



Research Paper

## Prospects and Challenges to preserve Ladakhi Identity since independence.

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### Abstract

Ladakh has its distinct cultural identity since ages. The assimilation of minority culture within the larger state is threat to its survival. Under the east-while Jammu and Kashmir State, the Ladakh cultural identity faced several challenges. This paper seeks to examine how distinct culture of Ladakh could face similar challenges after the formation of Union Territory and what could be the prospects to preserve it.

**Key Word:** Ladakh, East-while J&K State, Cultural Identity,

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### I. Introduction

Identity formation is closely linked to the politics of belonging. "Politics of belonging encompass and relate both citizenship and identity, adding an emotional dimension which is central to notions of belonging"<sup>1</sup> Different disciplines used the identity differently. Broadly, there are two approaches: Psychological and Sociological. The Psychological looks into the issues of individual identity formation, whereas the sociological studies the formation of collective social identity. Collective identity is defined as: "an individual's cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity." (Polletta and Jasper, 2001)

The Sociological perspective of the formation of collective social identity are mostly articulated through cultural materials such as names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and collective memories and they carry with them positive feelings for other members of the group.<sup>2</sup>

### Historical Context of Ladakhi Identity

Ladakh was an independent kingdom since the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, Skit Lde Nemagon, the ruler of Tibet, invaded Ladakh where there was no central authority. The lands divided in small principalities were at war with each other. Nemagon defeated them one by one and established a strong kingdom at Shey, 15 Kms from Leh, as its capital.<sup>3</sup> The ancient name of Ladakh was Maryul. Mar means red and yul means country. It means "red country".<sup>4</sup> In April 1834, General Zorawar Singh marched into Ladakh under the Dogra rule of Maharaja Gulab Singh. In 1846, Kashmir was made over by the British to Maharaja Gulab Singh by the treaty of Amritsar, so that Ladakh became part of Jammu and Kashmir State.<sup>5</sup>

With the accession of Kashmir to India, Ladakh became a part of the Indian Union on October 27<sup>th</sup> 1947. The Ladakh views of their religious and cultural ties with India, had unequivocally expressed their

<sup>1</sup> Yuval-Davis, Nira, (2006), "Belonging and the politics of belonging: Pattern of Prejudice:40 (3): 197-214.

<sup>2</sup> Pfaff Joanna- Czarnecka Gerard Toffin (eds)(2011), The Politics of belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamics, New Delhi: Sage Publication,p.101.

<sup>3</sup> Rizvi, Janet (1996), *Ladakh Cross Road of High Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup>Rabgias, Tashi (2012), The History of Maryul Ladakh, New Delhi: Jayyed Press, 5228, Ballimaran, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Kaul, H.N (2004), Ladakh through the Ages: Towards a New Identity, New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, p.101.

preparedness for inclusion of their land in the Jammu and Kashmir state, in the larger interests of India. They made it clear through various fora their own interests, cultural, political and economic must never be ignored.<sup>6</sup> The hopes and wishes of Ladakhi remained imaginary in an autocratic Dogra rule and even in democratic set up. As a consequence of this kind of functioning of the government, the people of Ladakh started drifting away from the state and considering in term of centrally administration for the region. The Ladakhi cultural identity were not given due recognition in a majority Kashmiri population. The first ever deputation from Ladakh headed by Chhewang Rigzin Kalon, the then president of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, called on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru the then Prime Minister of India on May 4, 1949 and presented a Memorandum which pleaded that Ladakh should not be bound by the decision of any plebiscite that might be held to decide Kashmir's accession.<sup>7</sup>

The Memorandum said, "Ladakh is not prepared to go to Pakistan whatever the result of the plebiscite may be, the LBA president Kalon Rigzin, asserted that Buddhist of Ladakh were a separate nation having distinct race, language, and culture and demanded right of self-determination for them. He further demanded separation of Ladakh from Kashmir and their closer union with India. The future security and prosperity of their country lie with India alone"

In a budget speech of Kushok Bakula referred, "Ladakhi felt insecure and their existence as a distinct racial and cultural entity was threatened in the fast changing shape of thing in the state government. The demanded put forward were: 1, There should be a Ministry of Ladakh Affair in the State Government headed by a Minister who should be Member of Legislative Assembly elected by the people of Ladakh. 2, Bhoti the mother-tongue of Ladakhi which has a script of its own, should be the medium of instruction in the schools. 3, The Legislature should not be competent to consider any bill regarding religion or social usage of the Buddhists unless the approval of the elected Buddhist members to such consideration had first been obtained"<sup>8</sup>

Thus, under the state government of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakhi were unable to get their due share and recognition of their distinct culture and step motherly treatment till date. Kushok Bakula in a press conference in New Delhi on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1973 stated that Ladakhi were opposed to Sheikh Abdulla's demand for restoration of pre-1953 position in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. He reiterated the demand of the Ladakhi for Central administration for their homeland in view of their sad experience with the successive State Government. He also suggested for the abrogation of article 370 of the Indian Constitution which conferred special status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, Ladakhi identity could not have independent entity, it was shown as a part of Jammu and Kashmir identity. For example, in every government school Urdu was compulsory subject and all revenue records were keep in Urdu, though Urdu is an alien language for Ladakhi.

### **Prospect and Challenges under Union Territory**

Ladakh since post-independence, articulated for the formation of new collective social identity. Ladakh having its own language, script, religion, ritual, custom, clothing, diet, folk song and dance, race, ethnicity, heritage and monument, topographical features, climatic condition and environment has not similarity with other states of the India. The union government under the leadership of Prime Minister Nerandra Modi realized the strategic importance of Ladakh for India's national security and cultural dissimilarity with Jammu and Kashmir took the decision to grant of Union Territory. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019, the union home Minister, Amit Shah brought a new bill in the Rajya Sabha, for the abrogation of article 370 of the Indian Constitution and grant of two new union territory, one for Jammu and Kashmir with legislature and another for Ladakh without legislature. The bill was passed in both of house of parliament and people of Ladakhi celebrated the historical decision.<sup>9</sup>

The suppression of Ladakhi identity by the Kashmiri majority got new way to preserve its own cultural and ethnic identity. Ladakhi identity under Union Territory is in process of building with a hope to create a new Ladakh. The apprehension of abrogation of article 370 of the Indian constitution in the mind of people of Ladakhi put in dilemma.<sup>10</sup> To preserve its endangered culture in a Hindu majority state, the political leaders and civil society strive for the declaration of Ladakh as Tribal Area under sixth schedule of the constitution. The National Commission for Schedule Tribes on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2019, wrote to Home Minister Amit Shah and Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda, recommended that Ladakh be declared a tribal area under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Sixth Schedule provides for the administration of tribal area after setting up autonomous district and regional councils. The NCST chairperson Nand Kumar Sai, in a statement said, "The NCST feels this will help democratic devolution of powers, preserve and promote distinct culture of the region, protect agrarian rights including rights on land and enhance transfer of funds for speedy development

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.180

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 184

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp.202-204.

<sup>9</sup> Accessed on 06 August 2019, [URL:https://www.news18.com](https://www.news18.com)

<sup>10</sup> Accessed on 02 September 2019, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com>

of the region”.<sup>11</sup> The civil society in Ladakh (Apex Body of Leh and Kargil Democratic Alliance in Kargil) stages constant protest to include Ladakh under the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the India Constitution. The endanger Ladakh culture can be preserved if union government grand a constitutional safeguard to Ladakh. Thus, the most pressing present challenge is to secure Ladakh under the constitution of India. The rich culture of minority in a larger Indian state can be easily submerged without any constitutional safeguard. There is a high hope among the people that union government will certainly listen the genuine assertion of Ladakh who are guarding our country from both China and Pakistan.

The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Leh and Kargil, are playing their active role in the promotion and preservation of native culture and tradition. The initiative to wear Ladakhi traditional dresses on every Monday in government offices is visible culture preservation. The challenges ahead before the political leaders are to protect its language which is Bhoti Language, the demand to inclusion of Bhoti language in eight schedule of the Indian constitution is not a new. The language has its own script and followers in the Himalayan region.

## **II. Conclusion:**

Minority rights to preserve distinct cultural identity in a democracy are indeed an indispensable responsibility of any state. Ladakh in a high Himalayan region has conscious to preserve its tangible culture and heritage. The more important is to preserve and promote its unique intangible culture in a new Ladakh Union Territory. Such as, the behaviors, moral and ethics of people, its simplicity, honesty, truthfulness, politeness and more especially the Buddhist way of living in an advance nuclear hostile world.

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<sup>11</sup> Accessed on 12 September 2019, [http:// www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)