

## Changing Vision's of Ladakh

The French historian, Pierre Vilar (1985) wrote that the 'The history of the world can be best observed from the frontier', yet we see that anthropological researches on border studies are not many.

The Kingdom of Ladakh was a part of the Tibetan empire till it broke up in 742 AD and an independent Himalayan state till 1834, though its borders fluctuated at different periods in history, even to include what is now Western Tibet. Border studies, have a broad significance not only for the Tibetans but also the people of Kalmykia, Buryatia, Tuva Republic, Ladakh, Spiti, Lahual, Arunachal Pradesh in India, Myanmar, Bhutan and the Pakistan (North-east). Conflicts between India and Pakistan separated the Baltis into two groups one living in Baltistan and Ghanche and the other living in Kargil in India. Soon thereafter, the fate of the people of Ladakh (Leh and Kargil) became entwined with that the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. What is left behind are Pre-Partition memories, of the Ladakh Wazarat which was established in 1901, and included Skardu (Baltistan) Kargil and Leh. We are well of the fact that with Partition and the creation of borders what is experienced is not only a demographic change but a change in the life and culture and identity of a group of people who would now have to live with these new border realities which might not necessary be the significant will of the people. Some communities like the Baltis search for a cultural identity while some remain ambiguous ethno-religious identities. The people of Ladakh are therefore seen to share several non-religious affinities with the Baltistan, this being their language, music, dress, food, the Bon customs and most importantly the folk tradition and culture of folktales like the King Gesar (*Ling Gesar*), infact the programmes broadcasted on radio in Leh and Kargil are listened to at Baltistan and are pretty much popular.

It was in 1974 that the Northern Areas was created to detach Baltistan and Gilgit from the rest of Jammu and Kashmir. Historically Ladakh shares a common heritage with Tibet, the spoken language being close to Tibetan. The dominant language of Baltistan, Kargil and Ladakh is a Western Tibetan Dialect as the regions of Ladakh and Baltistan that have participated in the culture of Tibet. Ladakh had shared its border with Central Asian countries, Tibet, Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. Ladakhi and Balti are closest to the Tibetan language infact the strong political and cultural links with Ladakh and Tibet gave Baltistan the name of 'Little Tibet.' The Baltis and Ladakhis people take pride in the fact that their dialects represent the original language as their pronunciation of the written Tibetan is still

intact, however there has been a downfall trend in the reading and writing of Classical Tibetan. Efforts have been made to promote Ladakh's literary heritage with the Tibetan Buddhist culture as both the administrative document and Buddhist religious texts were written in the Tibetan script earlier. The Baltistan movement and the vision of Greater Ladakh have emerged due to the conditions in the region post-partition and aim at stressing on a common Western Himalayan history of the region. A conflict-ridden borderland is thus, not the only dimension of Ladakh, and there is a need to study the region in a wider Himalayan context from a transnational perspective.