

A Cultural Significance of *Kesar* Saga in Ladakhi Community: A Case Study of Saboo village in Leh.

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ABSTRACT

Oral transmission has been the hallmark of literary tradition in Ladakh. *Kesar* Saga is one of the most popular epics orally transmitted through generations in the region. This literary epic has been the source of inspiration and entertainment for ages for the people of Ladakh as a popular bedtime story, folktale and a cultural narrative it encompasses knowledge structures of Ladakhi traditions. However, like any other literary work, it has been interpreted differently in different sub regions of Ladakh. The style of narration of the *Kesar* epic develops in both prose and poetry and it could last for months. It is popularly believed by the common masses in Ladakh that *Kesar* saga has around eighteen episodes. Through its multi-generational characters, this epic encompasses vast experiences of life, love and hatred, faith and betrayal, trial and triumph, bravery and sacrifice weaved amusingly to capture the imagination of the listeners. Taking the above context in consideration, the paper discusses the epic *Kesar* from a community point of view as to how common masses in Saboo village see to it. This paper takes a case study of Saboo village in Leh and engages with oral testimonies of common masses. These oral testimonies are examined as primary text in the paper which was collected as part of my preliminary field work. The epic being a great source of knowledge and entertainment, the proposed paper brings to light how the *Kesar* epic has influenced the cultural identity of the community in the Saboo village in Ladakh. The paper refers to the concepts of Microhistory and Memory in the works of Ingrid Winther Scobie and Alistair Thomson and illustrates the value of tracing relationship between folk literature and cultural identity of a community from the ordinary perspective.

Keywords: *Kesar*, Ladakh, Tibet, Mongolia, Himalayas.

INTRODUCTION

Ladakh, the cradle of the Himalayas, is rich in its epics, proverbs, dances and songs. Every occasion in every part of Ladakh is celebrated with songs. Regional variations can be found and different songs are associated with all the important occasions from child birth to marriages to deaths. Leh, the capital of Ladakh, is renowned for being the nerve centre of Central Asian trade. People from far and near used to gather here with their merchandise throughout the year and particularly in the summer season, the town would become a focus of cultural and economic exchange. Interestingly, this is reflected in many of the folk songs. Close and distant neighbors are frequently referred to in them and they are abound in beautiful descriptions of Tibet, Baltistan, Kashmir, Lahaul and Spiti valleys of Himachal Pradesh. Such songs could prove very useful in understanding the ties of the old Ladakhi kingdom with its neighboring states. During the cold winter evening's people would gather around their kitchen hearths, often joined by friends, neighbors and relatives as well and tell stories, usually narrated by the older members of the family.

The popularity of the *Kesar* story spreads across a vast region that includes Tibet, Mongolia, Baltistan and Ladakh. There are two to three different versions of the legend of *Kesar*. The versions narrated in Ladakh including Baltistan are more or less similar to the Tibetan version. The legend was so famous and widespread that the story is recounted in each region's local

languages and dialects. The story is based on the birth, and various exploits of the legendary warrior, Kesar. Every Tibetan and Mongolian speaking person claims Kesar as their national hero. The Tibetans even claim that he was a Tibetan king as well as one of the emanations of Tantric master PadmaSambhava. Similarly, the Ladakhis also consider that Kesar was one of the most powerful national and spiritual heroes of the region.

The *Kesar* saga also received attention from the scholars and hence good numbers of books are published containing what we called the Ladakhi version of *Kesar*. In general, we do not find much difference between the narrative styles of *Kesar* saga by Tibetans (the immediate neighbor of the region) as we find the same names to the characters that appear in the *Kesar* saga. Contrary to that, in the Mongolian version or the other alien version, the characters pronounce in their own styles with different pronunciations. Kesar as a heroic personality holds a distinctive identity in Ladakhi cultural society. The people believe Kesar as God as well as protector deity during times of happiness and sorrow.

Much of the ancient history of Ladakh is known only through the mythology of its people and its written history is of a much later origin. It is evident from the fact that the people of Ladakh have grown up hearing the stories from the grandparents or seniors that epitomized the history, society, religion and legends of the past. The *Kesar* epic or Saga being one of them is innately inherited in the tradition of Ladakh which had a great impact on its history, society and culture. I feel pertinent to mention here that the names used by Ladakhi and Baltistan version is *Kesar* and Tibetan is Gesar, then in the Buryat/Mongolian version its Gesser or Gesser Khan. The spelling adopted by me here in the paper is *Kesar*. It has shaped the collective thinking of the people thereby paving the way into the cultural realm of the society. The tradition of storytelling varies all over the world, but if we look deep into it, we find many things in common. One particular thing I see is that, the epic storytelling synonymous with the songs, chants, music, poetry and through dance too. The popularity of the epic still resonates today in the Ladakhi society in the form of various cultural practices and traces. The cultural significance of such a long surviving epic cannot be overemphasized.

HYPOTHESIS

The epic *Kesar* which is traditionally woven into the community of Ladakh is a reality not a myth.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the proposed research on *Kesar* is to evaluate how the story of the legendary king remains the main source of entertainment for the Ladakhi community as well as to value the aesthetic, literary, traditional and cultural heritage of the people, who for many centuries remained cut off from the rest of the world.

My research work focuses on the role of the epic of *Kesar* in reframing the social structure of the region, which had remained an exclusively distinct mountain culture, which is not found in the plains of our country except in the trans-Himalayan or central Asian countries. Since the subject itself is very comprehensive having connection with certain myths, no detailed clue has been found about the origin of the story so far. Thus, the proposed research work is aimed at establishing the fact that whether the epic is mythical or reality based. Lastly, the proposed research will focus on the study and analysis of the *Kesar* epic which is the most known

and widespread one in Ladakh, mostly in its oral form. It attempts to preserve the intangible heritage of Ladakh in the form of old age practice of storytelling by recording and documenting it.

METHODOLOGY

My research methodology is mainly derived from oral history and cultural studies. I collected various personal interviews from the common masses in Saboo village in Leh. This includes elderly monks, story tellers, students who have grown up listening to the stories. I have also spoken to scholars who have in one or the other way dealt with *Kesar* in their works. A thorough questionnaire was prepared based on my literature review. As Linda Shopes in her article 'Community oral history: where we have been, where we are going' mentions "we hoped that the stories that people told could help cultivate community identity and pride that could, in turn, support activism and change. And throughout, we aimed to actively engage neighborhood ownership of the project". In the same article, Alessandro Portelli has remarked "astutely that there's 'gonna always be a line in oral history, meaning that we always interview across lines of difference. It is precisely because of these differences that shape the dialogue at the heart of oral history".

The questions that were asked to the interviewees on cultural significance of *Kesar*, of their own experiences on *Kesar*, what is the significance of *Kesar* in their life, how *Kesar* flourished in Ladakh, what is the influence of epic *Kesar* on religion, culture, individual and community. The questions were also primarily based on people's own experiences of listening to stories or cultural significance of this story in Ladakh.

My paper looks at the works in the fields of Oral History, Cultural and Memory Studies. It employs the concepts of 'Microhistory and Cultural studies' to analyze the oral testimonies of the local people in Saboo Village that I have collected. The Oral history existed long before the written history has emerged into the academic scenario. When the written literature was not available, oral history played a very important role to educate the people about the human history. Oral history provides one of the important methods to record information that otherwise gets neglected. As Ingrid Winther Scobie pointed in the article 'Family and Community History through Oral History' that "oral history is not new. Indeed, it is older than written history. But with the exception of the federal writer's project during the 1930's, the idea of taping and structuring people's memories did not receive substantial organized support until 1948 when the well-known historian Allan Nevins from Columbia University founded the Oral History Project". Oral history draws upon the theory of Memory also as in the article 'The Memory and History Debates: Some International Perspectives' by Alistair Thomson, Michael Frish and Paula Hamilton. In the article, Michael Frish points out that "Collective Memory has entered into historical studies in many ways and forms". In this context, oral histories have taken a front position in the innovative studies in the society. Coming to Paula Hamilton, who says that "in more recent years, I have found the scholarly shift to studies of memory and history exciting, where oral history becomes one constituent of collective expression".

The research will be studied from the perspectives of Carlo Ginzburg's Theory of Microhistory or histories that look at individual or small community. It also looks at the documents related to that individual or community or inquisition document. While looking into these aspects, it tries to

piece together a cultural history based on what we know about the particular individual or community. The micro historical approach creates a focal point as suggested by Istvan Szijarto in his article "Four arguments of microhistory".

A Mexican scholar Luis Gonzalez "inserted the word *microhistory* into the subtitle of a monograph. The book investigates, within the span of four centuries, the transformation experienced by "forgotten" village. But the minute the dimensions are redeemed by its representative characteristics. Besides the fact that Gonzalez was born and lived there, this is the element that justifies the choice of San Jose de Gracia over a thousand other villages just like it". What I draw from the above lines is the microhistory is related with the local history and culture written from the broad perspective.

Secondly, the theory of Cultural Studies as reflected by Indira Chowdhury has been explored and used in research paper to explore the epic *Kesar*. Indira Chowdhury says, "As a part of the nationalist project, oral traditions were generally seen as part of a rich cultural heritage in need of preservation which led to a "folklorisation" of culture, but oral traditions were rarely seen as resources for historical understanding". Indira Chowdhury raises questions about the relationship between subjectivity and history particularly the role memory plays in understanding what historical events mean to human subjects who experience them. The article also helps us in understanding the relationship between history and memory. It demonstrates the ways in which oral tradition and oral history may converge and map out a distinct relationship between experience and memory and points out towards a different understanding of events and their interpretation.

CENTRAL ANALYSIS

On the basis of oral history from different sources, the study of *Kesar* is undertaken through the interviews from five different individuals (three male and two female) whose different perspectives are analyzed in the paper. The epic story is engrained in the blood of the people so everyone in this part of the region knows about it since childhood through their parents, grandparents, storytellers, elderly people and scholars etc. And the local All India Radio, Leh also transmits these stories. The familiarity of the *Kesar* epic with the people is appreciable as all of them are familiar with the epic. People have different perspectives regarding whether it's a myth or reality. Both exist according to the people whom I have interviewed. I have made four sub-headings to familiarize the readers as to how the interviewees talk about the *Kesar* saga.

A. Tracing history of *Kesar* epic in Ladakh: oral testimonies.

Venerable Thupstan Paldan is a senior Buddhist monk. He is 78 years Old. He was a government teacher. After that he worked in the Jammu and Kashmir academy of art Cultural and languages as an Assistant Editor. He is a writer and has written several books in Ladakhi language. He retired from government service in the year 2002. He lives in Saboo village. He is also a well respected and known scholar in Ladakh region and his contribution in the field of Buddhist literature are immense. He says, "*Kesar* epic is very old and it has been a tradition of narrating the story since ancient times. But to know the origin of *Kesar* in Ladakh, it is bit unclear and one cannot point a definite point of period". 78 year old monk also says that the epic story could have reached Leh from Tibet and neighboring countries as in the olden days, people from Ladakh used

to visit Tibet for trade and other purposes and thus, the story might have been transmitted from one region/state to other. Ven Thupstan Paldan also said, "Entire story can be narrated only by certain wise and intelligent ones and not by all. The common people as they may narrate incomplete stories".

The narration of epic story *Kesar* seems to have begun from lower Ladakh called sham region, because it was learnt that the tradition of narrating the story was there in a village called Wanla, 120 km away from Leh city. Chiktan village again 180 km away from Leh and then even in Changthang (Eastern part of Ladakh), traditions of narrating these stories originates from there. He also mentions in the interview that in Ladakh region "there are different types of folk songs being sung on different occasions and particular songs are associated with *Kesar*. All the 'Ginglu' are songs of *Kesar*. *Kesar* story being large was believed to be an important epic which is narrated in Ladakh region till date".

Ven Thupstan Paldan tells us that "*Kesar* runs in 18 chapters but details seem lacking". The epic *Kesar* is a well known and popular in Ladakh, Tibet, Skardo, Gilgit, Mongolia and Baltistan.

Mrs. Yangchan Dolma is a 68 years old woman and studied up to 8th standard. She is married and has two sons. She is an Amchi (traditional medicine practitioner) by profession and being a local doctor; she studies the old literatures and prescribes medicine to the people. So, she has a sound knowledge about the oral literature such as *Kesar*. She stays, in Saboo village with his son, her husband passed away long back. She lives in the upper area of the Saboo village. She says "perhaps its old one as it seems to be a descendent of kings as it is popular too". She further tells me "when she was young she remembers the narration of stories of Gyalam *Kesar* which lasted more than 18-20 days. In Saboo village, there was an old man belongs to Tongspoon family who used to narrate the epic *Kesar*, throughout the night till morning".

I found out that now the traditions of narrating the epic *Kesar* is fast declining and it's time to promote this very important piece of Literature of this small region. Oral history is considered to be the lifeline which bridges the gap between genealogical study and the historical study.

The Ladakh region itself is a cold place which prevails for a good duration of time in the winter season. One of the sources of entertainment and to keep the people busy is the *Kesar* epic.

Mrs. Tsering Yangchan is 76 years old women, married and has 5 children. She Studied up to 5th standard. She is a farmer and cultivates variety of crops. She lives in Saboo village with her family. Her husband was a government teacher who passed away few years back. I know her since my childhood days. When I asked her about the *Kesar* epic, She told me, "very old and the oldest story". She told me, "I heard it from my aunts who use to tell us the story day and night". She also explains that "*Kesar* story is real. In those days, he used to subdue the demons". She believes that *Kesar* is associated with several places and mountains in Nubra valley where she has spent her childhood days. There are ruined houses which are still there and people believed it belongs to *Kesar*. *Kesar* epic that she elaborates in her interview is different version of it. According to her, in lower part of Ladakh called (sham), they tell the story differently.

There are many stories in Ladakh region but people generally prefer *Kesar* story. All the people in this part could relate to this story the most. The story makes the narrator as well as the listener cry and laugh at the same point of time. The woman also say that all the villagers would gather at a

particular spot in Saboo village and the elderly person would narrate the epic *Kesar* through their little knowledge and make us participate in the drama too. She further says, “Nowadays, there are very few story tellers exist ending with a sigh. All are busy in their work. Nobody has time now”.

Dr Thupstan Norboo did his PhD from Department of Buddhist studies, University Of Jammu. He is 41 years old, married and lives with his family in Choglamsar village which is just 5 km away from Saboo village and presently working in the Department of Cultural Academy UT Ladakh as Editor. He is well versed with the Ladakhi literatures both oral as well as written. He responded saying that “*Kesar* story since there is a connection between Ladakh and Tibet we can also say that the tradition of narrating this *Kesar* epic must have been borrowed from Tibet”. He said “there are many accounts regarding this *Kesar* saga. Many scholars and researchers believe that it is an imaginary story”. To trace the origin of *Kesar* story Dr Thupstan Norboo says “it is difficult to trace out the origin of *Kesar* because its exact date and origin is shared in obscurity”. There are different accounts of *Kesar* as many scholars have given different version to it like Ladakhi version, Tibetan version even Bhutanese Version, all of them have their own version and even in Mongolia and some other foreign countries have different versions too.

Dr Thupstan Norboo said “ location wise is also difficult to trace out but generally the Tibetans they believe that they give certain name called Ling, Lingyul, maybe some areas of Tibet , but where Lingyul presently exist is again difficult to trace because name of the place has been changing that’s why it is hard to trace where this Ling exist”. Dr Thupstan Norboo points out that a great scholar of Tibet who is called Dukpa Kunzang Stobgyal; he is a great writer on the Tibetan epic of *Kesar*. He has written 31 different volumes of *Kesar* and he points out the period of *Kesar* as 11th century”.

Since there is a long relation between Tibet and Ladakh as these region falls under the central Asia, so I suppose the tradition of narrating this epic story could have been passed down from Tibet. Dr Thupstan Norboo said that “Buddhism in this present day, we have Buddhism from India and later on at the end of 12th century Buddhism totally disappeared from mainland India and Ladakh has to look back to Tibet for spiritual aspiration, so in this case lot of Ladakhi students went to Tibet for higher studies and it is also possible from Tibet that we got this tradition of narrating stories to our students”. Dr Thupstan Norboo also mentions that “he heard that there are some families in the Gya village (Ladakh), Gyapacho (name of the house) who was the chieftain before Ladakh was being ruled by the Tibetan kings or the dynasties of kings”. Ladakh was an independent kingdom being ruled by two different chieftains, from upper Ladakh and lower Ladakh. In the upper Ladakh Gyapa cho who was the main ruler the chieftain and lower Ladakh chopa from Wanla village, who was the chieftain from lower Ladakh. So in the above context what the scholars in Ladakh say is that the descendent of Gyapa cho is believed to be the descendent of *Kesar*.

Dr Thupstan Norboo elaborates and tells that a famous saying is there in Ladakhi “Yulha Nawa Gya (the first village to settle in Ladakh is Gya village) and “Khar La Nawa Khaltsi (means the palace was built in Khaltsi for the first time), so it is believed to be the first castle in Ladakh”. It sums up that by the above saying that around 11th century or 9th century, the *Kesar* lineage used to live and reside in Gya village and in that case Gya village could be the first village of the *Kesar*. Everywhere, *Kesar* is remembered as a hero. From the Buddhist perspective, he is said to

miraculously taken birth in the form of powerful hero to help and save the poor beings of Ladakh and Tibet from certain demons which were ruling these places.

Mr. Nawang Tsering Shakspo is 70 years old. He is married and has four daughters. He lives in Saboo village with his family. He is a renowned scholar in the Ladakh region. He is a writer and wrote several books in English and Hindi. Formerly, he was the head of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art Cultural and Language and retired in the year 2010. He has opened a centre for research on Ladakh in the year 2010 which is doing very well. The centre is situated in Saboo village. Mr Nawang Tsering Shakspo Says that “The flourishing of this *Kesar* story in Ladakh is due to the fact that culturally, Ladakh has bond with Tibet, we had sort of many relationships like trade relation and also herders they move with animals, and culturally, we are similar to the Tibetans, that both Tibetan including Mongolia we are practitioners of Mahayana form of Buddhism. So Mahayana form of Buddhism became very strong and took the strong route in this region as early as 8th century when Ladakhis had trade and culture relations with Tibet”.

Mr Nawang Tsering Shakspo further elaborates that “the ordinary people of Ladakh region say that *Kesar* was born in Ladakh”. But regarding this statement we don’t find any clue that he was born in this part of Himalaya. But this story of epic *Kesar* has been entertaining the people of Ladakh, so people feel that he was a Ladakhi and it’s a Ladakhi story if we go as per researchers. Mr Nawang Tsering Shakspo tells us that “there are certain evidences that speak of *Kesar* visiting Ladakh. Like in the remote area now falls on India-China border somewhere close to Siachen border we find masses of pebbles at one spot and people believe that *Kesar* used these particular types of pebbles as his weapon. There are certain caves and people believed *Kesar* resided there”.

I feel that if you look deep into all this evidences, it’s very interesting how people have connected *Kesar* with places and things in Ladakh region. Not only the Buddhist population that believe and narrate the *Kesar* epic but even the Muslim population too narrate and respect the *Kesar* epic. Till recent times and still in the Ladakh region, the main entertaining story in the winter season is the epic story of *Kesar*. Of course there are other stories too but *Kesar* epic is on top of the list of all the listeners as it has mixed emotions filled with love, hatred, sadness, bravery. And it also has a moral story. Mr Nawang Tsering Shakspo says “Since a decade onwards Ladakh has changed completely. We have now all sorts of facilities, modern facilities like what we have in the other parts of the country for entertainment, so therefore, I think this now has taken a different trend”. As we say lower Ladakh version and upper Ladakh version, what exactly this means is that lower Ladakh also means places low in an altitude compared to the other, which is called upper Ladakh. The lower Ladakh we call it sham region and the upper Ladakh we call it Changthang region. So, in the sham region, we find people more influence from the stories which are popular in Baltistan area and in the Changthang region the upper version maybe more influenced by the Tibetan Tradition and the themes are related to Tibet.

So, whether it’s a upper version or the lower version, today people are still connected with this *Kesar* epic but what the researchers observe is that children coming from rural areas they are much familiar with this epic and they possess more knowledge compare to the children residing in the urban areas. There is also an interesting story related to the birth of *Kesar*, how he was born, his marriage then defeating the evils of this region. The story has also many interesting chapters.

B. Impact of *Kesar* on Ladakhi culture.

Kesar epic has impacted the Ladakhi culture in many ways. When I was taking the oral testimonies of the people they said that tradition, culture and day to day way of life are much influenced by the regional stories specially the *Kesar* epic.

Ven.Thupstan Paldan in his interview said that “In Ladakh we have different kind of folk songs being sung on occasions like marriage, we find many songs associated with *Kesar*. The songs called *Ginglu* are songs of *Kesar*”. It is also interesting to note that the person who knows the story of *Kesar* could also sing these songs and later these songs have become folk songs.

Similarly, when I asked about its impact to 76 year old Mrs. Tsering Yangchan, she said “Yes it has and now-a-days our scholars are bringing out the impact in our folk songs, which clearly brings the account of *Kesar*. She also feels the same like others that there are folk songs and dance associated with *Kesar*”. Dr Thupstan Norboo enthusiastically tells us that “of course yes, since it has become part of our culture, so we should preserve it”. In Ladakh, he elaborates further that “there are lot of folksongs in praise of *Kesar*”. Ladakhi songs can be divided into different categories like like marriage songs, sarcastic songs, and heroic songs which are called *Ginglu*’s. So most of the *Ginglu*’s are in praise of the kings and also exclusively related to the bravery and the king’s heroic deeds .also the people of Ladakh also consider *Kesar* as the king so it also implies to *Kesar* too. In the folk dances there is a tradition of dancing and one particular dance is called the *Kesar* dance (*Spawo* Dance) or heroic dance, in this the artist they assume themselves as *Kesar* and dress up in the costumes of *Kesar* and perform the dance and even today we can see that.

Mr Nawang Tsering Shakspo in his interview tells us that “This *Kesar* epic has been part of Ladakhi tradition and culture and story about valor and sometime you know *Kesar* is also prayed as a God by Ladakhis. He is considered as a protector deity”. In Buddhist religion, we find many protector deities and among one of them people address as *Kesar*. Further, Mr Nawang Tsering Shakspo also states that “people also consider him as emanation or incarnation of Guru Padmasambhava (Tantric Master)”. And he also said “There is a big impact of *Kesar*’s bravery on Ladakhi culture and way of life, every social activity”. In fact the bravery and deeds of *Kesar* dominate the Ladakhi social, cultural and religious activities. Religion wise he is considered as God”. Mr Shakspo interestingly also is of the opinion that the “Muslim community of Ladakh region also thinks in the same way”. In the past, Muslim and Buddhist, they lived like a family and shared similar cultural traditions. So, there was not much distinction kept between the two. Mr. Nawang Tsering Shakspo says in earlier days “there was a custom in the villages that to kill the animals in their own style known as *jhatka* and *halal* but later while cooking they use the same pot”.

What I find now is that the impact of *Kesar* on the new generation is that the youth hardly takes interest in this epic which has given root to the Ladakhi tradition. One can say that it’s taking the form of dying tradition. As a researcher, I urge the readers and the scholars to help preserve this precious epic.

Dr Thupstan Norboo said “In the Ladakhi folk songs, there is lot of songs particularly sung in praise of *Kesar*. Ladakhi folk songs are divided into different categories. There are marriage songs, sarcastic songs, heroic songs which are called *Ginglu*’s (songs on *Kesar*). So most of the *Ginglu*’s

are in praise of the kings and includes Kesar too. There are folk dances too and one particular is called Kesar dance (spawo dance) or heroic/warrior dance. In this dance the artist they assume themselves as Kesar and perform it”.

C. Best time to narrate the epic story in the community.

As Ladakh is a cold place. The winter is climatically very cold and harsh. In winter, people have leisure time as we don't have much work outside, so the people mostly stay inside and do their work. So the older people in the family often narrate the story of *Kesar* in winter season. They don't prefer to narrate the *Kesar* epic in summer.

Ven Thupstan Paldan: says “in Ladakh, these stories are narrated in winter as people remain busy in farming and watering the fields in summer. So, people have leisure in winter with no more works”. He also says that “when the travelers they travel to far off places like the eastern part of Ladakh for trade related work which lasts for a good number of days, so to pass the time the epic *Kesar* was narrated in detail”. Though there is no hard and fast rule as to who will narrate the epic it can be either male or female.

Similarly Mrs.Tsering Yangchan says, “It cannot be narrated in summer except from 10-11th Tibetan month of winter. It is said that it cannot be told beyond the above months”. The epic *Kesar* is strictly not narrated in summer months and everyone in this region knows about when to narrate this epic. Mrs Tsering Yangchan says that she has only seen female narrating this epic”.

Mrs. Yangchan Dolma: “Mostly it is narrated in winter for whatever reason. Though in winter one gets lot of leisure time”. She further tells us that some grandparents were very enthusiastic to tell the story of *Kesar*, but then in her case, both male and female were there to narrate this epic story”. She says, “We had some female friend from Stok village, whose mother used to narrate the story very interestingly with rhythm and songs”.

Dr Thupstan Norboo says, “In terms of Ladakh, we can say winter is the story telling season. In winter, we have leisure time and also climatically harsh, so, no agricultural work, no field works outside, that's why people get lot of time and keep listening to these stories”. In his case, female were the narrators. He says, “I have heard most of the females like my grandmother and mother they use to narrate stories to their children”.

Mr. Nawang Tsering Shaksपो opines, “There is specific time for *Kesar* story to narrate. People say before the sowing time, they consider it to always narrate before the sowing season. So, winter has long nights and environmentally very quiet, especially children they don't sleep early, so to entertain them and to stay warm, the elders would narrate stories to them including Kesar saga and also in winter not much work to be done”. In his case, both male and female were the epic story narrators. The tradition of narrating the epic *Kesar* is an old practice and it is narrated in the winter season as most of the people don't have much work to do in winter. The winter is harsh in this part of the world. So, mostly people stay indoors and one of the entertaining sources is to narrate and listen to this epic *Kesar*, which lasts for a long time. Both male and female can narrate the epic *Kesar*.

D. Religious Relevance of *Kesar*:

In Ladakh, we have both Buddhist as well as Muslim followers. So, the Buddhist people have a strong inclination to the *Kesar* epic and people relate to this epic very well. Even the Muslim community in the region also knows the *Kesar* epic. So, according to the people, I have interviewed, they are well versed with the epic.

Mrs. Yangchan Dolma explains that “*Kesar* is assumed as Dharma Raja”.

Mrs. Tsering Yangchan: “*Kesar* displayed magical powers obscuring his appearances. In reality, he appears as present day Avaloketeshwara. He is holding a moon on his right shoulder and sun on his left besides holding spears and wearing head and many more. He has power to obscure his appearances through *ribshing*”. (Word used by lay people to indicate the supernatural barrier used by demons).

Nawang Tsering Shaksपो: “*Kesar* epic has been part of Ladakhi tradition, culture and story of valor. Sometimes *Kesar* is also prayed as God by the Ladakhis. In Buddhism we have protector deities and *Kesar* is considered to be one of the protector deities. Some people also consider him as emanation or incarnation Gurupadmasambhava” (Is a person to whom the followers of Mahayana form of Buddhism (Tibetan Buddhism) prays as second Buddha).

Dr Thupstan Norboo says “from Buddhist perspective *Kesar* is believed to be the reincarnation of Guru Rimpoche who is the father of Tantra in Tibet. He appeared in the 8th century”.

My findings on *Kesar* saga say that *Kesar* saga is both mythical and real. This story as a myth has not emerged in particular period and the enthusiasts went on adding more and more into the story. I am able to sum up that *Kesar* saga took firm root in the Himalayan region like Ladakh, Tibet and Bhutan etc. with the visit of Guru Padmasambhava in the 8th century. Needless to mention that the followers of Mahayana form of Buddhism, the religion to which alternatively address as Tibetan Buddhism taken as universal religion in the Himalayan region where a tradition say that the area where demons had upper hand and only to subdue them the king of Tibet, Trisong Dechan invited Guru Padmasambhava to Tibet. Hence, it is popularly found address based on eighteen episodes where the incidents are taking place in different realms of the universe. If we address the story as real occurrences on that point, we have to accept this whole incident took place in Kham province in Tibet where exist a palace called Linkhar which was presidential palace of king *Kesar* .

CONCLUSION

Oral stories have their own significance for researchers to document human culture of the bygone times. The research work have touched upon *Kesar*'s story in context of socio-cultural history of Ladakh, the region which had a status of a kingdom till the subjugation of the region by Zorawar Singh, an able general of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu in the year 1934. Interestingly, the subject remained more an oral history than a written article. Therefore, for a researcher, there seems a lot of scope as the same has not received serious attention from the scholars or anthropologists as a study field for the future posterity. This paper is maiden attempt to familiarize the readers with the literatures produced in regional languages but discussed in English language. The oral testimonies can enormously enhance the culture studies of the region

and the interview plays a vital role in documenting the history. Oral testimony unlike written records creates a very important bond between the interviewer and the interviewee.

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