Outside Influences on Art and Architecture of Ladakh, An Analytical Case Study of Monasteries and Stupas

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Abstract: *Based on archaeological investigations and a comprehensive physical survey in the Ladakh region, this paper provides details about outside influences on arts and architectures. It provides ample evidence that these sites are widely dispersed throughout the Union Territory. The archaeological sites of Ladakh are thought to date from the first century CE to the 18th century CE. These sites hold a special place in Ladakh's historical map. Ladakh's tribal culture is identical to Tibetan culture. This paper sheds light on these archaeological sites, particularly wood carvings and paintings. A critical examination of these sites provides important information about the region's past history based on facts and figures. During the course of exploration, similar types of archaeological sites to those found in Ladakh have been discovered in other parts of the subcontinent, particularly in Tibet. Wood carvings, wall paintings, Mandalas, and stupas are some of the noticeable features that are inextricably linked with Ladakhi culture and tradition. The sites have distinct features from various regions, including Tibetan, Kashmiri, and Indian. These characteristics serve as a living example for both the past and present generations. The essential qualities of these archaeological and monumental heritage that have been influenced by external influence, such as wall paintings, mandalas, wood carvings, and stupas, are discussed in detail.*

Keywords: Architecture, Ladakh, Monasteries, Stupas, Wood Carvings, Mandalas, Paintings

Introduction

The facts and figures about the outside influence on Ladakhi culture can be found all over the place in Ladakh. The first important cultural impact of which widespread traces remain is the Tibetan one of the 10th and 11th centuries A.D. When the Tibetans arrived, they built hill-top forts, of which many ruins remain, and they built Buddhist monasteries in the valleys below the forts. Thus, there is the monastery ruin below the fort at Chigtan, another below Basgo, a very imposing one below Nyar-ma, and most important of all that of Alchi, because it remains intact (Snellgrove,1979). The importation of outside influence on Ladakhi arts and crafts are seen in the second quarter of the first century during the reign of emperor Kanishka in the form of Kanika Stupa in Sani monastery of Zanskar valley (Francke 1994). The extensive archaeological work started in Ladakh only in the 1980s, when the archaeological Survey of India and

the wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology started digging; more recently archaeologists from overseas have been looking at ancient burial grounds, fortification and rock art. These investigation show evidence of Human settlement in the region for almost 6000 years, suggesting that the Himalaya and other mountain ranges have never formed a barrier to the movement of Human populations (Rizvi 2000).

Each monumental heritage in the region has distinct and idiosyncratic characteristics in terms of categorization. They all serve as important sources for a better understanding of Ladakh's past history as well as its relationship with other cultures for which there are no literary sources. The purpose and significance of these archaeological sites evolve significantly over time. These historical facts can also be found in abundance throughout Ladakh, with a significant concentration in the districts of Leh and Kargil in their respective areas of study. The Buddhist community makes an effort to preserve these features because of their religious significance. With the advent of Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh development of many small monasteries took place in 10th century (Skalzing 2016).

Geographic Settings

The Union Territory of Ladakh is situated on latitude 34°00'17'' N and longitude 77°26'39'' E (Google Earth) on the northern direction of India. Ladakh is nowadays a remote district of the State of Jammu & Kashmir, which since 1947 has been divided unequally between India and Pakistan. Despite the efforts of the United Nations the State remains a major bone of contention between these two countries and neither recognizes the right of the other to hold any part of it whatsoever. Jammu, the smaller but historically the senior member of this unified state, is mainly Hindu. By marked contrast Kashmir is predominately Muslim. Ladakh, like its western neighbor Baltistan, was added to the State as a result of the fierce campaigns of the ruler of Jammu, Gulab Singh, to whom the British subsequently made over in 1846 the land of Kashmir.

Until its final subjection to the rulers of Jammu in 1834 Ladakh was hardly part of India. It was an independent kingdom, generally oriented in its sympathies towards Tibet (Snellgrove, 1979). The record of Chinese traveler Fa-Hien about the geography of Ladakh in his book "Fo-Ku-ki" as the men of the snowy mountains (Hasnian 1977). Ladakh was an integral part of Jammu and Kashmir U.T until 5 August 2019, when it was established as a Union Territory of Ladakh on 31 October 2019, in accordance with the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act. Ladakh has the largest geographical setting and the second least populous Union Territory of India. Since its separation from the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, it has governed and functioned independently as a distinct identity under the supervision of the Indian Constitution.

Methodology

This paper presents the preliminary physical survey findings of Ladakh archaeological sites that have been influenced on a large scale from outside regions. It includes survey reports for Sani Stupa, Sums-tek Temple Alchi, Leh Palace, Three paired stupas of

Alchi, and a Kashmiri bronze image of Basgo, among other things. The study is primarily based on an extensive exploratory ground level physical survey of the aforementioned archaeological sites. The exploration of sites was carried out using the Google Maps and Google Earth application techniques. The photographs of the sites are placed in their actual context wherever possible. According to the record, the sites were exposed through direct visual observation following a thorough understanding of the sites.

Sites Description

This section contains a comprehensive report that was created during the physical survey of the sites that were chosen for exploration, reflecting on their archaeological characteristics and historical significance.

Sani Kanika Monastery and Stupa, Padum

The oldest stupa of Ladakh is situated on latitude 33°30'18" N and longitude 76°48'37" E (Google Earth) on the left bank of River Zanskar in Ladakh. It is located on northern side of national Highway Number NH301 near the Maitreya rock carvings. It is surrounded by an enclosure which was preserved in course of time. It is located very near to Zanskar River and is the part of Trans Himalayan Indus River. On the western side of it, there exists the Sani monastery. The rock carvings of Maitreya existed on its eastern side. It is situated at a distance of 221.6 kilometers from Kargil city on southern direction and takes six-hour fifty minute by car. It has simple garden setting.



Figure 1: Oldest Stupa, Sani Zanskar, General View



Figure 2: Oldest Stupa, Sani Zanskar, A Closer View



Figure 3: Oldest Stupa, Sani Zanskar, Front Side, A Closer View



Figure 4: Stupa platform, Mani wall and rocks sculpture, A closer view

It is very interesting that the Ka-ni-ka and Sa-ni monasteries are mentioned are first of all, as the oldest monasteries of Zans-dkar. kanika is the Tibetan form of the name Kanishka, the great kushana king of Kashmir and Northern India. This monastery was possibly erected during the reign of that king. This supposition is strengthened by another note in the chronicle, where it is stated that Zans-dkar was under Kashmir before it was seized by the kham-pas (Tibetans) (Francke 1994). Sani, standing on the edge of the village of the same name where the Stod valley broadens into Zanskar 's central plain, is believed to be perhaps the very oldest Buddhist site in the whole of Ladakh, its establishment antedating even the foundations associated with Rin-chen-zang-po at the time of the second spreading. The basis for this belief is a chorten of unusual shape adjoining it, known as the Kanika Chorten, together with the assumption that this name refers to the Kushan emperor Kanishka, who ruled over an area incorporating much of north India and what is now Afghanistan, and including Kashmir, in the second century CE (Rizvi 2000).

The most famous among the pupils of the Kashmir Buddhists who settled in Ladakh was Lotsava Rinchen bzangpo. He lived in the year 954 according to Schlagintweit. According to the Tibetan historical work mentioned above, the Kashmiri monks first settled at Sani in Zangskar, and built the Kanika monastery (Francke 1907). The evidence of the extension of Kanishka rule in Ladakh that Kaniska was responsible for

taking Buddhism to Central Asia, China and northern tribal areas of Tibet. He had also strengthened Buddhism in the Indus Valley along with its tributaries, e.g., the five rivers of the Punjab, the Valley of Kabul, Dras, Suru and Zangskar (Tsering 1979).



Figure 5: Ruined and cracked Wall Paintings, Sani Monastery, Zanskar, Closer View

In Buddhist culture, a stupa is a symbol of enlightened mind and the path to its realization. The best definition for stupa can be "spiritual monument" (Skalzing 2016). The oldest stupa (chorten) in Ladakh was found in the Zanskar valley, near Padum. The stupa is located within the Sani Kani monastery's enclosure. (Figures 1-3). The most notable feature of this stupa is its distinct shape in comparison to other stupas in Ladakh and Tibet. It is heavily influenced by Kashmiri and Indian art. The stupa is built in a square plan, with each side measuring 3.65 metres in length and 3.65 metres in width. As the level increased to the upper level, it became narrower. The stupa is square in shape with a dome on top. The dome has a circumference of 3 metres. It is divided into two levels, with the dome on the second. It has achieved a prominent elevation. It has two small window enclosures attached to the second level on the east and west sides (Figure 3). Both levels feature panel lacing on both sides.

The golden coloured chatra spire is placed on top of the dome and is supported by four iron chains on each side. Stone masonry, sun dried mud bricks, and stucco mortar are extensively used in the construction of this stupa. The mani stone with the Tibetan inscription '*Om Mani Padme Hum*' was placed on the platform (Figure 4). Recently, the stupa was repainted in white distemper. The presence of the black thorn here,

according to local legend, predates the stupa. Two temples heavily influenced by Tibetan art can be found in the same courtyard. (Figures 5-6). In the 16th and 17th centuries, juniper woods were imported from Kashmir for the ceiling and pillars of the main monastery. According to the custodian Lama, a few painters from Lhasa and Tibet were also requested. The presence of five pairs of Maitreya Buddha images influenced by the Gandhara school of arts is one of the most notable features of this site.



Figure 6: Niches, Buddha and Bodhisatva statues, Naropa Temple, Sani Monastery, Zanskar, A Closer View

Sum-tsek Temple and Three Stupas Alchi

The temple of Sum-tsek (three-tiered temple) is situated on latitude 34°13'25" N and longitude 77°10'30" E (Google Earth) on the left bank of River Indus in Ladakh (Plate. No. 07,08). It is located on northern side of national Highway Number NH1 in the middle of the Alchi village.

It is surrounded by an enclosure which is built in rectangle plan. It is very near to Indus River and is the part of Trans Himalayan Indus of Ladakh. On the northern side of it, there exists the Lotsawa and Manjushri temple, a temple built during the time of great translator Rin-chen-Zangpo in 11th century. one of the few monasteries known for certain to have been founded by Rin-chen-zang-po. This link may be sufficient to account for the local tradition which claims the great translator himself as Alchi's

founder (Rizvi 2000). The monastery was founded in the 11th century on the south bank of the Indus in a verdant oasis in a desert landscape and contains many important wall Paintings, amongst the oldest in Latah (Harrison 2011). The three oldest stupas were on the eastern side. It is located 66.3 kilometres to the south-east of Leh and takes one hour and twenty minutes to drive there. It can also be used in a simple garden setting.

It is approximately calculated to be a rectangular site. Although this site is spread over a large area of land, it contains a greater number of temples and stupas than other Ladakh sites. The archaeological monument assemblages found here are found in groups and are predominantly in solid form. 'A-lci is an old town, situated on the left bank of the Indus, opposite Sa-spo-la. judging by its many ruins, it may have been a place of importance in ancient times. Most of the inscriptions near the bridge of 'A-lci contain only the names of colonels who guarded the bridge, probably after the Tibetan conquest in the tenth century (Francke 1994).



Figure 7: Wood Carvings, Sum-Tsek Temple (Three-Tiered Temple), Alchi Monastery

Thus, even from the outside the sum-tsek has an unusual look, made all the more striking by the elaborate wooden carving which surmounts its facade. Inside, the centre of the lower chamber is occupied by a stucco chorten, while the three Bodhisatvas are ensconced in alcoves in the side and back walls. In a clockwise direction, they are Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya and Manjushri. Although the head of these attention by the curious garments they wear, draped about their legs from waist

to knees. Each of these is covered with a serious of beautifully executed miniature paintings the like of which do not seem to be known anywhere else, and which, even apart from their rarity value, are full of interest (Rizvi 2000).



Figure 8: Side View, Sum-Tsek Temple, Alchi Monastery

The Kashmiri influence on Alchi Sum-tsek and Stupa in brief discussion (Hasnian 1977). The important possession of the gumpas is the colourful wall paintings which are a thousand-year-old (Hasnian 1977) Dorjey clearly provided evidence about the outside influence on Sums-tek-temple of Alchi wood work and interior wall paintings under the supervision of Rin-chen-Zang-po in his book Ladakh Monastic Art and Architecture, stating that one of the fascinating architectures of the 10th century in Ladakh is three-tiered temple (Sum-tsek) at Alchi. (Figures 7-8). It reflects composition skill of Kashmiri painters and craftsmen. The builders and designers of this monastery had been summoned by a person, none other than the Lotsava, Rinchen-bzang-po. Its architectural design presents a visual confirmation of the influence of native Kashmiri house architecture. The temple of Sum-tsek has its proud possessions in the form of three extensively decorated Bodhisattvas: Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya and Manjushri (Skalzing 2016). The temple's facade is embellished with Kashmiri-style woodwork (Figures 7-8).

The porch has been extended to the second floor. Eight round and square pillars are installed to support the delicate woodwork ceiling. The perpendicular beam used here and in the temple is carved with twelve lions' heads and is between low height,

supporting six carved pillars with three Buddha sculptures laid out within the three triangles. The paintings on the walls and the stucco images on the ceilings are also inspired by Kashmiri and Tibetan architecture. (Figures 11-15). All the art-historians who have studied them agree that the paintings in the main shrines were executed by artists from Kashmir, and reflect, especially in their emphasis on the Tara goddesses, an iconography characteristic of Kashmiri Buddhis- m (Rizvi 2000). While in Kashmir, Rin-Chen-Zang-Po brought with him a large number of Kashmiri painters and artisans to Ladakh. Inscriptions in the Sum-tsek temple indicate that some repair and conservation work was done in the 16th century during the reign of Tashi Namgyal.



Figure 9: Two eastern entrance stupas (chortens), Alchi Monastery

The three oldest stupas (chortens) are also existed in the enclosure of Alchi Choskor (Figures 9-10). Two stupas can be found in the east, and another in the south. These stupas' interior paintings are heavily influenced by Kashmiri style (Figures 11-15). The southern one is the largest, with each side measuring 7.93 metres in length and width. These stupas are simply passageways between stone walls chambers. These chortens' ceilings are adorned with mandala paintings. The design of flowers and other rosettes is represented in the roundels of these mandalas. The walls of the largest one are covered with miniature paintings of Manjushri on the northern side in large numbers, while the other wall depicts miniature paintings of Akshobhya. The interior section of the same stupa's inner stupa is worth writing about. The figure of Rin-Chen-Zang-Po

appears in the walls of this chorten on the southern side, making its history very interesting, and the miniature paintings of three Kashmiris appear on the other three sides of the walls. These stupas are supported by four round-shaped twig pillars that have been installed.



Figure 10: Largest Southern Stupa, Alchi Monastery

The image of Indian monks in brown attire occupies the northern side of the eastern end chorten. On either side of these images were images of five preaching Buddhas, Sakyamuni and Vairocana. The Alchi Choskor was most likely influenced by Indian culture as well. Last but not least, the chorten number three, which existed on the eastern end and occupied the images of three Indian teachers. Sakyamuni's miniature paintings adorn the walls. This chorten's ceiling is also adorned with miniature paintings of Buddhas. They are dressed in white with red robes and making various hand gestures.

Leh Palace

The palace of Leh is situated on latitude 34°09'57" N and longitude 77°35'11" E (Google Earth) on the western side of Namgyal-Tsemo in Leh. It is located near the Sunni Masjid on the northern side of National Highway Number NH1. The palace is identified as the royal residence of Sengge Namgyal of Namgyal dynasty (Figures 16-18). The history says its completion took three years.



Figure 11: Ruined Wall and Ceiling Paintings, Southern Largest Stupa, Alchi Monastery



Figure 12: Ruined Walls and Ceiling Paintings, Southern Largest Stupa, Alchi Monastery



Figure 13: Wall and Ceiling Paintings, Inner View, Alchi Monastery



Figure 14: Ruined Wall and Ceiling Paintings, Inner Stupa, Alchi Monastery



Figure 15: Inner Stupa Wall, Dome and Ceiling Paintings, Alchi Monastery



Figure 16: Southern Side - Wall of Leh Palace Slanting Inwards, General View



Figure 17: Western or Back Wall of Leh Palace, A Closer View



Figure 18: Front or Eastern Side of, Leh Palace, A Closer View

The area of the palace is total 6 kanal and 13 marla, length of palace is 207 feet then height is 147 feet, it is having 21 balconies & containing 204 rooms (Phuntsog 2007). The first western scholar who noted about this magnificent palace was William Moorcroft states that "The most considerable building in Sle `(Leh) is the palace of the raja (king), which has an anterior of two hundred and fifty feet, and is of several stories in height, forming a conspicuous object on the approach to the city'' (Moorcraft 1971). The palace is heavily influenced by Tibetan architectural style. This archaeological masterpiece is identical to the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, and is considered the world's largest structure of its time. It is a nine-story palace with the highest elevation in all of Ladakh. (Figures 16-18). A timber lacing technique that is used perpendicularly to prevent vertical cracks in buildings. Stone masonry work and sun-burned bricks were extensively used in the walls. Poplar, willow, and juniper woods are used in the ceiling, window, and door frames. These materials were brought in from the surrounding villages of Leh. The artisans and workers were recruited from Tibet and Ladakh as well. As the storey increased in height, the palace's walls became narrower. The use of stone masonry decreased as the storeys were raised to lighten the burden on the structure. As the storeys were added, the size of the windows grew in order to make less use of bricks. The overhanging balconies on the upper stories are beautifully embellished and decorated in the style of Lhasa's grand palace. Several chambers are decorated with wall paintings that are influenced by Tibetan arts in some way.

Other outside influences can be seen in the Basgo and Hemis monasteries, where Kashmiri bronze images are displayed. The paintings in Basgo's Maitreya Temple are also influenced by Kashmiri artistic style. The pre-seventh-century colossal images seen in Kargil, Leh, Drass, Nubra, and Zanskar are heavily influenced by the Gandhara School of arts and Kashmiri arts.

Conclusion

The archaeological sites in and around the Leh and Kargil districts led to the conclusion that they do not have an independent identity but are influenced by outside cultures to varying degrees. During this time period, we will investigate how Tibetan, Kashmiri, and Indian arts are formally incorporated into these unique historical sites. Among the most notable features are the significant parts of wood carvings, paintings, and stupas, among others. The physical survey sites are located near the river and in the middle of the villages. The natural and man-made factors both played important roles in the upkeep of these sites. These facts bear a striking resemblance to Tibetan, Kashmiri, and Indian styles. But the most striking feature is the variation in form and style of each feature from location to location. After conducting a critical investigation of vernacular features, these features were documented.

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