and early '70s. What this episode illustrates is the impossibility of assuming a homogenous, unified Buddhist community. And although A/B politics is a thing of the past, its traces still influence public political awareness.

In addition to these political divisions, there are important regional antagonisms in Ladakh which resist submergence by Buddhistness. The most obvious of these rivalries is the one between Sham and Upper Ladakh, or rather Leh. There is an extensive repertory of 'ethnic' jokes about Shammans, and vice versa. Sham, historically the most important trading region of Ladakh, has a population which is fiercely proud of their Shamma-ness. Today, many people from Sham play significant parts in economy and politics in Leh, and this is resented by some sections of the 'indigenous' Leh populace. More recently, separate organisations representing the interests of different regions of Ladakh have begun to emerge, a process likely to continue with the 'constituentification' of Leh District under the Autonomous Hill District Development Council which was created in September 1995. While such organisations are responding to new socio-economic and political frames and conditions, they reflect historical antagonisms.

A third cross-cutting set of divisions is one along professional and class lines. While the fight against Kalonism and indebtedness of the early 1950s already illustrates this class element, the more recent establishment of organisations of *lag-shes-pa*, homeless people and the unemployed, and unions of taxi drivers, transport operators, hotel owners, etc., at the very least point to a more complex constitution of 'community' and 'interests' than that assumed in referring to the Buddhist religion as "the central feature of their lives in common." Buddhism, surely, has been used as a mobilizing tool, but it cannot be simply taken as *the* fundamental essence of Ladakhiness.

A fourth and final distinction to be made -- without suggesting that this list is exhaustive; we have not begun to discuss gender, for

discussion.

example -- is that between the relatively urbanized Leh and Kargil areas and the outlying villages. We will not go into this aspect here, but it is obvious that one cannot reduce 'Ladakhiness' to an ideal-type distilled from a narrow reading of a (few) particular village(s).

By now it will be evident that Ladakhiness and Ladakhi politics cannot be reduced to Buddhistness. Neither can some other 'essential' unity or homogeneity be imposed on the multiplicity of social, economic, and political identifications that one encounters in Ladakh. We will now attempt to show that even the 1989 agitation was *not* a straightforward expression and mobilisation of Buddhist anger with State policies, but rather required much effort on the part of the initiators in order to create and sustain a coalition of Ladakhis along religious identification.

Making the 1989 agitation

As mentioned at the start of this paper, the agitation began after a series of minor clashes between Muslim and Buddhist youths. Or did it? From interviews and documents a slightly more complicated picture emerges. Again, it is important to look at the historical record. Obviously, this agitation was a continuation or resumption of earlier ones, albeit with important differences as well. Its immediate history, too raises important questions.

In the Spring of 1988 there was a series of violent incidents aimed at the small Christian community in Leh. The protest, led by the Youth Wing of the LBA, was targeted against the 'abduction' of fifty Buddhist children to Srinagar for education at the Mizoram Jesuit Mission School. A second major issue was the publication of a book, *Skyabgon*, written by the Moravian Rev. Stephen, in which, it was alleged, the Buddhist religion was insulted and ridiculed. The issue was settled relatively soon with the withdrawal of the book and the return of the children. In many ways, this was a trial run for the events of 1989.

"It [a public rally in Leh Bazar on 20 May 1988] was a stupendous unprecedented event. In the last 15-20 years (since

1969), never did Leh see such mammoth crowd of men, women and monks. People's zeal and excitement was really to be believed." (Letter from President of the LBA, May 25, 1988)

An important factor in the making of the 1989 agitation was the reorganisation, indeed revitalisation of the LBA. First, a younger generation had taken control. Thupstan Chhewang, member of the royal family, *sprul-sku*, and nephew of Bakula, had returned to Leh in 1988 to join the Ladakh Ecological Development Group. He had played a leading role in the agitations of 1981/2, and many of the younger political players had pinned their hopes on him as the coming leader of Ladakh. He was elected as president of the LBA in early 1989. Other important new figures in the LBA organisation were Rigzin Jora, a very vocal activist, Rigzin Spalbar, and Tsering Dorje Lagruk. The latter had established and taken control of the Youth Wing. These four -- together with others -- shared a number of grievances against the old regime of the LBA and local politicians. Mainly, they felt that a more 'forceful' approach was necessary to realize the aspirations of Ladakhis. Key issues were greater local autonomy and Scheduled Tribe Status.¹¹

The LBA was reorganized, in particular through the establishment of additional local branches and improvement of contacts between the branches and the headquarters in Leh. The Youth Wing, following in the tradition of the YMBA and Lamdon Society, took it upon itself to tour the villages and 'educate' the people regarding social evils, such as excessive spending on rituals and weddings, consumption of alcohol, etc., and -- for our present purpose more importantly -- on the discrimination of Ladakh's Buddhists by the Kashmir government. These campaigns went on for several months before the incidents at Choglamsar and Leh on 6 and 7 June, 1989. Clearly, with this radicalisation of sections of the Buddhist youth, trouble was in the making. This is clearly expressed in a letter to Rajiv Gandhi written by then MP P. Namgyal and District Congress (I) President and MLA Tsering Samphel:

11. The ST-Issue, as we mentioned, dates back to at least the 1960s and perhaps earlier. Its eventual granting in October 1989 followed a long and complex series of events. For a detailed discussion see van Beek's "The Importance of Being Tribal", in this volume.

"I have just returned from an over-night visit to Ladakh where I was summoned for discussions in the wake of the latest jolt which the people there received due to their non-representation in the reconstituted State Cabinet. The people, after taking stock of the over-all situation, started wondering whether they still continue to be an integral part of the State. I personally had no answer to this simple question of theirs."
(P. Namgyal, letter to Rajiv Gandhi, dated 6 May 1989)

It is clear that the events that followed were neither spontaneous, nor presenting new demands. Mostly, the agitation began as a protest against inaction on issues that had been under discussion with the Centre for quite some time. This is true of the ST-Issue, as well as the demand for greater autonomy from Kashmir.

In spite of the 'educational' activities of the Youth Wing, popular participation was far from guaranteed once the agitation was launched. Initially, groups of vigilantes or enforcers, comprising mainly very young Youth Wing members, would go around and forcibly ensure - through intimidation, beatings, and in some instances arson and blasting - compliance with the LBA policies. These acts of violence are hardly expressive of "a basic adherence to a Gandhian philosophy of ahimsa", as the LBA has claimed and Crook (1994) agrees.¹² In fact, the situation was very bad, both for Muslims and Buddhists, and much material damage was done to properties. Violence was committed by both sides. The situation was worrying enough for the Dalai Lama to send a letter to both communities asking for a cessation of hostilities.¹³

12. Neither should it be assumed that this kind of violence is somehow a new phenomenon, resulting from the insecurity of a generation caught between tradition and modernity. Violence, including murder, was not quite a new phenomenon in 20th century Ladakh. Political violence in the modern sense dates back to at least the 1961 election campaign when several of those who stood against Bakula received a thorough thrashing in the Gumpa Soma. It is said that one of the victims, on finding out who was responsible, chased that person through the bazar with a gun in his hand and "he would have killed him if he had managed to catch him."

13. The Dalai Lama, "Message", dated 13 September, 1989. Around the same time, on 11 September, Stakna Rinpoche sent a letter to the Dalai Lama explaining the background to the current crisis. In Stakna Rinpoche's letter the booklet produced by the People's Movement for Union Territory Status in the summer of 1989 was included. Judging from the records, the LBA never officially answered

The social boycott imposed on Muslims, in other words, had to be enforced. This is hardly surprising, given the many kinship and economic relations between Buddhists and Muslims. This division of the society, it must be clear, was far from natural, at least in popular perception. The LBA gradually managed to get its youthful radicals under greater control, and the system for enforcing the boycott was formalized through a system of penalties which increased in severity according to the gravity of the offense.¹⁴ At the time, there was significant disagreement with the methods of the agitators. However, given the tremendous power of the LBA, few if any dared to speak out openly. The sole person who did, Sonam Wangyal, was put under a social boycott himself.¹⁵

Another illustration of the precarious nature of the agitation coalition is its rapid post-Hill Council fragmentation. As soon as the spoils of the agitation were to be divided in the context of the Autonomous Hill District Council of Leh, rifts emerged in the LBA. While these remained contained and largely hidden from public view, the internal rivalries and the vying for position were recognized and discussed fairly openly among the political elite. Moreover, during the final phase of the agitation in March-May 1995, there were growing disagreements over strategy and methods, such as the use of *bandhs* as a means of putting pressure on the government. Some of this disagreement and distrust was expressed in regional terms, some in occupational, i.e. Sham or Changthang vs. Leh, tourism operators vs. contractors, etc.

The final phase of the agitation in the spring of 1995 was carried on once again under the banner of the Ladakh People's Movement for Autonomous Hill Council, and was led by the Coordination Committee, which comprised representatives of the Muslim, Buddhist and

the Dalai Lama, nor even acknowledged receipt of the message, even though the office of the Dalai Lama and Council for Home Affairs of the Dalai Lama repeatedly and explicitly asked for such a confirmation.

14. Offenses listed varied from 'interaction with X', punishable with a fine of Rs. 50 to 500, to 'treason', punishable with 'a very sound beating.'

15. Sonam Wangyal is without doubt the most controversial figure in Ladakh's modern political history. He was -- and perhaps continues to be -- very close to Bakula Rinpoche. While most give praise to Sonam Wangyal for his actions in the early 1950s, in particular his role in the cancellation of debts and the ending of 'Kalonism', his later political career is seen as marred by corruption and Machiavellian conspiracies. For more detail, see our forthcoming dissertations.

Christian communities. At rallies during this phase, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian leaders addressed the crowds. A relay hunger-strike (*dharna*) in front of the Mosque brought people together on the basis of location, not community. Even the radical youth of the different communities had their own 'coordination committee' and planned and conducted their activities together. Symbolically significant, cars patrolling during *bandhs* and making announcements carried both 'Buddhist' and 'Muslim' flags. For all appearances, Ladakhis were once again fighting as Ladakhis against a common 'enemy', this time identified as the Central Government.

In August 1995, elections took place for the first Autonomous District Development Council, Leh (LAHDeC). All key leaders of the agitation on the Buddhist side joined Congress, as did Akbar Ladakhi, still one of the most powerful Muslims. The National Conference did not participate in the election, and so it was no surprise that Congress (I) won all twenty-six seats, twenty-two having been uncontested. The Executive Council, chaired by Thupstan Chhewang, includes Akbar Ladakhi, Rigzin Jora, Sonam Dawa, and Thikse Rinpoche. Most other key players found a seat on the general Council. Bakula Rinpoche was in Leh to celebrate the formal announcement of the Hill Council bill, and the Governor came to swear in the elected members and to choose the four nominated ones. It was a dreary, dark, rainy day. Already the tables in the corners of the usual public places in Leh were occupied by people expressing unhappiness with one or another aspect of the election process or the personnel of the Council. The establishment of the LAHDeC signifies a successful end to a decades long struggle, but it certainly does not constitute the 'end of history' in Ladakhi politics.

Conclusion

"A spokesman for the Ladakh Buddhist Association, which is leading the agitation, said that at present the Muslims of Kargil district were not with the LBA, but during the next few months they would also join in the demand for Union Territory Status for Leh and Kargil." (Hindustan Times, October 6, 1989)

This paper has sought to question some of the assumptions underlying representations of the 1989 agitation in Ladakh. First, we have shown that any understanding of contemporary Ladakhi politics must take into account the long and complex history of political and social contestation in the region. Both form and content of political struggle in Ladakh have historical roots that go back at least sixty years. Moreover, it is necessary to put the historical political process in Ladakh in a wider Indian (and indeed global) context. This kind of approach at once avoids the Scilla and Charybdis of modernist and essentialist explanation.

Secondly, we have tried to question the validity and usefulness of concepts of 'community' - understood as stable, homogeneous, and unambiguously bounded - in understanding the particular articulation of political struggle in Ladakh in recent years. While the 1989 agitation was undoubtedly 'communal' during its 'hot' phase, it would be wrong to assume that primordial religious identity alone can explain form or content of the agitation. This is clear from the internal antagonisms and divisions within the Buddhist 'community', from the many cross-cutting coalitions, identifications, a shared, imagined Ladakhiness, as well as from the current disintegration of the agitation coalition.

As identifications are performed, they are transformed, created, forgotten, a process embedded in a complex web of other processes and practices, both local and supralocal. Hence, the selective remembering, or more importantly forgetting, of cultural practices and history, creates more and less powerful fields of identification. Religion, in the Indian context in particular, provides one particularly effective identification. But it is not the only, the most important, or most stable identification.

Hence, we must discard our static conceptualisations of 'community' and 'identity', and shift our attention towards the ways in which 'community' and 'identity' are constructed, imagined, and performed. And we must rid our social scientific practice of its positivist obsession with systems, models, structures, and give greater attention to diachronic processes. Only in this manner can we hope to arrive at a more adequate understanding of the social.

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