



Research Paper

Ethno-Religious Identities within Colonial Discourses: A Comprehensive Examination of the Ladakhi Muslim Community

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Abstract

Muslims of Ladakh remains an understudied and underrepresented section for the longest part of the Ladakh's history. From the colonial mapping of the region to enumeration of the populace within, the scanty information and research about the Muslim Ladakhis in the contemporary scholarships have made the Muslims of the region unidentified within the discourses of Ladakhi identities. The ascendancy of Buddhist Ladakhiness, having its roots within the colonial scholarship and official records, perpetuated the inexistence of Ladakhi Muslims in identitarian terms. Assessing the scholarship, this paper examines how the production of colonial discourses about complex ethno-religious identities consequently constructed a monotonous Buddhist Ladakhi identity. It explores how synonymizing Buddhist as Ladakhi and Muslims as Balti(stani) within the colonial discourses resulted the production of a knowledge which, perhaps, made the Muslims of Ladakh imperceptible in official and academic discourses.

Key Words: Muslim, Ladakhi, identity, colonial writings, orientalism

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I. Introduction

When Article 370 was abrogated and the state of J&K was demoted to two distinct Union Territories, Buddhist majority district of Leh celebrated the event as the 'freedom of Ladakh' and its people from the colonizer Muslim political elites of the valley. Against the Buddhist leadership's jubilation on the attainment of their long standing demands for separation of Ladakh from the Muslim majority state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), Ladakh's Muslim majority district of Kargil repudiated the bifurcation of the state of J&K and the declaration of Ladakh as a separate Union Territory (UT). The Muslim leadership of Ladakh expressed their disagreements with the Buddhist leadership of the region regarding the bifurcation of the state of J&K since 1950sⁱ and they intensively censured their disagreements with the Buddhist leadership and considered the declaration of UT as an impositionⁱⁱ and in consequence the Muslim majority district of Kargil was put under siege for monthsⁱⁱⁱ.

The contestation and differentiation of Ladakhi Muslims with those of the Buddhists of the region was neither abrupt and spontaneous nor was confined to the bifurcation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Rather, issues of contention between the Buddhist and Muslim communities varied from modes and means of identity assertions to political and economic mobility. However, the Buddhist voice remained the dominant one and the unattended and marginal Muslim Ladakhis asserted against the dominant Buddhistization of Ladakhiness which was imagined, implemented and reaffirmed by the academic and bureaucratic engagements since the colonial era. Ranging from the imperceptibility of the Muslims of the region in official records and scholarships to the inconsequentiality and peripherality of the Muslim majority regions of Ladakh in academic and administrative terms since the colonial period, the Muslims of the region remained secondary in the popular discourses of Ladakh. During the colonial period, Muslim Ladakhiness did not appear in the colonial constructs because the

fluidity and multiplexity of Ladakhiness and its localized senses of identification was modified, altered, and fabricated to construct a congruent Ladakhiness, to which Buddhism remained the essential factor.

Before the intervention of Western expeditionists, academicians, colonial cartographers, and census reporters, the numbers and communal identifications rarely made any effect on the multifaceted Ladakhiness which was fluid and unsettled in nature. Neither Buddhistness nor Muslimness acted as a determining factor. Additionally, the ethnic ties of different groups itself overlapped within the region. Nevertheless, during the precolonial period, the chronicles of Ladakh (essentially about the Buddhist rulers of Leh in Ladakh) had histories of the Buddhist rulers of Ladakh and the royal court of the *rgyalpo* (king) of Leh immunised from any Muslim connection or influence (Bray 2016, Georgios 2016)^{iv}. It was, however, with the Colonial essentialization of religion (Buddhism in particular) in production of knowledge about Ladakh that the senses representation and marginalization, majority and minority spewed in the imagination of Ladakh. After the Dogra's invasion of Ladakh (1834-41), Ladakh Wazarat, consisting Baltistan, Kargil, and Leh districts, became an administrative entity with Baltistan and Leh (read as Ladakh until recently) remaining the outposts of Islam and Buddhism respectively (Grist 1995)^v. Since the colonial construction of binary discourses about Buddhist Ladakhi and Muslim Balti(stani), the perplexing understandings of ethno-religious identities perhaps de-Ladakhised the Muslims of the region.

Cognizing certain continuity and changes in the colonial imaginations of Ladakh and Ladakhi people, this study primarily deciphers how the Muslim Ladakhis were relegated and othered by colonial ethno-religious complexities produced through colonial state and scholarship. Beginning with the colonial making of state and projection of identifiable subjects, it examines how the Muslims of Ladakh were under/represented in the imagination, construction and production of 'systematic knowledge' about Ladakh. It will also fathom how the academic and bureaucratic notions of Ladakh and Ladakhis witnessed certain shifts under which heterogeneous Ladakhi identities were submerged to construct a homogeneous 'Ladakhi' identity followed by certain challenges to the very homogeneity within colonial constructions. As discussed below, the homogenization/heterogenization game in construction of uniformity in terms of Tibetan Buddhist identity or reimagining through the lenses of class, caste, and/or tribe, on the expenses of native realities and senses of belonging, during the colonial and post-colonial eras made the Muslims a marginal group. This study will unfold the contents and contexts under which the formal and popular exposition of Ladakhi Muslims went through any substantial change.

It is argued that most of the colonial works upon Ladakh produced by the bureaucrats, statistical reporters and expeditionists of the colonial regime principally constructed a synonymity between Buddhistness and Ladakhiness. Deciphering the colonial ways of representation and underrepresentation of native realities, this paper discusses the Dogra and British colonial mapping of Ladakh and its people. It would also undertake the shifts in the colonial imagination and representation of Ladakh and Ladakhis in the formal academic as well as the state's official construction of Ladakhi identities making an interplay of heterogeneous and homogeneous Ladakh.

Ladakh in the Colonial Academia: non/Ladakhi Muslims

Van Beek (1995)^{vi} discussed inconsistencies and ambiguities in the Colonial Census reports of the Ladakh Wazarat. Beginning with the surveys of land settlement and borders under the Wazir of Ladakh Wazarat W. H. Johnson^{vii} in 1873 and the Gazetteer Report of 1891, the Census reports of 1911, 1921, 1931, and 1941 produced official ambivalences regarding the people of Ladakh, specifically the Muslims of the region. The colonial state project in the form of Census Reports followed the discourses produced by colonial writers.

Throughout the Census reports, the homogeneous projection of Ladakhi Muslims under the aura of Bota or Tibetan Buddhist and the wholistic projection of Muslims as Balti by language, religion as well as tribe/caste produced ambiguities while identifying and classifying Ladakhi Muslims in the census reports. Their attempts of tribalization or caste-based classification of Muslims of Ladakh were part of the nation building and caste/tribal classification of subjects on national pattern. Such homogenization of Muslims irrespective of the caste-agnostic nature of Ladakhi Muslim societies demeaned the essential notion 'pa'^{viii} among the Muslims of Ladakh (ancestral family names like ahmad pa, Hussain pa mehdi pa) and assimilated the Muslims into 'Balti' caste/tribe. Essentialization of Buddhistness for being Ladakhi and the making of Muslims as Balti, irrespective of their ethnic, cultural, and geographical belonging made the Muslims of Ladakh less-Ladakhi.

Coming to the Colonial writings, their projection of Ladakhi also produced discourses pertaining to the non-Ladakhization of Muslims of the region. To begin with Moorcroft and Trebeck (1841)^{ix}, "the Ladakhis are, in general, a mild and timid people, frank, honest, and moral when not corrupted by communication with the dissolute Kashmiris, but they are indolent, exceedingly dirty, and too apt to be addicted to intoxication" (vol-I, 1841:321). Other than their projection of Kashmiri (primarily Muslims) as a cause of corrupt attitude among Buddhists, they do not mention the Muslims of Ladakh the way they discuss in length the socio-religious and cultural aspects of Ladakhi Buddhists. In the case of Muslims, they mention the presence of some Balti Muslim colonies in Chuchot and "women of the Mohammedan Ladakhis are discarded for a more simple necklace" and

they wore a headdress. Addressing the expanding influence of Islam in Western Ladakh, they say that “the Mohammedan religion is spreading rapidly, and affecting a material change in the habits and character of the people. One good effect is its promotion of temperance by the prohibition of *chang* and fermented drinks, but on the other hand it has introduced much more dissoluteness, dishonesty, and disregard for truth, than prevails in those places where Lamaism still prevails” (vol-I, 1841: 345-46). Smearing the Mohammedans of Ladakh further, authors narrate that unlike the followers of the religion of Buddha, the economic vulnerability had resulted the cost of living and purchasing in Drass higher and the impoverished Muslims in Dras were intolerant, dissolute and unprincipled (vol I, 1841: 43). Following the description of economic vulnerability forcing people to charge higher for goods and services, the authors emphasise over religious belonging as the primary consideration for the dissolute picture of Muslims of Dras.

Aynsley^x (1897:101-102) in his chapter on Ladakh states that people of Drass were not Buddhists. Rather they were Hindus or Mohammedans. With this ambiguity about the religion in Ladakh, he skips Kargil and other parts until he reaches Shargole, where he finds the footprints of Buddhism. Though he passed through Kargil and other Muslim dwelling hamlets, he exponentially moves to the Buddhist Ladakh and puts a circumstantial elucidation of emergence of Buddhism and the Buddhism oriented socio-cultural and religious practices of Ladakh. He, as many other of his contemporaries, denounced the Muslim strata of Ladakh and their socio-economic and religious histories in Ladakh. In a similar way, Duncan (1906)^{xi} mentions only the Balti Muslims of Baltistan. The Muslims of Kargil and rest of Ladakh seems invisible in his account of Ladakh.

For the colonial writers, considering Muslims as a secondary within the trans-Himalayan Buddhist land remained constant. After giving a detailed explanation about Chinese Muslims of Kan-su, Ho-chou, His-ning and other places, Rockhill (1891) titled the book as “The Land of Lamas”^{xii}. The desperation towards the ‘myth of Shangrila’^{xiii} and ‘the land of Lama’ prompted the travellers, surveyors and other visitors to side line the Muslims of Ladakh. This resulted, later on, the generalization of Ladakh as the ‘land of Lamas’, the continuity of which can be witnessed therein. A major example is the BRO roadside signboards with ‘Don’t be Gama in the Land of Lama’.

Ganpat (1929)^{xiv}, for instance, appeals his audiences towards “one of the most fascinating countries I have ever seen- Ladakh, which I call *Lamaland*, and which was once the Westernmost sub-kingdom of mysterious Tibet” (Ganpat 1929: 22-23). The author says that Kargil was “at the very edge of Buddhist Ladakh” with people of Mongol and Dard stock in *Purikh* being a part of Baltistan (Ganpat 1929: 33). The author says that Ladakh is popularly known for dirty yet cheerful people practicing polyandry, professing Buddhism and consuming *chang*. Whereas, Kargil, the Muslim majority area of Ladakh located at the edge of Buddhist Ladakh.

Marco Pillas (1939)^{xv} narrates his story about the terrain, topography and people of Ladakh with the pilgrims moving for Haj through murderous Zojila and also via Yarkand during winters. His account puts on the administrative region between Ladakh and Zojila as *Purik*^{xvi} with its headquarter at Purik, for the first time. However, he continued terming Muslims as Balti and the Buddhists as Ladakhi in the Dogra’s Ladakh Wazarat. He states that beyond the serene alpine of Kargil remains the real Ladakh where one could experience the real Tibetan way of life. Though Pillas took Purik (Kargil), one of the three Tehsils of the Dogra’s Ladakh Wazarat, as a separate administrative unit. He continues the making of Shia Muslims as Blati or belonging to Baltistan. He also stresses that the real Ladakh is the one where Buddhism prevails. Such categorical Buddhistization of Ladakh remained common to the colonial state administrators as well as explorers.

As of other oriental exponents of ‘the Land of Lama’, Knight (1893)^{xvii}, states that Ladakh is the country of Buddhists. Even though, topographic characters of Tibetan/Buddhist Ladakh were visible from Drass of Purik, they could only find scratches of their ideal Ladakh soon after reaching Shargole, first village with Buddhist population. Continuing the colonial primacy to Buddhists of Ladakh over their polemical attributions of Muslims of Ladakh, Knight says that children of Buddhist families are less in number, but sedate, healthy, and happy like any ideal Buddhist. This, according to him is the population controlled by polyandry as well as being Buddhist by faith. On the other hand, merry noise making multitude of dirt and, erratic children of ‘Balti’ villages are growing nearly starved because of polygamy practiced by Muslims of the region.

Fredric Drew (1875)^{xviii}, spoke about first settlement of Ladakh, “Dras as one of the valleys of Ladakh. The bounds of Ladakh may be taken differently, according as we consider it politically or from any other point of view. Dras has not the same inhabitants nor the same religion as the central part of Ladakh” (1875: 226). He found the people of Drass belonging to Kashmiri, Dard or Balti races. Until reaching Shargole, the author never mentions the social life of people of Ladakh. It was only mentioned that Shargole was the first Buddhist village with a few Balti Muslims. Hence forth, the author romanticized the Buddhist Ladakh. The author mentions three major groups of people residing in Ladakh; Ladakhi, Champa (Changpa), and Balti. The Buddhist population of Leh and its vicinities are called Ladakhi. Changpas are the nomads of Rupshu and nearby areas. Whereas, Balti settlements were in Chuchot, Drass, Suru, Pashkum, and the Purik region. Having said that, Drew (1975) tries to distinguish the Muslima and Buddhist Ladakhis while noting that “Baltis are that branch of the Tibetan race, who, at one time identical with the Ladakhis, spread farther down the Indus Valley and then became converted

to the Muhammadan faith” (238). Here he makes that Balti were Ladakhi and became Balti with the acceptance of Islam. Other stocks of people in Ladakh were the Khamba, travellers with some settled around the Pangong Lake, and the Dards of Drass and Indus basins converted to Islam or “interpolated between Baltis and the Ladakhis”. The author has mentioned Dards of Drass as Dards. Whereas the Dards of Indus River are called ‘Buddhist Dards Ladakhis’ (1875:244). Another class of people were the Argons, the *half-castes*, born of Ladakhi women and merchants of Kashmir and Turks. There were some *ghulamzadas* or ‘slave born’, emerged because of connections between the Dogra sepoy and Ladakhi Women and they belonged to the government. For him, Baltis, of Baltistan, were good natured, patient and with some humour. But they were not cheerful as Bots (Buddhist Ladakhis). Regarding the possibilities of wide spread of Islam, and making Ladakh a Muslim state, as speculated by Moorcroft & Trebeck (1841) and Thompson (1852)^{xix}, Drew (1875) says that the process of conversion has halted and a perpetual dividing line, south-eastward has emerged. A major reason behind the sustenance of religious boundary was “The countenance and encouragement which the Maharaja has shown and given to the Buddhist religion, as a branch of his own, has been enough to counteract the tendency that there was to Muhammadan conversion” (Drew, 1875:359-360).

Bellew (1875)^{xx}, states that people of Drass were Shia Muslims dressed in a Kashmiri-Bot mixture (1875:101). He was among the firsts to observe the ethnic as well as religious fraternization in Ladakh region which acted as a religious, lingual, cultural frontier between the Tibeto-Buddhist world and the West Asian Islamic peripheries. Reaching Kargil, people here are said to be both Bhot as well as Shia Muslims. Contrast to the previous travellers’ Balti (Muslim) euphemism, Bellew shows that people of the Kargil District was thriving and contented, warmly clad and well nourished (Bellew, 1875:106).

Cunningham (1854, 1998 revised), in the chapters, Government (X) and People (XI) and History (XII) of his acclaimed book^{xxi}, states that, in addition to the Gyalpo (king) of Ladak, there were pretty chiefs, earlier known as gyalpo, in Nubra, Gya, Zaskar, Paskyum, Sot, Suru, and Drass, and the Muslim chiefs were called ‘Cho’ (1854: 258-260). Cunningham exhibits the socio-political and economic relation between the Shia Muslim people and aristocrats with the Rudok, Balti, Yarkand, Kashmir, Lhasa, and other places in its surrounding (1854:261). Cunningham says that by 1850s, the Western part of Ladakh has Islamized and around 1500 Muslims were emigrated to Baltistan and another 15,000 Muslims of Purig were perished during the first invasion of Dogras. He states that the Muslim “chiefs of Paskyum and Soth distinguished themselves by their protracted resistance on the first invasion of Ladak by Zorawar Sin” (1854: 258). Instead of that, Cunningham portrays Ladakh being inhabited by Buddhists, exclusively of a distinct race of *Botis*, who are adherents of Buddhist faith and re distinguished with other great Mongolian race because of their peculiar language (1854: 290).

Within the colonial ‘state projects’, a fixed and unambiguous body of knowledge was produced by means of the bureaucratic as well as academic explorations and researches about the undefined, profane and undetermined localities like Ladakh, based on which the imagination and construction of the senses of identification/differentiation were continued. Such senses of identification/differentiation, having roots in the academic and bureaucratic manufacturing of concrete knowledge, legitimized the claims made on the basis of Ladakhi/Buddhist ‘unique identity’ and its preservation. The colonial production of their senses of imaginations and knowledge productions were used and reused by the native people as the symbols and logos in imagining their ‘unique’ identity.

Though “the history of Islam and Buddhism in the region are interwoven to the extent that one cannot interpret the region as a whole without examining both” (Bray 2013:13)^{xxii}. The academic as well as administrative essentialization of Buddhist identity in defining Ladakhiness abated the Muslims of Ladakh. As Grist (1998)^{xxiii} said, the colonial imagination of the Ladakhi Muslims remained as an external factor which endangered Ladakhiness/Buddhistness of the region. The colonial fantasy with Buddhistness of the region, as we have seen, was a supplement to the marginalization of the Muslim sections of Ladakh. Grist (1998) would say that the marginalized and unidentified Muslims of Ladakh under the Buddhist rulers of Ladakh were further repressed with the Dogra’s ferocity against the dissident Muslims which made the Muslims of Ladakh marginal in pre-partition era.

As the homogenized historicization and essentialization of a particular Ladakhiness resulted othering of the Muslims. The obscurity in identifying Ladakhi Muslims in the colonial as well as post-colonial imaginations about Ladakh resulted the Muslims of Ladakh to perform their Muslimness alongside Ladakhiness of their own (Gupta 2013). The gradual appearance of the Muslims as the Muslims of Ladakh, instead of homogenistic Buddhistization or identifying them as Balti of Baltistan, and the Muslim’s quest of Ladakhiness challenged the established academic Ladakhiness (Nasir 2020)^{xxiv}.

Colonial Prospects of Ladakhi Muslim: Orientalism or Tibeto-Centricity

After the Dogra’s occupation of Ladakh, British colonial interests in the Himalayas and the shifting patterns of its strategic and ethical importance resulted the exploration of the region as a strategic location as well as an ethno-religious alternate to Tibet at a time when Tibet was virtually closed for Western travellers for

over a century (Bishop 1989 p. 85)^{xxv}. During this period, the Western fascinations and fantasies were enlarged for the wilderness and mysterious destination of Tibet and the Tibetan Buddhists. A handful of visitors to the impermissible and inaccessible land further infused fascination of Tibetan Buddhism which was inaccessible to many Western travellers. During this period, Western explorers either visited Ladakh as an alternate Buddhist place to Tibet or would take their way to Tibet through Ladakh (Bishop 1989 p. 85).

Though, colonial differentiation of Ladakhi and non-Ladakhi never coincided with the socio-cultural and historical roots of the region of Ladakh. The acceptance of Tibetan Buddhism as the primary factor through oversimplified parallelization of Ladakh and Tibet obscured the nuanced characteristics principal to the understanding of Ladakhi intricacies. Such discourses of projecting Ladakh as a considerable alternate to Tibet was conceived through the colonial classification of Buddhists and Muslims of Ladakh as Ladakhi and Balti respectively, pertaining the latter's belonging to Baltistan. The colonial construction of Ladakhi discourses produced adequate data and literature featuring Buddhism as primordial and inseparable to the very idea of Ladakh. Against that, the Muslims of Doga regime's Ladakh Wazarat were classified as Balti Muslims on the basis of their religious identities, irrespective of a Muslim belonging to any corner of Ladakh Wazarat (including Baltistan, Kargil and Leh Tehsils). It made the Buddhists as Ladakhi in every aspect of representation and the Muslims of Ladakh remained an additional Balti(stani) people residing in Ladakh.

From being silent about the Muslims of Ladakh and the Muslim ecumene of Kargil within their way to the Buddhist majority areas of Leh and Zaskar to the narration of their stories of Ladakh only after reaching Shargole, a village where the footprints of Buddhist architecture become visible (Ganpat 1929, Knight 1869, Drew 1875) to the reluctant description of a 'dishonest' Muslim others residing in the Western part of Ladakh (Moorcroft and Trebeck vol-I, 1841: 345-46), the production of colonial discourses perhaps emphasised the needful exclusion of the Muslims of the region, or considering Muslims as subsidiary, within their discourses about a Buddhist Ladakh. Throughout the 19th and 20th Century, this modus operandi of pretending Ladakh as a Buddhist-land did not shed any light over the Islamicate Kargil, though Kargil also remained and mentioned as a part of the geobody of Ladakh. However, in identitarian terms, they never mention Muslims as Ladakhi. Instead, they produced a discursive otherization of Ladakhi Muslims, advertently or inadvertently, by officially denoting the Muslims of Ladakh as Balti or belonging to Baltistan in its entirety.

Despite ambivalent inconsistencies in fixation of identities into ethno-religious dichotomies^{xxvi}, the mutation of fuzzy bases of differentiation into fixed grounds of identification through the Western Scholarship became the prima facie accounts for the colonial state projects. The official records and census reports during the colonial period essentialised Buddhist religious identities in dis/identifying Ladakhi while subsiding and blurring the importance of native and contextual senses of identification^{xxvii}. The convenient factor of the colonial state in conceptualizing a religiously dichotomous Ladakh Wazarat with Buddhists being Ladakhi and Muslims being Balti resulted the denomination of Muslims as something other than Ladakhi (Census Report 1931, p. 289).

Other than the production of discourses about a Tibetized Buddhist Ladakh, Western Christian prejudices to the Muslims and Islamic civilizations perhaps remained another factor for the slanderous and otherised representation of Muslims of the Ladakh, as was the case elsewhere (Sunar 2017^{xxviii}). Since Muslim powers remained the closest and longest enemies of the West for most of the time, during the era of Western Colonization, the Christian West had launched papacy led crusaders (Said 1978^{xxix}, Sunar 2017), added "with the deliberate propaganda of the Church to preserve the unity of European society, Muslims were constructed in the European imagination as inhumane creatures, monsters, and cannibals—at best pagans worshipping an idol called Muhammed" (Sunar 2017, p. 37). As a part of the production of orientalist discourses about the orient, stereotyping and stigmatizing of the Muslims remained implicit^{xxx}.

Production of orientalist discourses about Ladakh began with presumption of Ladakh as the *terra incognita*, the unexplored and unrecognized space which was mapped, named, and educated to the natives the way West perceived the Ladakh and Ladakhis. Within their discourses about the exotic and unexplored Himalayan Highland and the unambiguous Buddhistization of the region, legacies and lessons from the orientalist prejudices towards the Muslims contributed to the stereotyping and othering of Muslims from their Buddhistized imageries of Ladakh. Western portrayal of the Highland others as Tibetan and Buddhist became further elucidated when Diseredi in 18th Century termed Baltistan as 'First Little Tibet', Leh as 'Second Little Tibet', and Tibet proper as 'Third Tibet'.

The orientalist prejudices and stereotyping of Muslims and otherization of Muslims within the colonial imageries of a Buddhist Ladakh concurrently accentuated the colonial prejudices pertaining to the otherization of Muslim Ladakhis. In a symbolic way of categorization and otherization, Silva, Wedge & Hamilton (1987, p. 49)^{xxxi}, for instance, narrated that during their early morning travel from Kargil towards Leh, they saw a "a tiny mosque with a golden dome in the darkened fields before we emerged into the sunlight at Mulbekh and saw a Buddhist monastery" and it seemed that they "emerged metaphorically as well as actually out of darkness into light".

Overlooking Muslim Ladakhis perhaps remained an essential component of orientalist discourses about Tibetans and the Ladakhi counterparts. Bishop (1989, p.7), for instance, says that “Tibet was part of the oppositional fantasy between East and West, between Occident and Orient”. The enduring colonial construction of discourses about the Buddhist highland in the High Himalayas were more about Western fantasies about Tibetan Buddhists than about the subjects in literal terms^{xxxii}. However, the oriental prejudices towards the Muslims and Islam also contributed to the slanderous depiction of Ladakhi Muslims, portraying them as subsidiary and their subsequent de-Ladakhization. The Western prejudices towards the Muslims perhaps contributed to the colonial stereotyping of Muslims as an inferior voraciously destitute and dishonest community becoming ineligible for Ladakhiness. For most of the times, the western travellers were guided and assisted by Muslims whom they trusted and hailed. Yet, they, in general, vilified and represented the Muslim community as secondary as part of the oriental project in the Himalayas. Western expeditionists, academicians, bureaucrats, among others further constructed an unambiguous and dichotomous portrayal of people of Ladakh on religious grounds where the Muslims of the region were considered Balti instead of Ladakhi. In the case of official reports also, Gazetteer Report of 1890 (p. 26) for instance mentions in the case of non-Baltistani Muslims of Ladakh that, ‘Muhammadans include the Baltis who... are but Ladakhi converted to Islam (1890: 26).

From discovering the Himalaya’s wondering Jesus in the monastery of Hemis (Leh) to declaring Tsongkhapa, a 14th century reformist monk, as the ‘Luther of Central Asia’, the Western orientation towards the Himalayas remained principally orientalist. Within their construction of Tibet as the ‘storehouse of ancient (Christian) wisdom’ and the ‘last home of occult mysticism’ of Western Christians, the Western scholarship extensively portrayed Buddhist Ladakh as important as Tibet itself (Bishop 1989, p. 182). Within the Western fascinations about Tibet, Ladakh had a crucial importance because of ethnic, cultural, geo-spatial, and religious similarities and the Western “travellers entering from Ladakh would already have experienced an abrupt transition much further west when journeying from Kashmir, and would notice no change when entering Tibet” (Bishop 1989, p. 85). As part of the colonial orientalist orientation of Ladakh, the exclusion of Muslim Ladakhis, or considering them as subsidiary at the least, beginning with Cunningham (1854), remained central to their projection of Ladakh as an alternate to Tibet.

Concluding Remarks

The Colonial perceptions of Ladakh, shaped by the accounts of individual expeditionists, cartographers, bureaucrats, and reporters primarily focused on the Buddhist community and their way of life while projecting the Buddhists as the sole Ladakhi. The politically marginal Muslims of Ladakh were further subjugated under the Dogra rule and they underwent a constant process of misrepresentation or underrepresentation (Drew 1875, Grist 1992^{xxxiii}, 1977, Warikoo 2014^{xxxiv}). For them, the Muslims of Ladakh (including Purik/Kargil and Leh) were the others who were not fitting in their ‘myth of Shangrila’ inhabited exclusively by an ideal and charming Buddhist community. They did not mention the Muslims in their accounts of Ladakh or were assimilated with the Muslims of Baltistan just because of their Muslim identity.

Considering the Scholarships produced by the colonial writers as the primary source of identification and classification, the census reports during the Dogra regime persistently muddled Ladakhi Muslims with that of Baltistan of Ladakh Wazarat. Their construction of a perplexing ethno-religious Balti-Muslim identity classified the Muslims of the region as Balti in religious, ethnic, linguistic, and all other terms of colonial identification. Intricacies surrounding native senses of identification were also demeaned in order to produce a positivist notion of fixed Ladakhi Buddhist and Balti Muslim identity. Within the classification of Muslims, the colonial categorization of caste and tribe agnostic Muslims were unsuccessfully tried to classify on such scales. Addition to this, the bewildering of religious identity of the Muslim community with Balti ethnic identities resulted the submergence of other ethnic, regional, linguistic, and cultural roots of a multicultural Muslim society within the Ladakh Wazarat of the Dogra rule.^{xxxv}

The making of Buddhist as Ladakhi and the Muslims as Balti(stani) impacted the Muslims of Ladakh even after the partition episodes. With the partition episodes, most of the Balti Muslims remained on the other side of the border and the Muslims of Kargil and Leh Tehsils of Ladakh remained a section of underrecognized Ladakhis, irrespective of their demographic equivalence to the Buddhist of the region. Being a part of Muslim majority state of J&K, appearance of Ladakhi Muslims, mostly Shias residing in Kargil district, on the map of political identities in the state further minimised. Within the postcolonial Ladakh, the Buddhist Ladakhi identity continued to reverberate the discourses of identity politics of the region.

The postcolonial pejorative othering of Ladakhi Muslims in the academic scholarship and popular perceptions trace their roots to an aberrant idea of producing an exclusive Buddhist Ladakh in the colonial academic cum missionary discourses. Learning from the colonial inadmissibility of the Muslims in imagining Ladakh, the continuity of confusing religious with ethnic in the postcolonial academia and the Buddhist understanding of their nativity and originality principally estranged Ladakhi Muslims.^{xxxvi} The academic discourses about a monotonous Buddhist Ladakhi identity was instrumentalised to impose social boycott over

the Muslims and raising demands for economic betterment of the Buddhist community (Bertelsen 1996^{xxxvii} van Beek 1996^{xxxviii}). On the other hand, the colonial and postcolonial underrepresentation, relegation and marginalization to the extensive othering of the Muslims of Ladakh as *chipa* (the outsider) by the Buddhists of Ladakh, the Muslim community of the region remains an overlooked group. A major legitimacy for the uniqueness and originality of the Buddhist identity against the others, and the otherisation of Muslims as *chipa* (the others) within contemporary Buddhist colloquial have its roots in the colonial imagination of Ladakhi Buddhists and Muslims with subsequent bewilderment of religious with ethnic identities and making Buddhists as Ladakhi and Muslims as Balti(stani).

ⁱ For Ladakhi Muslim representations against the bifurcation of the state of J&K during 1950s, see J&K Constituent Assembly Debates, see <https://lawandotherthings.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/debate-Part-I-2.pdf> accessed on 25 October 2022

ⁱⁱ [Kargil Observes October 31 as 'Black Day' | NewsClick](#) accessed on 25 October 2022.

[Kargil gets mobile services back after 145-day long internet shutdown \(business-standard.com\)](#) accessed on 21 October 2022.

^{iv} Petech (1977) also says that the Chronicles of the rulers of Ladakh purposefully enshrouded the relations of the Buddhist royal families of Leh and the Muslim rulers in its Western parts.

^v Grist, N. (1995). Muslims in western Ladakh. *The Tibet Journal*, 20(3), 59-70.

^{vi} Van Beek, M. (1995, June). Contested Classifications of People in Ladakh: An Analysis of the Census of Kashmir, 1873–1941. In *Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the Seventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Graz (pp. 35-49).

^{vii} Johnson served as Wazir of Ladakh and he was earlier a British surveyor engaged with the Great Trigonometric Survey of India after whose name the 'Johnson Line' in the Eastern part of Ladakh and Aksai Chin are known till date. See [Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography](#), Vol. 5, No. 5 (May, 1883), pp. 291-293

^{viii} The term pa in Purig/Kargil "is used to denote a collectivity or identification with a collectivity, which can range from the extremely temporary to the more long-lasting." Grist N. (2008: 34)

^{ix} Moorcroft, W., & Trebeck, G. (1841). *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Panjab; in Ladakh and Kashmir; in Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz and Bokhara; from 1819 to 1825* (Vol. 1). Murray.

^x Aynsley, H. G. M. M. (1879). *Our Visit to Hindostán, Kashmir, and Ladakh*. Wm. H. Allen & Company.

^{xi} Duncan, J. E. (1906). *A summer ride through western Tibet*. Smith, Elder & Company.

^{xii} Rockhill, W. W. (1891). *The land of the lamas: notes of a journey through China, Mongolia and Tibet*. Century Company.

^{xiii} Bishop, P. (1989). *The myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, travel writing, and the western creation of sacred landscape*. University of California Press.

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^{xxiii} Grist, N. (1998). *Local Politics in the Suru Valley of Northern India* (Doctoral dissertation, Goldsmiths, University of London).

^{xxiv} Khan, Abdul Nasir. "Portrait of an Indian Freedom Fighter: Munshi Abdul Sattar." *Muslim Communities and Cultures of the Himalayas*. Routledge, 2020. 51-56.

^{xxv} Bishop, P. (1989). *The myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, travel writing, and the western creation of sacred landscape*. University of California Press.

^{xxvi} For discrepancies in the enumeration and classification of Muslims of Ladakh Wazarat, see Census Report of 1921.

^{xxvii} The colonial cartographers did not decipher the contextual applicability of the term *pa* (denoting belonging) ranging from mundane identifications of an instant group to the denotation of a concrete and identifiable label attached to a house, a family and their relatives to a village or a region. Instead, they experimented a simplified base of identification based on religion, and caste or class at times.

^{xxviii} Sunar, L. (2017). The long history of Islam as a collective “other” of the west and the rise of Islamophobia in the US after Trump. *Insight Turkey*, 19(3), 35-52.

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^{xxx} For the Western imagination and othering of a ghostly Muslim other, see Arjana, S. R. (2015). *Muslims in the Western imagination*. Oxford University Press, USA.

^{xxxi} da Silva, John, J. F. N. Wedge, and Charles Hamilton. "The society's tour to Kashmir and Ladakh." (1987): 45-55.

^{xxxii} Bishop (1989) has extensively discussed the Western fantasies about Tibet.

^{xxxiii} Grist, N. (1992, August). The use of obligatory labour for portage in pre-independence Ladakh. In *Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes* (Vol. 1, pp. 264-74).

^{xxxiv} Warikoo, K. (2014). *Himalayan Frontiers Of India: Some Perspectives*. *Indian Research*, 2(2), 80-85.

^{xxxv} Contemporary Muslim Ladakhis consist Balti, Purig, Ladakhi, and Brokpa among other groups.

^{xxxvi} Wahid (1989) has said the colonial production of a Buddhist Ladakhi knowledge as intellectual colonialism and the continuous othering of the Muslims of Ladakh and entangling them in communal tensions are called as the legacies of such intellectual colonialism which produced the bases of othering the Muslims.

^{xxxvii} Bertelsen, K. B. (1996). *Our communalised future: Sustainable development, social identification and politics of representation in Ladakh* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Ethnography and Social Anthropology, Aarhus University).

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