

**Memorandum submitted by Shri Cheewang Rigzin, President
Buddhist Association, Ladakh to the Prime Minister of India on
behalf of the people of Ladakh.**

May 4, 1949

Sir,

On the eve of the grant of responsible Government to the people of Kashmir by the Maharaja, we the Buddhists of Ladakh and adjoining areas presented to him through our representatives in the Praja Sabha, a memorial, a copy of which was submitted to you for your information and consideration. This memorial, which was prompted by our apprehensions for our future, based on our bitter experience of nearly a century and a quarter, embodied the following proposals:

1. That he should govern us directly through legislative and administrative machinery, proposals for which would be submitted by us at his command.
2. That our homeland amalgamated with the Hindu-majority parts of Jammu should form a separate province in which adequate safeguards should be provided for our distinctive rights and interests.
3. That we should be permitted to re-unite politically with Tibet of which land we form part and parcel for all purpose but political.
4. That we should be permitted to join East Punjab.

Proposal (1) originated in our respect for the obligation we owed to the ruler in view of the relation which bound us to him from the day of the conquest of our land by his great grandfather.

Proposal (2) emanated from the fact that we desired to see nothing more of the administrators from Kashmir, who had mostly governed us during the past to our utter ruin, that our Cultural kinship with the Hindus encouraged us to expect a Sympathetic regard for our interests and an assured future in a Hindu-majority province, and finally that historical causes bound us to the people of Jammu and not to those of Kashmir, for it was the Jammu Dogras who conquered Ladakh for Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1834, while Kashmir came into his possession in 1846, twelve years latter.

All things considered, however, proposals No. 1 and 2 were concessions to treaty obligations imposed on us by the Dogra conquest while proposal No. 3 which would come into force on the failure of (1) and (2) was put forward because it is the only panacea for all our ills, the only guarantee for our future progress and development.

No. 4 was a proposal of despair, for though we are in and of Tibet, the political and economic system of that land-our racial and spiritual home-are too archaic, antiquated and unprogressive to suit us. We rather wish that India should exert her wholesome influence in the political and economic fields on her (Tibet) at the present day even as she shaped and moulded her spiritual and cultural life in ancient times.

The Maharajadhiraj has so far vouchsafed to us no reply and we have taken this silence of His Highness to imply the relinquishment by him of his position as a party in respect of proposals (1) and (2), a tacit recognition of our right to choose our path independent of him. We have given most anxious thought to this grave problem and after

mature deliberation arrived at the decision that we should straightway merge with India.

That we have the right to determine our own future apart from other communities and people inhabiting the state and that we cannot be affected by the result of the forthcoming plebiscite in the event of its being favourable to Pakistan is evident from the following facts:

1. We are a separate nation by all the tests-race, language, religion, culture determining nationality. The only link connecting us with the other people of the State being the bond of common ruler. If the Indian National Congress could persuade itself to recognise: the Muslims of India as a separate nation although they had so much in common with the other elements of the Indian population, the Government of India should have no hesitation in recognition what is patent and Scout revertible fact in our case.

2. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah built up his case on the validity of the Treaty of Amritsar. This treaty bears upon the territory of Kashmir only so while the ruler has consented to the transfer of his sovereign power in favour of all his people, S.Mohammad Abdullah and the people of Kashmir can, through this transference manage the affairs of their country as they will. But they have not the power to appropriate against their will a people, a separate nation, whom a separate treaty the result of the war of 1834 twelve years anterior to the treaty of Amritsar-bound to the ruler in a special relationship, in which, the people of Kashmir, who came into the picture later, naturally, did not figure at all.

3. The right of self-determination claimed by us cannot lie claimed with equal force by the people of Baltistan including Skardu the parts of Kargil tehsils predominantly peopled by Muslims, as they are connected by ties of religion with the majority community in Jammu and Kashmir, nor by tile 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 to the majority community of Jammu and Kashmir. It may be added that at the time of the conquest of Ladakh by Zorawar Singh, the entire area comprised under the Tehsils of Leh and Kargil acknowledged the suzerainty of our Raja, while Baltistan had several Rajas of its own.

In case the result of the plebiscite is favourable to India, we simply go a step further than other people of the State in seeking a closer union with that great country and in case it is otherwise, our verdict stands clear and unchallengeable. When we have decided to cut ourselves from the State itself, the question of our forming part of Pakistan cannot arise at all.

We have indeed made up our minds to join India; but what is our decision worth until India is prepared to accept it ? We certainly make the offer for our own advantage; we see in our merger with India the only hope of our salvation. But India, too, will not be loser by this arrangement. The Tehsil of Leh alone covers 23,000 Sq. miles and, if we add to it the other areas predominantly inhabited by Buodhs, viz. Zanskar Bodhkarbo, Mulbek, Fukar, Darcik Garcon, in Kargil Tehsil and Padar in Kishtwar, the total acquisition of territory to India not probably measure less than 33,000 Sq. miles. It is true that the whole of this area is undeveloped and most of it at present barren. But it must also be remembered that its economic potentialities are tremendous and in the hands of a great country like India it is bound

to be transformed into a smiling garden and a source of immense wealth and power. Its strategic and commercial importance too cannot be underrated. The Tehsil of Leh has Tibet and China among its neighbours and the town of Leh is the nerve centre of Central Asian trade.

The British Indian Government took Gilgit on lease from the Maharaja for military reasons for no consideration in return. The Indian Government has already incurred an expense of crores of rupees for the protection of Kashmir, not to speak of the great sacrifice of military personnel which the process has involved. It is clearly impossible for Kashmir to liquidate this colossal debt which is daily growing in magnitude. Would this not be an additional reason for India to take over the Buddhist homelands hereby offered by the Buddhists themselves for its acceptance ? Though our right of self-determination stands intrinsically unassailable, we are willing to be considered as the instrument of redemption of the people of Kashmir, heretofore our fellow citizens, if that purpose can be automatically served by India's acceptance of our offer.

There is nothing in our offer which is in any way incompatible with the high idealism which characterises India's international policy. We might even say in positive terms that it is perfectly consistent with it, for has not India repeatedly declared that it stands for the right of self-determination for all nations and are we not a nation whose right of self-determination it should uphold and to whom it should extend the protection it seeks ?

Tibet is a cultural daughter of India and we of lesser Tibet seek the bosom of that gracious mother to receive more nutriment for growth to our full stature in every way. She has given us that we prize above all other things-our religion and culture and it is the experience of

having been the recipients of such precious gift which encourages us to ask for more. The Asoka wheel on her flag-symbol of goodwill for all humanity and her concern for her cultural children calls us irresistibly. Will the great mother refuse to take to her arms one of her weakest and most forlorn and distressed children a child whom filial love impels to respond to the call?

Sir, the absence of a reply to our references on the subject of our future has depressed us greatly. We beseech you with all earnestness to be so kind as to vouchsafe a line in reply to this our last prayer on the subject.

Before we close, we wish to make it clear that our desire to be absorbed into the body politic of India does not imply any reflection on the present National Government of Kashmir. Far from it, we have no hesitation to say that we have full confidence in the present Prime Minister, S. Mohammad Abdullah. The step we have taken has been dictated solely by the instinct of self-preservation which governs all men and nations alike, as also by the desire to find swiftly deliverance from the misery, squalor and stagnation in which we have been sunk for generations past.