

Childhood in Motion:

*How Modern Education and Technology are Changing Traditional
Family Structure in Ladakh, India*

An Honors Thesis for the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development

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Introduction

“‘The Roof of the World’ is certainly an appropriate nickname for the Himalayas.” So began my sister’s very first research paper. She was in fifth grade; I was in second. I recall reveling in the elegance of that sentence, marveling at its sophistication and complexity and power. But my interest in this paper was not limited to the quality of its writing, though I still maintain that it was remarkable for an 11-year-old. It was the subject of the research that I found most compelling. The paper’s focus was on the Himalayan mountain range and the cultural consequences that such a geological extreme implies. Perhaps my interest in Nepal, Tibet, and Northeastern India began as the kind of infatuation common to little girls who admire and imitate the things that their older sisters are doing. Remarkably, the research and paper I would complete, over fifteen years later, deals with the two main issues I’ve mentioned here: Himalayan, or specifically, Ladakhi culture and childhood.

The topic of this paper has, at its center, the children and youth of Ladakh, India. I am interested in how traditional views and constructions of childhood and young adulthood in the wider context of the Ladakhi family have shifted since the 1960s, when the Indian military first established a permanent place in the Ladakhi landscape and the government opened the region to foreign tourists. It was at this time that the process of “modernization,” as defined by the anthropologists and environmentalists that study this region, began.

I stayed for roughly five weeks in Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh in the summer of 2008. In that time, I was acutely aware of my physical surroundings. The land was quite unlike anywhere I had been. It took nearly two weeks to drive to Ladakh from

Delhi. In that time, I slept in barren valleys strewn with glacial boulders, sipped *masala* chai in broken buildings by snowy mountain passes on the world's highest motorable roads, and finally learned the streets of the administrative and commercial center of the region, Leh, a town full of desert dust and bustle.

It was easy to be awed by and interested in the landscape. Interaction with the landscape felt natural. The people, however, were more difficult to communicate with. I learned basic Hindi in the two months I spent in India. But most people in Ladakh speak Ladakhi—a dialect of Tibetan. In Leh, English is widely known. The population of Leh, however, is quite international, particularly in the summer. Thus, many of the people with whom I communicated most were foreign as well.

Leh is extremely diverse in comparison to the rural areas surrounding it. Merchants and carpet sellers from Kashmir set up elegant shops. Nepali businessmen and laborers sell goods, serve meals, and work the fields. Tibetan refugees haggle with tourists in outdoor markets over heavy silver bracelets, earrings, and necklaces studded with Pakistani coral and turquoise. Migrant workers from peninsular India work on the roads, in hotels, and in the vegetable markets and bazaars. Leh in the summertime also hosts a large number of tourists, mainly from peninsular India, Israel, Germany, France, the U.K. and the U.S.

I met many Ladakhi people in the process of traveling, however, and also stayed with two Ladakhi families in villages outside Leh. I met and became friends with young women in their 20s, women with whom I actually found I had much in common. The older generation proved extremely hospitable and generous, though my verbal communication with them was limited by a language barrier. I found that children in this

part of India were something of an enigma. Sometimes I saw them standing or walking in small groups by the roadside. They were usually in school uniform; the boys whooping or smiling with their hands in their pockets and the girls waving their *dupattas* (scarves) as the jeeps rolled past.

In Ladakh, I encountered few children in the streets in the towns or working on the roads. Unlike in other parts of India, I found few opportunities to speak with young beggars on the street, because beggars (and streets, for that matter) are few. The children I encountered in Ladakh were energetic. They were generally too lively to loiter. Whether they wore the maroon monks' robes, the color-coordinated school uniforms, or the polyester and denim costumes that have recently come into fashion (and become perhaps the most affordable option), children in Ladakh were largely active; kept busy by play, household chores, school, or transportation between these activities.

I encountered children in the homes in which I stayed for part of my time in Ladakh. But their presence lacked the consistency of their elders—mainly because they spent much of the day at school. I left Ladakh feeling unsatisfied with my understanding of what it might feel like to be a child in Ladakh. I visited schools as well, in an attempt to understand this other facet of the experience of the Ladakhi youth and left feeling equally uninformed. Looking back on it now, I realize that children in Ladakh and, presumably, in many parts of the rapidly changing developing world, must work hard to function, learn and thrive in more than one setting. They have not one culture to lay claim to, but many. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that the child must make a series of transitions every day— from school to home, from television watching to *thupka*

(noodle) preparation, from cricket playing to garden tending—in order to function, learn, and thrive in these multiple environments.

Since returning to the U.S., I have done a good deal of research. I have found valid sources of information, both in books and journal articles. Ladakh, despite its relative isolation, is surprisingly popular with researchers and scholars—mainly in the areas of geology and ecology. Anthropologists and art historians also have a fairly strong presence in the region. But I have not found a researcher that has focused his or her study on childhood in Ladakh. Instead, I have read about a number of topics that relate closely to childhood, but do not approach the subject as the primary focus. Many articles address general family dynamics and the role of women in Ladakhi culture, in the contexts of polyandry, division of labor, and, more recently, feminism. I have also found information on the characteristics of the close-knit and interdependent village community, and the effects of such a social set-up on the individual. Furthermore, I have sought to relate the well-documented reactions to the institution of a standardized western-style education system in Ladakh. I have, thus, pieced together information that lies at the periphery of the subject, without ever locating significant sources that address the social construction of Ladakhi childhood—past or present—head-on. I hope to effectively weave my findings together, in an attempt to explore and explain the child's increasingly varied environment in order to better understand the child himself.

The main issue in Ladakh these days is modernization, and most articles and books I have read look at Ladakh through the lens of modernization and change. The speed of modernization is surprising, considering Ladakh's remote location and severe climate. Yet the changes are real and relevant. It is not difficult to see why so many

researchers have deemed it appropriate and timely to use this particular theme as a backdrop to their major points. Environmentalists and anthropologists alike have expressed concern over the natural and cultural degradation that began in the region 35 years ago. In recent years, the situation has escalated. Trash is everywhere. Discarded empty bags of Lay's potato chips, wrappers from Kit-Kat bars, and tall, cylindrical water bottles clog streambeds once kept effortlessly pristine for irrigation. Prayer flags strung on roofs compete for space with satellite dishes and television antennae. Flush toilets have been installed in homes and hotels that lack septic tanks. English-medium schools and peninsular Indian popular culture have created a rift between the young and old. Modernization and education, according to some, have made the Ladakhi youth unaware of aspects of their own culture. They are outsiders in their own families.

To say that the changes taking place in Ladakh today are mercilessly destroying a culture and a people is somewhat of an exaggeration. Despite the negative results that many associate with modernization, some of the changes that can be observed in Ladakh actually make sense and, in fact, may actually function to improve the quality of life in the region. Although such a viewpoint may be unpopular with some western scholars, as it brings into question such issues as authenticity, sustainability and traditional lifestyles, it is a valid one to examine.

Basic improvements in trade, transportation, and infrastructure have occurred as a result of the push to modernize Ladakh. Examples abound. The introduction of rice into the Ladakhi diet is seen by some as being culturally corrosive (Wiley, 2002, p. 1095). Yet the low expense and high calorie-content of the food has sustained many families during years in which crop yields are low. The introduction of solar heating systems has

increased the comfort level affordably and sustainably in the Ladakhi household throughout the frigid winter months. And even the influx of popular culture—Bollywood movies, Hindi music videos, and the like—speak to a general attempt to create and nurture a sense of pan-Indian identity and pride that extends over the great Himalayan range and into the Jammu and Kashmir State, of which Ladakh is a part.

Other aspects of this new-fangled “modernity” are more puzzling and more destructive. Ladakhis are historically self-sufficient. The introduction of a cash economy has changed this. Ladakh is now part of a much larger economic system, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but does imply dependency on foreign markets, and on foreign people.

Because of the delicate ecology of their mountain habitat, Ladakhis have become great manipulators of land and water over the centuries, and they treat the resources they have with the utmost respect. The very concept of waste is an alien one to Ladakhis, and they were in no way prepared for the inevitable introduction of foreign-made goods that often follow the institutions of a cash economy and a lucrative tourist industry. Ladakh is now faced with a number of new issues. What can be done with the chocolate bar wrapper once the chocolate has been consumed? What can be done with the rubber car tire once the tire has become broken and unusable? What can be done with the irrigation water, contaminated by chemical fertilizers and pesticides, once it has entered the network of glacial streams? The introduction of packaged convenience foods and expendable or even dangerous technologies disrupts the systems that have taken centuries to establish and refine. Perhaps most tragic is the apparent loss of pride in the Ladakhi

identity and experience, and the consequent shift to feelings of admiration for the wealthy west, and shame for all the things Ladakh lacks.

Modernization is a more pressing issue for the children and youth of Ladakh than for the more advanced generations. The young are exposed to two worlds: the one their parents and grandparents live in, and the one they see glorified in the classroom and on the television screen. Children are essentially asked to make a choice between these two worlds—between tradition and modernity. Somehow, the youth of Ladakh have approached this ultimatum with grace and care. Ladakh’s young seem to accept and even enjoy the cultural incongruities they experience daily. I once observed school children chatting in English about Hindi television shows as they walked uphill to school, adjusting their route in order to circumambulate a *stupa*. I saw uniformed little girls in a tiled ice cream parlor, deftly licking their cones and balancing on stools while their fathers watched from the open doorway. I met and became close to young women who were pursuing higher education in highly marketable and modern subjects such as economics, political science, and mathematics, outside Ladakh, but came home for the summer months to help their mothers tend the gardens, graze the cows, and churn the butter. Thus, though there is an apparent willingness on the part of the young Ladakhis to move forward in their studies and to increase their opportunities, there is also a sense of loyalty to the family, the village, the land, and the pattern of life that is so specifically Ladakhi.

I have grown to admire the young people in Ladakh. In my time there and in my research that followed, I began to recognize the worlds that these children and young adults navigate. Before Ladakh was “opened” to the rest of the world by the Indian

government nearly forty years ago, children existed in the home and village. Now, Ladakh's young deal with traditional life as well as the culture of the school, the culture of the media, the culture of the west (as demonstrated by tourists and trekkers in the summer months), the culture of pan-Indian identity, the culture of consumerism, the culture of technology, and the culture of "progress" in the developing world.

How has recent implementation of infrastructure and importation of technology affected the construction of the Ladakhi child's identity? How has media, in the contexts of the school and of the home, renegotiated the Ladakhi child's place in the family and in Ladakhi culture in general? Moreover, how have family dynamics and gender roles shifted since the first seeds of modernization were planted nearly fifty years ago? I hope to examine the structure of a child's life in the home, village, and school settings. I will draw on written resources in books and articles, personal observations, and notes I took on conversations and interviews with individuals I met in Ladakh. I will also try to be mindful of my methodology, and to consider how my role as a researcher, a westerner, and a woman affected what I saw and how I interpreted it.

Research: The Major Questions

Although my focus in this thesis is on how constructions of childhood have changed in Ladakh's recent history, I dealt with three major issues that helped supplement this research.

First, I looked closely at modernization. Every book and article about Ladakh speaks to the major changes in the region since the 1960s and 70s. Modernization has affected Ladakhi children in many ways. Perhaps most relevant was the gradual introduction of a modern education system. Mandatory schooling has affected how children structure their time, and how they fit into the social hierarchy of the home and village, as literate and "modern" individuals. Another aspect of modernization has affected how children structure their time spent in the home. Technology has entered Ladakh in a major way, particularly in the context of entertainment media. A satellite dish has become a fixture on nearly every roof, and a television has found its way into nearly every kitchen. Since children are multilingual and educated according to western methods, they are better equipped to interact with and control devices such as the radio, the telephone, and the television than senior family members. They therefore wield a specific and relevant kind of power in the home.

Second, I felt that exploring shifts in family structure and power dynamics would strengthen the scope of my study. I did a significant amount of secondary research. No books or articles exclusively focusing on the experience of the Ladakhi (or even Himalayan) child have been published, at least to my knowledge. There are, however, a number of articles that examine the woman's role in both the traditional and contemporary Ladakhi settings. Gender roles in Ladakh are changing. Before the second

half of the 20th century, men and women worked together in the domains of agriculture and animal herding. Very few tasks were gender specific. Children were looked after not only by mothers, but also by all adults and older children in the household. After the introduction of a cash economy, more and more men began to seek work outside the home, increasing the women's workload and changing the dynamics between children and their fathers. Topics around women's issues and gender roles have been well researched in Ladakh. I have included information on these subjects in this paper. What is most compelling to me, however, is the future of gender roles and family dynamics. As the educated youth grows older, how will they choose to structure their families? The generation of women that will begin to have babies in the next few years will likely be educated, at least in the Leh-town area. This will drastically change the distribution of labor and power. Unfortunately, it's too early to do more than theorize on this situation.

Finally, I did my best to understand and remain aware of my role as a researcher. My perspective, as a western, English-speaking woman, was unique. Although I feel that I was able to make good observations and craft a worthwhile body of work, I know that my observations were specific to certain times, locations, and situations. I also realize that my study was inherently flawed, since I was unable to fully grasp the culture's nuance. When I was in Ladakh, everything I saw and wrote down and analyzed was processed through a lens that is specific to me and my experience. Rather than to resist and deny this, I allowed myself to include aspects of my personal experience in the thesis. I was not an objective researcher, and I am aware of this. I approached my primary research organically, by using subjects who I knew as friends, and by

interviewing my subjects informally. Later, after returning from Ladakh, I used secondary research to support and supplement the information I gathered in the region.

Methods of Research

Although I did conduct primary research in Ladakh, the structure and focus of this study only emerged fully after I had returned from Ladakh and had done a significant amount of reading and writing on the region.

When I was in Ladakh in the summer of 2008, I knew that I wanted to write a child development thesis and that I wanted to conduct research in Ladakh. At first, I was thinking of using the school as a point of entry in my research. My plan was to observe lessons, interview teachers, and analyze learning materials. This was not possible for a number of reasons, the most significant one being that it conflicted with the policies of the program in which I was initially participating. After spending time in Leh-town talking to merchants and shopkeepers, my interest shifted from the contemporary education system to a traditional one. I became interested in learning about the modern manifestations of apprenticeship culture in Ladakh. Crafts and trades were once contained and passed down within a family. I began to research Ladakh's craft traditions, and it was because of this that I was able to stay with the Tsering family, since Mr. Tsering was a metalworker and prayer wheel maker. This topic seemed very relevant to my study and my interests because I also study art history and am a working studio artist.

What I found, however, is that few modern manifestations of apprenticeship traditions still exist in Ladakh, except for perhaps in the monastic setting (which was also effectively off-limits to me). Mr. Tsering's children were all educated and had no interest

in learning his trade. In an interview with a traditional *thangka* painter, I discovered that a modern school for traditional crafts had opened in Dharamsala. His parents had sent him there as a young adolescent. I wanted to find craftspeople that had been educated according to Ladakhi traditions—that is, in the home, by a family member, over a number of years, and so on. The more I looked, the more I became sure that I was looking for a cultural institution that no longer really existed.

One thing that remained consistent throughout the process of my primary research was my interest in the Ladakhi home. Both homes in which I spent significant time were appealing spaces. Although I felt welcome in these homes, I felt that there was an underlying complexity, in terms of traditional norms, modern issues, and the interaction between these two things, that I could not quite grasp. When I was in Ladakh, I made connections with the two families with whom I stayed, and felt comfortable asking specific questions regarding their feelings about modernity and childrearing in Ladakh. It was in my secondary research that I was better able to explore structural and cultural aspects of the home itself.

The Ladakhi home represents a kind of crossroads. It represents old and new, tradition and technology, isolation and invention. The home and the family became the context in which I began to look at children and childhood. This seems like the obvious choice now, but it, in fact, was one I considered thoroughly before committing myself to it.

My research dealing with Ladakhi families in their households was fairly unstructured. I made sure that everyone I met understood that I was doing research for an academic project. I conducted casual interviews and discussions with various family

members belonging to a range of different age groups. The topics I considered most thoroughly were childhood experience, educational experience, feelings on modernity in Ladakh, and generational shifts in lifestyle. I was also able to observe interactions between adults and young children, most notably during my time with the Tsering family.

Literature Review

History of Ladakh

There are many scholars who focus on Ladakh's history. It is a complex history, fraught with periods of instability due mainly to external sources. Ladakh is dealing with one of these periods in the present day. Wedged between two major mountain ranges, the Himalayan and Karakoram, and two major powers, Pakistan and China, Ladakh is both isolated and exposed. Ladakh, a frontier state in India's northwestern-most reaches, is vulnerable to attack from its neighboring nations. Both countries have shown unabashed interest in controlling Ladakh in the past (Mellor, 2001). The Ladakhi region, which historically had no military force, has always been susceptible to attack and disaster.

The region of Ladakh was self-ruled as a sovereign kingdom from the 10th century through the late 19th century. Although the regions were politically independent, Ladakh maintained strong ties to Tibet. The two kingdoms shared a religion, Buddhism, and were linked by common aspects of culture, language, and subsistence living (Wiley, 2002). Ladakh, despite its shallow soil, severe winters, and limited water supply, was largely self-sustaining. The region did, however, enjoy a central position on a major silk route. From the 9th century onward (Rizvi, 1996), summer in Leh, which is still the region's center of trade and commerce, has been buzzing with a diverse array of languages and humming with trade and monetary transactions. It is only recently that native Ladakhis really began to profit from the presence of visitors. Most Ladakhis in the past benefited only slightly from the trading activity. Few owned their own businesses, and thus the success that was had in the region due to trade was generally had by non-Ladakhis who simply used Leh as a meeting place (Warikoo, 1986).

In the 13th century, Ladakh became destabilized due to the Islamist conquests. This instability continued for more than two centuries, as an onslaught of foreign attackers took interest in the territory. Ladakh controlled the lucrative cashmere trade, which made the region appealing to invaders from neighboring regions. Finally, the Dogras, from Jammu region, gained power over Ladakh in the late 1800s. The British laid claim to the region, at the height of colonial rule in India, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

When India gained independence from its colonial ruler in 1947, Ladakh became a part of the new Indian nation state. It wasn't long before it also became a contested territory. China claimed a large portion of eastern Ladakh in the early 1960s (Wiley, 2002), after a brief war with India (Tiwari & Gupta, 2008). Less than a decade later, partitioned Pakistan waged war against India in an attempt to take a piece of Ladakh as well. There have been three wars between the two nations to date (Hay, 1997). India and Pakistan continue to engage in border disputes today.

The region is located on the Tibetan plateau, and Ladakh's religious and cultural connections with Lhasa endured over the centuries of political turmoil and instability (Kaul & Kaul, 1992). Ladakh and Tibet maintained their commercial and socio-religious affiliations until the border closed in 1959 (Mellor, 2001). But Ladakh's ties with its neighbor (and one-time conqueror) to the northwest, the Jammu and Kashmir state, and peninsular India, for that matter, have been more complicated. Until the mid-1990s, Ladakh was completely under the power of the Jammu and Kashmir state government. Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council was formed in 1995 after many years of effort and negotiation. The organization deals with agricultural, educational, and cultural

issues and policy and was designed to give Ladakh a voice in state politics. Opinions vary on its actual ability to affect change (Kingsnorth, 2000).

Despite its current reputation as an idyllic and pastoral tourist destination, Ladakh is a land entrenched in political turmoil. Its people are plagued by the reality that the earth they work and the lifestyle fashioned over centuries are compromised by the threat of military action from the countries around them. Although Ladakh, as a region, currently holds on to its commitment to peace and cooperation, the tug-of-war between these world powers continues.

Modernization: The Roles of the Military and Tourism

To protect its borders from surrounding nations, India erected and staffed rural military outposts in the region. The military's involvement in Ladakh changed the social and economic personality of the region (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). In the 1960s, when the border trouble with Pakistan and China began in earnest, it was clear to India that a strong military presence would be essential if the nation was to keep Ladakh as part of its territory. And so Ladakh saw the deployment of the Indian military. The muddy green buildings and khaki-colored trucks became a part of the landscape, as they hunkered in desert valleys and stretched in low lines on the roads. But it was what the army brought with it, rather than the army itself, that really changed the social landscape of Ladakh. Reliable roads and, later, an airport were erected and maintained (Hay, 1997). A telecommunication network was established. Infrastructure and administration on the local and national levels became important aspects of everyday life (Tiwari & Gupta, 2008).

The presence of the military also provided a market for imported goods on a scale Ladakh had never experienced. Although Ladakh, which was part of an ancient but enduring trade route, had seen material goods from many exotic locales, never before had the volume of importation been so significant. The government subsidized imports to make them available to the wider population. Wheat, rice, hard coke, and firewood are the main government imports (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). These supplies have changed the way people eat, heat, and build.

Until the 1970s, Ladakh was closed to tourists due to obvious instability in the area. The Indian government, predicting (quite correctly) that the region's natural beauty and adventuring opportunities might attract western tourists, began the process of opening Ladakh to foreign and domestic tourism in 1974 (Hay, 1997). Government officials also likely believed that such a move would fix the region more firmly on the Indian map (Norberg-Hodge, 1991), yet the transition was carried out with some trepidation. The Indian government opened the region bit by bit, beginning with Leh, and adding increasingly remote regions as time went on (Harrer, 1978). Travelers were able to enter Ladakh by way of the newly constructed Upshi-Manali road (Hay, 1997). The journey was tedious. Commercial airlines began to run flights from large Indian cities to the tiny army airport outside of Leh. Today, most tourists take a flight from New Delhi, which is less than two hours. Using the road, the trip can take weeks.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, every summer large numbers of tourists have come to Ladakh, creating demand for guesthouses, hotels, trekking companies, bakeries, restaurants, banks, antique shops, rug shops, and jewelry bazaars. Although the Indian military started the trend, the tourist industry supported a cash economy in Ladakh more

concretely and made the motivation to participate more urgent (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). According to Norberg-Hodge, who has spent a good deal of her life living in and studying Ladakh, the tourist presence, the newly-founded cash economy, and the Ladakhi perception of tourist wealth has created a kind of identity crisis in the Ladakhi people. This should come as no surprise. Tourists appear to have a limitless amount of money to spend, and it is difficult for Ladakhis to understand that it is currency, rather than interpersonal cooperation, that structures the European and American lifestyle. “Compared to these strangers,” Norberg-Hodge reports, “they suddenly felt poor” (p. 95). But westerners also seemed to outwardly admire Ladakh and its people. This resulted in what Mellor (2001) calls an oscillation “between a conceptual pride in Ladakh, and apparent shame over their perceived lack of material possessions and ‘deficient’ education” (p. 31). The conflicting messages from the west have contributed to at least a somewhat conflicted self-image for many Ladakhis.

Ladakh has two distinct sections. The Kargil district is primarily inhabited by Muslims. The Leh district is predominantly Buddhist (Kaul & Kaul, 1992; Kingsnorth, 2000). The two populations do intermix, but geographically they tend to concentrate in their respective regions. Interaction and harmony benefit and strengthen both factions, particularly because Ladakh is contained within the Jammu & Kashmir state, which rarely acts in Ladakh’s best interest. Nonetheless, disagreements have arisen between the groups in the not-so-distant past. In 1989, shootings and riots in Leh-town shook the foundation of the peaceful social landscape (Pinault, 1999), and the social boycott that ensued proved to be extremely problematic. The event was far from trivial, and, in fact, destroyed commercial and interpersonal ties between Ladakh’s Buddhist and Muslim

communities. It took years for the groups to reconcile. In the early 1990s, the boycott ended. The Muslims and Buddhists of Leh district joined forces to create the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) in 1995 (Van Beek, 2008, p. 525). It was apparent that the groups needed to combine in order to be heard in the Kashmir state.

The Kashmiri government has historically harassed the population of Ladakh. For Kashmir, a divided Ladakh is preferable to a unified one, since the state can more effectively absorb and silence voiced dissatisfaction from smaller factions in the region. Many Kashmiri leaders paint Buddhist Ladakhis as backward. For decades, reform campaigns outlawing polyandrous marriages, attempting to demolish primogeniture, and generally decimating the relevance and power of the Buddhist community, have been put in action (Van Beek, 2008, p. 534).

Despite some major differences, Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh historically have enjoyed a fairly peaceful relationship. Although their communities may not have been completely integrated, they had in common many aspects of their lives. Both populations were farmers and herders. Both dealt with the same long winters. Traditionally, however, the basic family structure differed. Polyandry and primogeniture, two essential aspects of this study, were only practiced among Buddhist constituents.

Polyandry

Polyandry is a titillating subject for westerners (Childs, 2003). Perhaps for this reason, there have been several fairly impressive attempts to study it. One of the earliest formal research projects undertaken in Ladakh, which was published in the 1920s, had polyandry as its subject (Pederson, 2005). The thesis was written by Prince Peter of

Greece and Denmark. Poul Pederson, who reiterates and condenses the paper's main points, believes that Prince Peter failed in his analysis of polyandry as a "latent male homosexual and near-incestuous form of the marital institution, correlated with excessive economic and social pressures on the nuclear family of peoples living in a difficult natural or social environment" (Pederson, 2005). The prince's phrasing is a tad dramatic, but aspects of his examination seem viable. I disagree that polyandry has much of anything to do with homosexuality or incest. I do, however, see the connections between polyandrous marriage and Ladakh's economic environment, social landscape, and geographic location. Because of the intense interest in polyandry as a system and an institution, it seems appropriate that I begin my overview of Ladakhi childhood and families by describing polyandry and its effects on the Ladakhi family, both within the home and farther afield.

Western scholars are clearly interested in polyandry, and its implications in the structure of family. But in most articles and books, the polyandrous family format is not examined from the perspective of the child that grows up in it. More commonly, researchers have looked at the effects of polyandrous marriage on the treatment of women, fraternal relations, and inheritance. These are valid investigations. But it is important to think of where the child is in all this, and the ways in which polyandry affects him.

Polyandry, like so many other aspects of traditional Ladakhi life, is an institution that has as its core pragmatism and cooperation. Resources are scarce in Ladakh, and Ladakhi families are concerned with keeping their material legacy strong and unified (Chwang, 1986). As stated by Moodey, "Polyandry...is not primarily due to personality

factors or broad cultural orientations, but to the need to preserve the family estate intact” (1978). Hay (1997) takes on a more humanistic view: it is not the family’s estate’s intact status that is most important, but rather the family unit itself. Either way, polyandry is often, though not always, successful in keeping both the estate and the family together. Hay goes on to say that polyandry also helps to maintain the population without increasing it too dramatically. Ladakh is a difficult place to survive, with its limited growing season, inconsistent imports, and harsh winters. Polyandry was, and in many communities still is, considered the most responsible way to organize a family financially and morally.

In Ladakh, as in nearly all regions of India, marriages are more about practicality than anything else. Parents of the bride and groom arrange the marriages, while the participants do little until the union has been fully negotiated. Although love marriages are becoming increasingly popular today, traditional Ladakhi unions are nearly void of the idea of romantic love. Marriage contracts are not so different from business transactions. Polyandry, in many situations, seems like the most viable investment. Families do not like to carve up their land and property, nor do they willingly jeopardize the relationships on which the family relies, functions, and thrives. Romantic love between two people is not nearly as important as general harmony among all members of the household. Suspicion is exercised on those couples that seem to value and pursue exclusive romantic pleasure over the well-being and happiness of the whole family unit (Aggarwal, 2004). By taking only one wife for all of the household’s brothers, the family is, in effect, providing sexual satisfaction for all the brothers, ensuring a relatively small

number of ensuing heirs, and preserving the house, land and possessions for the generations that will follow.

Many tourists are perplexed by polyandrous unions. Researchers that study such marriages have found that general aspects of eastern (or specifically Buddhist) worldview are helpful in forming a basic understanding of how these unions work. Attachment to things or people is routinely discouraged in Buddhist philosophy, and perhaps this is why polyandry functions in primarily Buddhist Ladakh. Men and women in polyandrous unions are able to develop affection for one another, but individual pursuits of exclusive romantic love or bliss are regarded harshly. Harmony within the household is the goal, rather than the individual happiness of each member (Aggarwal, 2004). This fundamental difference between eastern and western relational ideals is important to consider when looking at the institution of polyandrous marriage (Pirie, 2005).

Polyandrous marriages do not always remain intact. In Haddix's article, *Leaving Your Wife and Your Brothers: When Polyandrous Marriages Fall Apart* (2001), the issue of partition in polyandrous unions is examined. The research presented was conducted in a Tibetan community in Nepal. Nonetheless, since polyandrous Tibetan marriages are very similar in structure to polyandrous Ladakhi marriages, the information is relevant. And the conclusions are quite surprising. Younger brothers, Haddix asserts, do have the option of leaving a polyandrous marriage, and many take advantage of this option. If a young man does choose to partition the household, he must negotiate his inheritance, build a new house, and find a wife of his own (Haddix, 2001).

How does this highly unusual marital system affect the status of women? The answer is murky. Some scholars seem to believe that polyandry actually elevates the

status of women by granting them a large amount of sexual and domestic power. Most agree, however, that such a view is problematic (Angmo, 1999). Wives in polyandrous marriages must work hard to satisfy the needs of the household—in terms of food preparation, domestic duties, childcare, and so on. Some women grow to resent the demands of their role and long for their natal homes and the lives they led before they were wives (Aggarwal, 2004).

Polyandrous marriage certainly has an impact on the intimate workings of a household, but the institution has also affected the social landscape more broadly. Although the institution's intention is to solidify and preserve family relations, it may actually have a negative effect on the institution of marriage in general. In fact, some studies show that due to other societal circumstances of the region, polyandry is very likely to result in a high level of female non-marriage. This not only restricts aggregate fertility and limits population growth (Childs, 2003), but also denies many women the right to marry and produce children legitimately. According to Childs, illegitimate births are “both common and accepted” (2003). But illegitimate children do not generally live comfortably, as they cannot inherit land or property. Unwed mothers and their children are often stuck in a cycle of servitude.

As challenging as polyandrous marriages can be, emotionally and physically, for those involved, the alternative, non-marriage, is rarely considered a better option. To be unmarried is to be non-participatory. Men are generally spared this choice, since younger brothers can take on the eldest brother's wife as their own. If a woman cannot or does not marry, she is forced to move outside the family home when her brother marries and work

as an unpaid laborer to her parents, brothers, and sister-in-law. In traditional Ladakhi society, an unmarried woman is basically powerless (Hay, 1997).

Polyandry was declared illegal in 1942. The legal status of the union is merely a technicality, but nonetheless polyandrous marriages have been in decline. Monogamy is the new norm. As a result of this shift, and a declining infant mortality rate, many believe that the Ladakhi population will grow at an unprecedented rate (Norberg-Hodge, 1991).

Children figure into polyandrous marriages in more than one way. Obviously, many Ladakhi children are products of these unions and deal with the inherent dynamics from a slight distance. As they grow older, however, they may be more directly involved in such a marriage. Although the popularity of polyandry is dwindling, it is still practiced in modern Ladakh, particularly in rural villages.

Conception and Pregnancy

Children are important in the Ladakhi home. Before the age of modern and mandatory education, children were at the home's center. All family members participate in the process of raising a child. During pregnancy, members of the household do their best to nurture and aid the expectant mother. Even at the most primary stage of life, when a child has not yet emerged, the people in the immediate community, and the medical philosophies that guide them, turn their attention to the mother's and child's care.

Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994) give great insight in their analysis of Tibetan medical texts and their relevance on the subject of reproduction. These texts have been consulted for centuries and remain a part of reproductive culture in Ladakh. Each step in the process of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth is highly formalized.

Balance is an important aspect of traditional Tibetan medicine. It is not surprising, then, that the text translated and interpreted by Norberg-Hodge and Russell stipulates that the *khu ba* (sperm) and *khrag* (blood) must be balanced and pure in order for intercourse to result in conception. Timing is also an important framework that hopeful couples must respect.

If and when a woman does become pregnant, her body is described as feeling heavy, but balanced (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994). Although the illusion of balance is achieved, her life and the patterns that define it become increasingly unbalanced. Her sleep is disturbed. Her appetite proves inconsistent. Her bodily constitution will be compromised if measured attempts are not taken to compensate for the disturbance the pregnancy causes.

As is the case in most parts of the world, Ladakhi women are responsible for childrearing. Although they have the support of their husbands, families, and members of their *phaspun*, women in Ladakh take on the task of childbearing and childrearing knowing that they will have to bear the weight of reproduction with great grace and strength. In addition to domestic responsibilities and childcare, Ladakhi culture dictates that women do hard physical labor.

Women are valued for their “stoic” capabilities (Aggarwal, 2004; Wiley, 2002). This proves to be particularly important during pregnancy. Pregnant women in Ladakh often continue to participate in agricultural and household activities nearly until the birth, and complaining is considered to be self-indulgent. This is not necessarily due to any misogynistic tendency in the culture, but rather to the fact that a family’s survival depends largely on the woman’s duties. In most households, women take responsibility

for tending the gardens, caring for the animals, processing and storing crops, preparing meals, cleaning the house, and raising children. These responsibilities leave a woman little time for rest—even when pregnancy renders her fatigued, irritable, or otherwise unwell.

Although women in Ladakh generally are expected to work during pregnancy, Tibetan medical and physiological texts deal with prenatal activity with great care and sensitivity. This evidence suggests that pregnancy really is a respected phenomenon in Ladakhi culture. Norberg-Hodge argues that interdependent households and communities care for the pregnant woman enthusiastically (2001). Yet, realistically, it seems that women are expected to work during their pregnancy, as many researchers have observed (Aggarwal, 2004; Wiley, 2002; Chin, Dye, & Lee, 2008). It is merely the constraints of time and energy that prevent the families from giving the woman and her pregnancy more attention. According to Wiley (2002), Ladakhis agree that during pregnancy women should eat more (especially nutrient-dense foods such as eggs, dairy, and meat), and work less. In many of the sources consulted, there seems to be a gap between what Ladakhi men and women think a pregnant woman should eat, drink, and do, and what is actually eaten, drunk, and done. It is not socially acceptable for women to eat more and work less during pregnancy. By doing so, pregnant women fear they might appear lazy and attention-hungry, two traits that are not tolerated in Ladakhi culture.

According to the texts, the infant's body is formed, week by week and part by part, over the nine months of pregnancy. Each week brings about the formation of a new bodily complexity. In the fifth week, for instance, the umbilical cord is formed. In the seventh, the eyes emerge. In the tenth week, shoulders broaden and buttocks begin to

bulge (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994). Although such superstitions are in conflict with basic concepts in western medicine, which is becoming increasingly pervasive on the Tibetan plateau, Tibetan medicine has been widely trusted in Ladakh for centuries and many people still value these traditional sources highly.

Tibetan medical texts deal with many issues in women's health. Methods of conception and contraception are described in detail. Menstruation and menopause are consistently mentioned. These texts, and the *amchis* (the practitioners of traditional Tibetan medicine) continue to work together as a resource for new mothers. Women, particularly in rural parts of Ladakh, continue to rely on traditional methods and beliefs. However, modern medicine is increasingly popular as it becomes more widely available. Wiley (2002) reports that women in Ladakh have "enthusiastically embraced" western biomedical resources, not only for prenatal preventative care but also for access to modern birth control.

Reproduction is an important aspect of the female experience in Ladakh, even though many women are never granted the opportunity to bear children legitimately. Although reliable methods of birth control are rising in popularity, many experts predict that population growth will continue to increase (Crook, 1994) in light of declining infant mortality rates and a general shift toward monogamous marriage, particularly in urban areas. Ladakhis value productivity, whether it be economic, agricultural, or reproductive (Aggarwal, 2004).

In a sense, reproduction is an ultimate expression of productivity, since children are encouraged to engage in domestic and agricultural chores from a young age. Thus, a fertile woman is generally considered to be a productive and valuable member of a

household. Folksongs and verses systematically join and juxtapose the two main female “functions” in Ladakhi culture. These are motherhood and agricultural work. Numerous folksongs emphasize the connections between women and the earth—referencing not only the commonly used metaphors comparing supple body parts and a fertile womb to springtime growth and flowing rivers, but also honoring the woman’s partnership with the earth on a more pragmatic level. The woman’s role as cultivator of soil, tender of the garden, and provider of sustenance offers rich and playful subject matter for traditional songs and poems (Aggarwal, 2004).

Childbirth

Labor and delivery provide Ladakhi women with a final opportunity to show their strength to relatives and in-laws. In traditional births, women deliver with only female family members and neighbors present. The women involved in the helping are generally experienced mothers themselves. The *amchi* is only called if there is a problem (Wiley, 2002). Traditionally, women were required to give birth in the husband’s *phaspun* (Aggarwal, 2004), perhaps to avoid any ambiguity about to whom the child belonged.

After the newborn is cleaned, he or she is presented to the mother to hold. Birth is a time of joy, and parents are joyful whether the child is male or female (Aime & Bala, 1986). However, in Nazki’s study, conducted in 1986, 43% in a sample of 200 Ladakhi interviewees responded that they would prefer to have a son.

A healthy infant, whether male or female, is cause for a celebration. Infant mortality remains a serious problem in Ladakh. Many parents have the experience of losing a child (Attenborough, 1994). Infant mortality is a concern in all Himalayan

communities. In Chin, Dye, and Lee's study, published in 2008, they found that infant deaths in the Himalayas are estimated to occur at a rate of between 250 and 300 per 1,000 live births.

The father enters the room and recites a *tashi smonlam*, an auspicious blessing. "You who were born of my heart,/May you live for a hundred years!/May you see a hundred autumns,/A long life, bright and happy!" (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994). The father then washes the newborn child in water and sweet herbs to bring the child wisdom (p. 522).

The father is involved in the birthing in a way that is not physical or visceral or immediate. Although the father is generally in the home, and, in fact, Norberg-Hodge reports that in her study 23 out of 25 fathers were present in the home at the time of their last child's birth, the room in which the woman delivers is a powerfully and exclusively female space. The man remains at the periphery. It is only when the child is cleaned of his mother's blood and the afterbirth is wrapped and buried safely in the cellar that the man may enter and participate in the event directly.

Women that live in Leh district are becoming more and more comfortable with hospital births. In the early 1990s, over 50% of births in and around Leh took place at the Leh hospital (Wiley, 2002). The only hospital in Leh, however, does not have much to offer in terms of cleanliness or equipment. When Wiley wrote this article in 2002, the hospital lacked running water, one of the most basic necessities in running a clean and efficient facility.

Wiley, who has observed a number of hospital births in Leh, comments on the strident unpleasantness of the process. "In the hospital the birthing woman has little

control over her environment, pace of delivery, or caretakers, as nurses and/or doctors take control and make decisions without her input” (2002, p. 1098). Women are discouraged from asking questions or even showing emotions. Any possible power that a woman had while delivering in her home was absent in the hospital setting, according to Wiley’s observations, and the affair the researcher describes is stripped of all elements of ritual so richly present in the home births as outlined by Norberg-Hodge. Nonetheless, Wiley wisely avoids touting the home birth experience as inherently more positive than the hospital birth, since little research has been done on the subject.

Birth Ceremonies

Although the woman generally does not rest before the birth, she is encouraged to relax after the infant is born. This lasts a month (Harrer, 1978, p. 89). The prescribed time of rest is instituted not only for the mother’s health, but also to appease the spirits, which are believed to consider birth to be unclean. At the end of the mother’s resting period, a house cleaning ceremony to be performed by monks from the local monastery and the first organized celebration of the birth, *Dun*, is instigated by close friends.

A birth in a village or *phaspun* has inherent social customs, which speak to the high cultural value placed on infants. Roughly three weeks after the cleansing ritual and gathering, the child is taken outside of the house for the first time, and there is another celebration, called *Dagang*. Both the *Dun* and the *Dagang* are festive occasions, with a good deal of food, *chang* (barley beer), and dancing.

Guests bring gifts, such as money, butter, or sugar, for the new parents (Nazki, 1986). If the infant is female, neighbors and relatives also bring *kab-tse*, flat bread with

zigzagged edges to represent the crocodile. In the events that follow the birth of a baby boy, neighbors and friends bring icons that represent the ibex. The ibex is a symbol of masculine strength, and the animal is respected for its ability to climb high in the mountains but remain grounded. Unlike the mysterious crocodile, the ibex's strength is straightforward, and his personality is loyal, even-tempered, and honest (Aggarwal, 2004, p. 142).

Many families still observe and follow folk superstitions. Most of these practices are quite straightforward and don't take up too much of the caregiver's time. A dab of black soot is applied to the baby's forehead, since it is believed that evil spirits are most attracted to beautiful and unblemished children (Harrer, 1978, p. 86). A brief excursion outside on a starry night is thought to ease an irritable child's nerves. Some of these common superstitions, however, are quite elaborate, as some parents' fears of said spirits are acute. Many of these superstitions seem like they are likely to do more harm than good. A knife or piece of iron is placed under a baby's pillow to discourage bad dreams, for instance, or a turquoise bauble on a stud is tucked into the folds of an infant's cap to protect him from the evil eye.

A year after the birth, a naming ceremony is planned. In the Buddhist tradition, the infant is not named in his or her first year of life. Rather than leaving the responsibility up to the parents, Ladakhi tradition dictates that the *lama* names the child (Nazki, 1986). Guests bring gifts to the new infant's home that vary according to the child's sex.

The Father's Role

In the moment after the child's birth, when the father blesses the infant, there is a kind of emotional tethering between father and child, which seems to remain, in some capacity, throughout the child's development. The Ladakhi father is encouraged to seek a connection with his children. Although women are regarded as the primary caregivers in a Ladakhi household, men are also active participants in childrearing practices. Perhaps because masculinity and femininity are defined with a measured dose of fluidity in Ladakh, at least traditionally, men are generally enthusiastic and tender in their roles as fathers.

In the beginning of the child's life, the father supports the child indirectly—by helping the mother during the pregnancy and lactation periods. In traditional families, children interact with the men of the household regularly. All members of the family work together on household tasks. Today, since an increasing number of men work outside the home, the father supports the family by way of material wealth by providing household essentials such as food, fuel, and goods. Although his physical presence may be less consistent than it was in times past, the father also provides emotional support to the child throughout his or her childhood and adolescence (Haddix, 2001).

In a polyandrous marriage, the father's role is less straightforward. Since no one in the family can be certain of a child's paternity, the situation is complicated and possibly volatile. In many communities, including Karnali Tibetans, the paternity of all the children is attributed to the eldest brother. Often, the eldest brother has more frequent sexual access to the wife, giving younger brothers few opportunities to father children and thus making his claims of paternity more plausible (Haddix, 2001).

Birth Order

Age and birth order are significant issues in the life of the Ladakhi child (Nazki, 1986). It may seem hard to believe that when, in comparison to siblings, a child is born is important, but it has a major effect on the quantity and type of resources that the child will receive from his or her family. Naturally, other issues come in to play. Sex is important. Health is important. But age order can actually define experience in a major way. Where the child fits into the family, in relation to his or her siblings, proves vital to delineation of responsibilities, formation of identity, and availability of educational opportunities.

Specific roles are assigned to specific children, and labor within the home is divided according to the gender, age, and age in relation to the siblings (Hay, 1997). Adults attach expectations to each child according to his or her status within the group. One unfortunate reality of such a system is that girls are less likely to be educated outside the home, since women traditionally have been the farmers. This seems to be changing, however, as more and more young women are pursuing higher education (Chin, Dye, & Lee, 2008).

In some cases, the issues related to birth order are obvious and well-defined. In the article *Polyandry and Population Growth*, Childs (2003) explains that many of the roles dictated by birth order have long-lasting implications. It is common for the youngest brother to become a monk, for instance. This decision is generally made by the child's parents when the boy is still young. Parents generally give the child to the institution before he reaches age ten (Childs, 2003, p. 435), and monks often remain in the monastic

setting until death. Another lasting effect of the roles connected to birth order is the fact that daughters tend to marry according to birth order (Childs, 2003). For this reason, it is common for younger sisters to remain unmarried. Since sisters marry according to birth order, and the number of marriageable men is generally still quite low, younger sisters rarely have the chance to marry and are instead relegated to a *zur-khang*, an adjunct house near her natal home. The terminology used to describe this situation is telling. A woman that finds herself in such a position is called a *mo-hreng*, a “solitary woman” (Childs, 2003, p. 439). In a culture that is built on interdependence and interpersonal harmony, such a title seems quite cold.

Although birth order remains an important social construct in the Ladakhi household, the rules and roles it implies are no longer held to so stringently. As polyandry becomes less dominant and younger brothers seek wives of their own, the option of marriage has become feasible for late-born daughters. Monastic education now competes with government-funded secular schools, giving parents the option to educate their youngest sons without committing them to a monastic life, an option that was never realized in traditional Ladakhi society (Dawa, 1999).

Early Childhood

The amount of time that parents spend with children is significant, particularly in traditional Ladakhi homes. Time, in Ladakh, is valuable, and there is always work to be done. There is little separation, therefore, between what women in Ladakh do over the course of the day and what children in Ladakh do over the course of the day (Mellor, 2001). Mothers bring babies into the fields when they weed and water the gardens, to the

stream to wash clothes, or to the pasture with grazing cows. Children learn how to perform basic tasks (such as weeding, washing clothes, or herding cows and yaks) by watching the mother's performance of these chores over the days, months and years, and eventually by participating. At a young age, with minimal prompting, children begin to perform household tasks on their own (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994).

In the early part of childhood, parents exercise great patience in all interactions with their children. The idea of punishment is not even considered, no matter the severity of the child's offense. All members of the family participate in the infant's or toddler's care. Because extended families often live together in one house, the child is almost constantly engaged in an interaction. Mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, siblings, and neighbors, all seem to relish the presence of a young child. A typical Ladakhi childhood is filled with affection, attention, and nourishment (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994).

The young Ladakhi child is nurtured, swathed in warmth and acceptance and non-judgment, until about age five, when the child is granted more independence and freedom. With this comes responsibility. The child is expected to contribute to the household in some way. Parents allow children to choose their chores but generally encourage five- and six-year-olds to help with the less taxing tasks. Children at this age often help by looking after younger siblings, fetching water, and assisting with cooking (Norberg-Hodge & Russell, 1994). According to Norberg-Hodge and Russell's study, it is also at this age when discipline becomes a factor.

The idea of parent-child play, at least in a western sense, is not present in Ladakh. Such an interaction implies a horizontal parent-child relationship, and Ladakhis do not

embrace this structure. When children do play, they play with their peers. Some communities, particularly around Leh-town, have access to imported toys; plastic dolls and the like are most common. In the more traditional villages, however, toys and games must be tinkered from the materials that are available.

Modern Education

Traditionally, Ladakh's learn-by-doing philosophy did not apply only to young children. Before modern education became widely available, parents involved their children in their everyday tasks, from the most basic to the most complex, in order to prepare their children for the time when they would be leading the household. In some cases, such as in families of metalworkers, weavers, rug makers, and *amchis*, a more formalized apprenticeship system was created (Wiley, 2002).

In the last thirty years, modern secular education has become a major aspect of Ladakhi life. In *Whither Ladakh Education?* (1999), Dawa writes on the sheer number of government schools that have been founded since the late 1970s. "Under the state government's educational policy, every small village, even those with only five or six families, boasts a primary school, while bigger villages may have five or six schools each, including a middle and high school" (p. 72). Education has drastically changed the experience of Ladakh's younger generations.

When schools were first established, the only available learning materials were grossly culturally inappropriate. Ladakhi teachers were working with textbooks that depicted norms of north India, a region that is separated from Ladakh by the world's most significant mountain range, the Himalayas. This nearly impenetrable obstruction serves

as both a physical and cultural barrier between Ladakh and peninsular India, and, for this reason, the images in the textbooks did not register with Ladakhi children. Pictures of and references to Hindu culture, middle-class issues, upward-mobility, nuclear families, and quasi-western ambitions were difficult to decode, and had little in common with the traditional Ladakhi lifestyle (Mellor, 2001), which was still essentially intact in the 1970s.

The textbooks were widely scorned in Ladakh. An organization founded by concerned university students returning to the region sought to create educational materials that were appropriate and applicable. SECMOL, the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh, was straightforward in their criticism of the Indian government which, they said, was unjustly forcing Ladakhis to abandon the way of life they were used to, in the name of progress and development (Mellor, 2001). The organization became a potent organizing force that offered a new point of view and voice for Ladakhis struggling with the impact of modernization. In one of their first projects, in the late 1980s, SECMOL designed and distributed new textbooks, which featured images that they intended to be recognizable and resonant. This project acknowledged the importance of tradition, in the images and their content, and progress in their format and context (Dawa, 1999).

The education system is growing, but many still wonder if this is a good thing. Dawa points out that the education available to Ladakhi children and adolescents prepares them for a few very specialized career paths in areas that happen to be limited in Ladakh. Regardless of SECMOL's efforts, the education that most children receive in the region has little to do with the way of life there. Nonetheless, a family that values

education is considered to be progressive. But at what cost? In order to survive in Ladakh, one must learn the intricacies of agriculture, irrigation, animal husbandry, and the like. Dawa argues that school may actually be getting in the way of learning, at least in the sense that could prove practical for Ladakhis. Furthermore, Dawa argues that the education system is corrupt, describing discrepancies in resource allocation, unfair teacher assignments, and widespread cheating on standardized exams to fool the government into giving schools better funding.

Educating children with generally illiterate parents is a difficult business, and the cultural implications of mandatory schooling in a place like Ladakh are many and multifarious. India's media and government work hard to present education as a wholly worthwhile endeavor. Whether formal education helps or hinders the children of Ladakh is still to be determined.

Everyday Buddhism

Ladakh, and particularly the communities around Leh, is primarily Buddhist. Ladakhi culture is infused with Buddhist philosophy, which values order and balance. These are two concepts that inform the Ladakhi lifestyle. The *phaspun* and the wider Ladakhi community in general has, as its goal, order. Unlike the methods of ordering individuals in peninsular India (and many other parts of the world), communal order in Ladakh has little to do with a belief in divine order, cosmic order, or caste. Ladakhis do not seek to institute a system of order that is wrought by an elusive figure in the clouds, or a far-off politician. Order is everyone's goal. And, thus, it is everyone's responsibility (Pirie, 2007).

The ideal community is comprised of cooperative households. Because Ladakhis have been so willing to work together, the cash economy that exists in the region today was not present fifty years ago. Even their tax system, which was still in place in the early 20th century, was based on a “currency” of labor that would benefit the community. Bray (2008) describes the system of *corvée* labor, as work that had, as its goal “communal benefit, for example the repair of roads, bridges and temples.”

The Architecture of the Home and Village/*Chutso/Phaspun*

The home is an important part of the Ladakhi experience. Many households in Ladakh are self-sustaining. Agricultural activities, as well as animal husbandry and herding, have made survival possible in the harsh mountain climate. The family, in particular the women in the family, spend the summer months preparing for winter. Summertime is a highly productive time. Women work their small plots expertly. Nothing goes to waste. The women chat and sip tea from a thermos as their hands nimbly pick away the weeds from the vegetables, still growing in the soil. The weeds are kept and dried for winter, to be used as cow, yak, and donkey feed.

Due to the pleasant weather and intensive agricultural obligations, Ladakhis spend a good deal of the summer outside consumed by work. The winters are long, and the cold is excruciating, but the Ladakhis throw their energy into entertaining. Winter is the time for socializing, storytelling, and the general enjoyment of company, community, and companionship (Rizvi, 1996).

According to Norberg-Hodge (1991), social class in Ladakh, at least traditionally, is not important. The vast majority of the population would fall into what westerners

would call a middle class, with the remainder divided quite evenly between an aristocratic class and a lower class. Class tension is minimal.

Although class is not a major source of social conflict, Ladakhi culture does not lack a hierarchy. The hierarchy is not based on acquired wealth or power but purely on age. When members of a community gather, usually around the stove in a household's kitchen, each person has a pre-determined place according to seniority and gender. The oldest man sits at one end of the line, close to the stove, and the youngest female sits at the other end. If the event is very well-attended, men and women form separate lines. This configuration, called a *dral-go*, also applies to, and perhaps originates from, the traditional line dances that are performed enthusiastically on celebratory occasions (Pirie, 2005).

The typical style of the Ladakhi house is attractive and angular, with many cozy rooms that prove conducive to entertaining neighbors and friends in the dark days in winter. Most traditional houses have a flat roof and are insulated with straw. They are constructed from mud bricks, formed by hand and dried in the summer sun, presumably since lumber is hard to come by in the desert landscape. Wood is used for the window frames and doors, however. Many of the houses in Ladakh have two floors, with a summer and a winter kitchen (where family members spend the majority of their time) on the ground floor, and an open-air courtyard, a small chapel, and a perhaps a spare bedroom, on the second level.

In winter, the house's physical form shifts and focuses. The area that the family uses and occupies concentrates and becomes confined, as all family members move into

one room. The common space is used for food preparation and consumption, entertaining neighbors and friends, and sleeping.

Each household works its own land and grows its own crops. Subsistence agriculture has endured as an essential part of the Ladakhi experience. Although each house is generally self-sufficient, the interdependent spirit so tangibly present in Ladakhi communities is present in their agricultural endeavors. Households are assembled into groups of ten. These groups are called *chutsos* (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, p. 53). During times of sowing and harvest, members of the same *chutso* help one another. The group also discusses issues of the village, and chooses representatives to sit on the village council (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, p.49).

The *goba*, or the village head, is generally appointed by rotation. The *goba* presides over the village council. All members of the council, as well as the *goba*, are male. The *goba* deals with the formal aspects of running a village—deciding when to paint the monastery, for instance, or how to repair a bridge. But he also is responsible for resolving issues on a more intimate scale. Villagers come to the *goba* informally, seeking ways to settle an argument with a neighbor, or negotiate a good marriage-match for their adult son or daughter with another family. In Ladakh, the unbiased third party is an essential presence in all disputes and negotiations.

The Ladakhi home, though important and quite functional as its own entity, links itself to other homes in a number of ways. The *chutso* serves a practical function. During times when intense agricultural labor is necessary, members of the same *chutso* combine their efforts in an attempt to help all its members achieve a healthy and bountiful yield. The *phaspun*, another organization of less than a dozen households, also serves a very

functional purpose. Most every household in Ladakh finds membership in both a *chutso* and a *phaspun*. Although they both offer reciprocal help, the functions of these organizations vary significantly. The *phaspun* offers support at times of birth, marriage, and death. The rituals prescribed to each of these major events are elaborate and time-consuming, and families need outside help. Though the purpose of the *phaspun* is quite practical, the connection between members of the *phaspun* proves somewhat metaphysical. Members share the same house deity (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). For this reason, members of the same *phaspun* can live in different villages.

Although members of the *phaspun* deal with the complex traditions relating to birth and marriage, death rituals prove to be the most time-consuming. The *phaspun* is most helpful during times of sadness since preparing for an event like a funeral—cleaning the house and making the food—is generally less pleasurable when it is death, not birth or marriage, that marks the day.

As imported food and supplies become available and affordable, and the market towns (namely Leh and Kargil) become more important, new public spaces have become a part of everyday life (Wiley, 2002). One might wonder, to whom do these spaces belong? Who controls the bus, the school, and the bazaar? In the home, the underlying dynamic is constant, though shifts in the family's power structure might challenge it in some ways. In the public village spaces, as defined by Bhasin (2004, p. 245), specific places such as the water source, the spring, or the barley field are associated with informal female gathering, while men meet more formally under a tree or in an open field. Although seasons may change the physical appearance of these locations, the age hierarchy and social dynamic of the people who meet there endures over the seasons and

over the years. In the public spaces newly established in Leh-town, the dynamic is chaotic and unpredictable by comparison.

In many cases, children deal with these places more than their parents, since education has also recently become widely available and wholeheartedly pursued, and children often have to travel daily to go to school. Thus, it could be inferred that children have a part in determining who sits on the bus (and who stands), for instance. Children and adolescents are learning to negotiate and define the social landscape in contemporary Ladakh, and Leh in particular, in ways their parents cannot.

Despite the new and dramatic invigoration of public space, the home seems to retain its power as the center of the Ladakhi family's life and livelihood. The kitchen, which also functions as a gathering room, with its hammered steel stove and carpeted cushions, serves as a place of ritual and community. The space is gracious and orderly, since the seating is determined by age and sex. But, perhaps due to the time spent and the energy expelled there, the space also feels productive, dynamic, and relevant.

Observation and Analysis

How Modernity Came to Ladakh: The Road

It takes time and patience to access Leh by road. The road to Ladakh is tenuous. The route is plagued by landslides, avalanches, and wash-outs. This is not surprising. It passes over the Himalayas, the world's most significant mountain range. It is, not surprisingly, a tiring trip, a grueling journey, an exhausting series of switchbacks and setbacks. It was, however, an important part of my experience in Ladakh. Although most tourists opt to fly, the trip overland felt rich and real. I grew to know the landscape in a physical way. I camped in the valleys, stayed in rest houses in the towns, stopped to drink hot tea in roadside yurts. I learned (truly, really learned) how to urinate outside gracefully and modestly—sometimes on verdant hillsides, sometimes in desolate deserts, sometimes in fields of rocks.

I was given the chance to acquaint myself with the Ladakhi landscape gradually. I was able to watch the hills grow steeper and the population decrease over the weeks of traveling. Obviously, the landscape changed—from rolling hills to dramatic, white peaks. But I was able to watch subtler, less tangible shifts occur as well as the jeeps bounced from town to town. The language changed—from Hindi to Ladakhi. The predominant religion changed—from Hindu to Buddhist. The popular styles of clothing changed. The staple foods changed. Even my own body changed as it struggled to become accustomed to the altitude.

This journey had its price. One major drawback was time. I was not able to spend as much time at my destination due to how long it took to reach it. It is also a

dangerous trip. The drivers have to acquire special licensure to drive in the mountains. This is a daunting, exhausting place to travel. The passes are narrow, the weather is extreme and unpredictable, and the roads are prone to washouts, avalanches, and landslides.

And yet people get there. I was amazed by the high concentration of foreign tourists in Leh, though most do fly in from Delhi or Mumbai. And things get there too. The town is equipped with everything a European tourist could desire: fine jewelry at low prices, mountain views, hot running water (at certain hours of the day, at least), and an almost decent chocolate croissant. In the summer, Leh-town is an extremely popular tourist destination. And the town has altered itself to fit the part. Merchants and shopkeepers from near and far have set up stores on Leh's streets. Many researchers, anthropologists and ecologists in particular, find the foreign presence offensive. To some extent, it does feel as though bustling Leh doesn't quite belong in pastoral Ladakh. But one actually can't blame modern globalization for the Leh-town phenomenon. Leh has been a historic center for trade and commerce for centuries. As a major stop on the silk route, Leh became something of a destination for traders and travelers. Foreigners are nothing new. This, I admit, does not explain why there is a German bakery on every corner. But that is another question for another paper and another day.

It is rarely Leh-town itself but rather the mountains and rivers around it that attracts so many visitors. It's easy to wax poetic on this land of arid mountain vistas. And poetry is well and good, but I did my best not to become intoxicated by Ladakh's physical landscape. Yet, to be honest, the landscape is what first attracted me to this part of the world. I have been fascinated by the Himalayas since I was young. But, for some

researchers, it seems that the natural beauty of Ladakh is so tantalizing, so titillating, that they have a difficult time seeing development as anything but a dark force in the “kingdom of light” (Kingsnorth 2000). It’s a tempting view—especially when issues of environmental and cultural degradation are brought up. Yet some of the goods and ideas imported into modern Ladakh have been downright beneficial—even if they took a good deal of editing and reworking by the Ladakhi people to become this way.

Tourism has brought about incredible environmental strain. I do not intend to make light of that. It is not difficult to see evidence of this in the town proper and outside it. Like most of India, Leh lacks a sufficient waste disposal system. Ladakhis living in the villages outside of Leh generate nearly no trash. But Leh, with its hundreds of hotel rooms and plethora of rooftop restaurants, deals with a significant demand for such items as imported beer, bottled water, shopping bags, and convenience foods. There is no way to dispose of the waste these products accrue, so it is burned, releasing noxious gases into the air, or simply thrown in a gutter, alley, or field. Although the situation is not as dire as it is in some of the north Indian cities I visited, as more and more products are imported from peninsular India and elsewhere, trash is beginning to accumulate in Leh. Without the equipment or resources to dispose of the waste properly, the issue will only become more obvious and destructive.

Trash is not the only problem the tourists have brought, however. The water supply has been contaminated due to laundry *wallahs* washing hotel bed sheets on the river rocks with industrial detergent. A mistake such as this one can have tragic consequences since water is one of the scarcest resources in the region. The hotels and guesthouses use a significant amount of water in a single day.

Despite its rugged mountains and hard-working people, Ladakh is delicate. It must be treated with respect, or else the systems, so carefully wrought by its inhabitants over centuries, will disintegrate.

One thing that researchers, most notably and most visibly Norberg-Hodge, seem to downplay is the fact that some aspects of development are actually beneficial to the Ladakhi people. It is so tempting to see the traditional Ladakh in a romantic light. To an outsider, it may not seem so challenging to live out life in this way. The houses are pleasant, the people are perpetually kind, and foreigners rarely get the chance to experience a Ladakhi winter.

The unfortunate reality is that Ladakh is cold in the winter. Women are tethered very tightly to agricultural work. Infants can, and often do, die after home births. The activities that have occupied and supported the Ladakhi lifestyle for hundreds of years are grueling and perhaps even painful. But the people of Ladakh have devised ways to make life wholly bearable. Traditional Ladakhi culture is harmonious. It is ingeniously interactive. It is well-designed and well-imagined and well-enacted. People know how to celebrate, how to settle an argument, and how to welcome a child into the world. For westerners, far removed from the work inherent in subsistence agriculture in a locality where the soil is thin, the rain is inconsistent, and the winter is long, it might seem wise to simply let Ladakh be. The choice, however, should be in the hands of the people that actually live in Ladakh.

Many western scholars conducting research in the developing world have recently begun to question their place in their respective projects in a productive way. Western scholarship in regions like Ladakh carries with it an air of colonial entitlement. This is

particularly problematic in anthropological studies. Unlike the geologists or ecologists, those addressing the social sciences are not looking at specimens; they are looking at human beings. Therefore research projects, particularly those that are fairly large-scale, must be thoroughly adapted to meet the specifications of the subjects.

The researchers that begin to look at themselves in the Ladakhi context and realize that they cannot be a neutral influence are the ones I find most interesting—though also quite perplexing. John Crook, who spearheaded an extremely ambitious project in the 1980s, is someone I think might represent this population well. He appears to be not only excited and knowledgeable about the region but also very conscious of what his presence implies to the people living there. His particular project was a large one. Crook and his colleagues wanted to study various aspects of a Zangskari town before the road was built. When he was there, the construction of the road had begun, and was supposed to reach the village in a year's time. The effects of the project had not yet reached the village, and Crook and his team scrambled to finish their research before the road brought in influences they felt would compromise the data. This created a tense and ominous mood. Although the researchers were extremely productive in a short period of time, their program was problematic. They lacked the time to plan a project that was truly culturally sensitive. Crook acknowledges this, and seems to really struggle with it (Crook, 1994).

Due to its historical position on a major trade route and its exposure to conquest and colonization, Ladakh has been dealing with non-native people, products, and ideas for hundreds of years. I was surprised by some of the things that are not indigenous to the region, such as certain vegetables or a particular (and very peculiar) style of hat.

Ladakhis are great assimilators—something that has probably been both a blessing and a curse throughout their history. The Himalayan world is tenuous in terms of governance. The confused and ever-shifting political climate makes it easy for nomads and traders to move along the passes and roads with little hindrance. Thus, many cultures meet and mingle in the Ladakhi village or town. To the outsider's eye, Ladakhis may look rather homogenous. But the region boasts great religious, ethnic, and cultural complexities. As a number of scholars point out, Buddhist Ladakhis are associated with more than one ethnic group, and can claim connection to a number of locales. They are Ladakhi, Kashmiri, and Indian (Kaul & Kaul, 1992). They also have certain things in common with Tibet and Jammu.

In the late 19th century, Moravian missionaries supplied Ladakhis with some ultimately important agricultural knowledge that would become inexplicably bound to the Ladakhi way of life. The missionaries brought a new religion (which was received tentatively, if at all), but more importantly taught Ladakhis how to knit, bake, grow foreign vegetables such as potatoes, spinach, tomato, cauliflower and radish, and preserve their root vegetable crops using semi-underground cellars (Rizvi, 1996). Women in Himachal Pradesh, the state that borders Ladakh on its southern margin, are famous for their elaborately patterned knit socks. These socks are sold at innumerable roadside chai stalls, and feature not the patterns of 19th century Protestant Germany, but rather distinctly Himalayan symbols and motifs, such as the Tibetan swastika and the mandala.

One can't help but to wonder what it would be like to grow up in an environment like this—a place tucked up in geological folds, daunting in their size and stature, yet a place that is as much defined by its separation from the rest of the world as its connection

to and engagement with it. Ladakh is remote. Even with the construction of the road and the airport, it is still difficult and expensive to organize a trip to the region. Yet Ladakhis, and particularly those that live in the Leh district, generally have a sophisticated and informed worldview. Why is this? The answer isn't simple. But I think it has a good deal to do with the fact that Leh was an important silk route trading town. I think it may also be due to the fact that Buddhism and Buddhist culture play such a prominent role in Ladakhi life.

Just as the road (and the developments that the road made possible) shuttled outsiders into Ladakh, it has also provided a way to move Ladakhis out of the region. All Ladakhis with the qualifications and ambition to receive a university education must leave Ladakh to get it and travel either west or south to the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, or peninsular India. Many of the most capable and qualified individuals are leaving Ladakh, contributing to the "brain drain" phenomenon that can be observed in most parts of the developing world.

The Social Demographics of Leh-Town

Ladakh has little to do with what people generally associate with India. The region lacks the astounding poverty. It lacks the crowds, the turbans, the heat, the sweet fruits and saris. It lacks the lush sensuality. It lacks the nose rings. Ladakh lacks the volume of street children and until very recently, it lacked the streets. Yet the contemporary Ladakhi household, particularly in Leh district, is dealing with some of the very same issues as other parts of India.

I found Leh to be a rather confusing place. Leh appears to be at once lavish and austere, money-minded and spiritual, authentic and heavily, heavily touristed. The town proper is densely populated, mainly by shops selling the things that western travelers seem to like. Kashmiri carpets hang pristinely in windows. Bomber hats made from the fur of rabbit and yak sit on tables outside leather shops—an institution that many devoutly Buddhist Ladakhis find quite disgusting. Rooftop restaurants abound, serving everything from Ladakhi noodle stews (*thukpa*), to vegetarian north Indian specialties, to vaguely Italian concoctions seasoned heavy-handedly with dill and oregano. Though most of these places serve alcohol, it does not appear on the menu. Nonetheless, it is rare to enter one of these establishments and not encounter a rowdy westerner sucking down a glass of sweet gin or a large bottle of the coveted Kingfisher beer.

Merchants have come from far and wide to sell their wares to tourists in Leh. Most are male. Some come from the Kashmir Valley. Many are from Nepal. A large number of Tibetan refugees reside in Leh in the summer and sell their wares in sprawling outdoor markets. The treasures to be found in the stores and markets are many. The barter system, still widely accepted in Leh, provides opportunity for prolonged interaction between seller and buyer. And the sellers are disarmingly charming. The Kashmiris have quite the reputation for charisma. No sooner had I walked in the door, I would find myself seated comfortably and sipping sweet tea flavored with cardamom and cinnamon, discussing the intricacies of carpet knotting, or weaving, or embroidery.

Leh is not a large town. It took me only a day or two to learn the busy tangle of streets and alleyways. I rarely found myself lost or confused. I encountered a wide variety of people strolling the few streets. On some days, it seemed as though I saw

nearly as many foreigners as Ladakhis. In no other city I visited in India did I feel this way. This instinct is not so improbable. Thousands of tourists visit the tiny town each year.

So what is it that draws westerners to Leh? The shopping is great, but I don't think it warrants a two-week jeep ride. The scenery is rather remarkable as well, but this is true in many parts of the subcontinent. Many visitors covet Leh for the outdoor opportunities it offers, using it as a kind of base camp for treks and the like. Others venture beyond the town's outskirts to visit more remote temples and shrines, all the while knowing that they will be back to town in time for a hearty dinner and a soft bed. But the town itself proves to be a popular attraction. And westerners have been coming to Leh for years.

My suspicion is that what foreigners find so attractive about Leh is the very thing that their (our) presence is eroding. The people of Leh, or, more generally Ladakh, and the people who have relocated to the area in search of greater opportunity usually have a kind of sensibility of utter sanity and sense—a sensibility so rare in other parts of the world.

I heard one woman in Leh-town lamenting the dirtiness of the town and the impoverishment of the people. I do not remember what she looked like, but I do recall the unpleasant tone and volume of her voice. She was disappointed, she said, in the town. Someone had told her about Leh. Someone had said it was clean and picturesque and that the presence of poverty was less obvious than in other parts of India. She snorted, implying her contempt for such an idea.

In this westerner's mind, Ladakh is "backward." The woman was sitting in an outdoor café. The air in Leh is brisk and clear, but the sun was warm that day. I sat a few tables away from the woman and her party. Other foreigners sat around, drinking *masala* chai from white cups. Young Ladakhi men waited the tables. I was stunned by this woman's words and her willingness to criticize so broadly, particularly in such a pristine and public setting. This was the only instance in which I heard a foreigner openly put down Leh. But subtler aspects of tourist behavior connote disrespect. And, frankly, it doesn't take many people with this kind of mindset (expressed in this tone of voice) to make a negative impact on Ladakhi self-worth.

As Helena Norberg-Hodge states so compactly yet so completely in her slim volume, *Ancient Futures*, the culture of Leh and Ladakh is diluted by the presence of outsiders. This seems like a sensible thesis. But the extent to which this proves true is rather astounding. It is not simply the presence of foreigners that is the problem, but rather the trappings of tourism—that is, motorable roads, a cash economy, electricity, television, convenience foods, and so on—that have compromised Ladakh's thoughtfully crafted cultural identity. The question, as it is in so many parts of the developing world, is whether these new aspects of culture are a problem or simply progress?

“Catching the winter sun” (Nicola Grist): Ladakh's Weather and Land

The different aspects of Ladakhi culture are integrated and interdependent in a way I have never experienced. Ladakh is, in a truly remarkable way, traditionally self-sustaining. I mean this in a literal sense. The people are able to feed themselves by way of subsistence agriculture, clothe themselves using the wool from sheep, goats, and yaks,

and find support in times of crisis by way of social resources such as the *phaspun* and *chutso* structures. I also mean this in a more metaphysical sense. Ladakhis seek guidance from local Buddhist monks and *lamas*, healing from village *amchis*, and entertainment and pleasure from annual festivals and sporting events that leave no one out. Traditional culture in Ladakh is about interdependence not only in an interpersonal capacity, but also in the sense that all aspects of life—domestic, religious, social, educational, vocational and agricultural—are connected.

In every agrarian society, weather is important. Weather gives structure and form to life. People generally know to sow in spring and harvest in fall, but the finer details of the agricultural art depend on more precise timing. In Ladakh, it seems that all aspects of traditional culture relate to the landscape and the weather. Over the centuries, Ladakhis have developed systems that make obstacles into assets, challenges into resources.

In developed parts of the world, where the effect of a summer drought or an early autumn frost is closer to inconvenience than to incapacitation, it is easy to forget just how much these things can matter. Ladakh's dry, harsh climate and rocky soil do not seem to discourage the people who rely on their kitchen gardens and barley fields for nourishment. Despite the influx and availability of foreign-made goods and food grown elsewhere, agriculture remains a major part of living in Ladakh.

Heinrich Harrer, who spent a good deal of time trekking in the region, applauds the general spirit of the Ladakhi population. "In such a cold, dry and inhospitable land only a people of exceptional stamina, ingenuity, toughness, fortitude and adaptability could hope to settle and prosper," he writes with obvious admiration (Harrer, 1978). To live in Ladakh, even present-day Ladakh, is to live with long winters, with unreliable

roads, with inconsistent government programs, and with political unease. These are all difficult aspects of the Ladakhi experience. But how Ladakhis have learned to work with the weather and land, over hundreds of years, is perhaps their most remarkable feat. Of the 96,000 square kilometers that make up Ladakh, only 217 are arable (Harrer, 1978). That means that Ladakhis, a people dependent on farming, can only use about .5% of the region's territory for agricultural endeavors. And yet Ladakhis have been able to survive off their yearly yields for centuries.

The weather in Ladakh is extreme. This much is clear. And it's not surprising. The Himalayas are extreme. Doesn't it make sense that the air around them would follow suit? The passes I traversed in a jeep on the road to Leh were up to 17,000 feet above sea level. The air is thin in the mountains. Ladakh is one of the driest regions on the whole of the Indian subcontinent (Weare, 2002, p. 98). It took me days to adjust to the altitude. Even after a month, my lungs struggled and my breath was short when I climbed a hill or took a brisk walk. The people that were born there don't seem to be at all affected by the altitude (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). And, quite frankly, the lack of oxygen in the air is not the hard part about living in Ladakh. It's the winter.

Winter in Ladakh is long. According to Hay (1997), it begins in October and ends in April (p. 5). It is cold. In some winters, snow is plentiful. A Ladakhi friend told me that it snowed every day for two months straight last winter in Leh. Few people in the villages have cars, and public transportation to and from town is tenuous. And so one has to wonder, how do Ladakhis carry out their everyday activities when the wind is blowing and there is eight feet of snow on the ground? The simple answer is, they don't.

People in Ladakh spend the summer preparing for the winter. They use the winter months to relax and enjoy each other's company, ideally in a warm kitchen with a bowl of *thukpa* (noodle stew) and a cup of *chang* (barley beer). Vegetables grown in summer are carefully preserved and stored in cellars. Government subsidies on rice and other high-calorie staples have made the task of feeding a family through the winter less daunting. And the structured networks between individuals and families allow for a high level of security and support in the event that something urgent occurs (a birth or a death, for example).

Naturally, Ladakhis must continue to participate in some domestic tasks during the winter months. Women continue to cook. Families work together to carry water and feed the animals. But these daily duties, which are minor in comparison to the workload undertaken in the summer, leave a good deal of time for relaxation and recreation.

Although Ladakhis must work hard to sustain themselves and their families, they are generally able to devote a good deal of time to social and sporting events. A Ladakhi proverb asserts that "work without play is as tasteless as a meal without salt" (Harrer, 1978). Even in the warmer months, men take time to engage in matches of polo and archery.

Before the education boom in Leh, children were able to partake in leisure activities regularly. And, at least during school holidays, they are still able to enjoy the inactive winter days spent around the stove. Nonetheless, children are generally sent off to school during the winter months. Children therefore are not usually able to participate in the traditional winter activities. The logistics of sending a student to school every day in the winter can prove difficult, particularly if the family lives far from the school. For

some families in the very remote villages, boarding school (which can start as early as kindergarten) is the only plausible option for keeping children in school through the winter.

Children are actually the only sector of the current population that can no longer participate regularly in the winter activities. Although men are more likely to work outside the home than women, many jobs in Leh and the area that surrounds the town are dependent on the tourist presence, which is almost nonexistent in winter. Traditional craftsmen (men who weave or work with metal, for instance) generally also work less in winter, since light and heat are limited. Therefore, adult men and women do generally spend the winter days indoors, following the same pattern as generations of Ladakhis. How long this will go on, however, is unclear.

Traditionally, storytelling was the favorite winter pastime in Ladakh. The region's old and extensive catalogue of folktales provided ample opportunities for entertainment. The role of storyteller was generally reserved for one member of the social group, someone with an outstanding proclivity for creative retellings of these traditional tales (Rizvi, 1996, p. 145). Fireside tale telling was a major feature of Ladakhi social customs. Unlike many of the typical western narrative constructs, Ladakhi storytelling was interactive. Listeners, young and old, participated in the process by joining in on common refrains or familiar songs that the storyteller incorporated into the narrative (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, p. 36).

Today, families are likely to own a television and the ubiquitous rooftop satellite dish. I can't say if television has taken the place of storytelling, as I haven't seen any research on the subject, but it seems quite possible that it has become another popular

entertainment medium, well-suited for the reclusive winter months, but not designed to necessarily bring extended families and neighbors together into one living space. Certain manifestations of technology and the nuclearization of the family seem to work concurrently. In Ladakh, television is possibly functioning to change social norms and customs and to fracture once essential family bonds.

One of the more striking aspects of Ladakhi life is the ability of Ladakhis to adapt to and work with the extreme physical conditions under which they live. The people deal with the cold, dry weather, the inconsistent water sources, and the rocky terrain with ingenuity and invention. As I have said before, the concept of waste is not apparent in Ladakh. It seems that people are generally very eager to use every bit of the eggplant (including skin and stem) in the stew, or knit every scrap of wool into the socks. Helena Norberg-Hodge observes this feature of the Ladakhi lifestyle. “What cannot be eaten can be fed to the animals,” she writes, “what cannot be used as fuel can fertilize the land” (1991, p. 25). Meat is eaten only rarely, but animals prove useful in more longstanding ways. The *dzo* (a hybrid between the cow and yak) is used as a draft animal. The fields rely on the animal and his master for tilling, and the animal and his master rely on the field for food. In this way and in many others, consumption in Ladakh is quite cyclical.

A striking example of the Ladakhi ability to work with the limitations of the land has to do with human waste. Every traditional house in Ladakh, which is every house outside of Leh-town as well as many houses in it, has a latrine on the second floor. The room is small, with mounds of ash and dirt on the floor. A shovelful is put down the square hole after each use. The waste and ash fall into a small space below, where it is dried and frozen throughout the winter months. Compost toilets use no water, unlike the

flush toilets that are beginning to replace them, particularly in Leh-town, which is heavily influenced by the desire of guesthouse proprietors to please tourists (Kingsnorth, 2000, p. 38). In the houses that still use the traditional latrines, the compost is used when the winter is over. Families spread their plots with the fertilizer, thereby effectively replacing many of the nutrients that the soil lost during harvest time (Mankelow, 2008, p. 268).

The staple crop in Ladakh is barley, which is planted on about two thirds of arable land (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, p. 11). Different types of wheat are also consistently cultivated. The most common method of processing these grains is by preparing a roasted flour, which is then served in a number of different ways (Wiley, 2002, p. 1095).

Non-Traditional Education: The Impact of Mandatory Schooling in Ladakh

There are many schools in Leh. Groups of children in uniforms, starched and spiffy, march from home to school on the sandy shoulders of roads. The schools have hand-painted signboards and heavy, serious-looking gates. Many of the teachers are young. They dress mainly in non-traditional clothing. The women wear Punjabi suits or western-style dresses—fashions borrowed from somewhere else. Men wear pleated slacks with belts advertising brand names, signified by letters, trademarked acronyms sitting snugly on bellies. Capitalism on a leather loop.

In peninsular India, social mobility is a relatively new realization. In the past, colonialism and the caste system prevented people from significantly moving up or down in the highly formalized social hierarchy. Free education has changed this and has made success for the very poor possible.

People in India understand, however, that in order to succeed one must prove to be extremely capable. India is a hyperbolic culture. The idea of “genius” is becoming culturally important. It represents an ideal, a status achingly sought and desired by the nation’s youth because of the success it implies. India’s obsession with genius, specifically in an academic setting, is quickly being marketed. *Kya Aap Panchavati Pass Se Tez Hai?*, which translates literally to “are you smarter than a 5th grader?” is a popular television game show in India that juxtaposes extremely gifted (presumably “genius”) children against adults of average intelligence. The show has captured national attention. Another television quiz show, *Kid Genius*, recently finished its run. The young man who won, Subham Prakhar, has become something of a national idol. The boy is from Bihar, India’s poorest state. Prakhar is clearly on his way up, and the rest of India is watching.

I had the opportunity to watch the show *Kya Aap Panchavati Pass Se Tez Hai?* in a Ladakhi sitting room while eating a supper of instant noodle soup and mutton. The program is directed at a mainstream Indian audience. The host, a popular Bollywood actor, switches between English and Hindi. The show is designed to put everyday adults in teams with bright kids (in full-on “nerd” regalia—funky glasses, mismatched socks, high-waisted pants, and the like) that answer questions straight out of the national standardized curriculum for grades 1 through 5.

There are some major differences between the Indian idea of genius and the American one. The American genius is brilliant, erratic, socially incompetent, and largely misunderstood. The Indian genius is clever, disciplined, resourceful, entrepreneurial, and ubiquitously successful. Thus, the kids featured on *Kya Aap Panchavati Pass Se Tez Hai?* are not necessarily geniuses in the American or western

sense. They are not children who have sought out thick novels from the library or itched to research this faraway land or that exotic animal. Perhaps, most importantly, these are not children who learn for the sake of learning. Such an individual is not the Indian ideal and does not fit into the Indian “genius” construct. What is the point of being a genius if it doesn’t mean achievement on standardized tests, admittance to an exclusive university, and recruitment from a high-paying company? India is largely a material culture (Varma, 2004, p. 87). Genius is valuable but only if one knows how to use it.

Education has effectively compromised the long-standing and inflexible social hierarchy in India. Opportunity for advancement, once an unfathomable prospect, is now an important part of Indian culture. It was in 1950, when India as a free state was just emerging, that free and compulsory education was written into the constitution (Varma, 2004, p. 114). Although nearly sixty years have passed, India’s potential as a technological and industrial powerhouse, and perhaps a major world power, has only been recognized in the last decade. Just how successful India has the capacity to become as a world power and a renowned leader in business and technology is still to be determined.

In Ladakh, the social setup is also changing. In centuries past, when the region was still feudal, a few noble families wielded power and influence. It was therefore not historically “possible” to rise up in Ladakhi society (Pirie, 2007, p. 48). The vast majority of Ladakhi families lived simply. This pattern basically continued—even after feudalism was destroyed by the waves of invaders—until the 1970s. There were few differences in standards of living between households. Even today, Ladakhi Buddhist families, at least in Leh district, are not striving to outdo their neighbors. Many Ladakhis

seem vaguely apprehensive about the changing lifestyle that modernization brings. To a westerner, this might be difficult to believe. But the Buddhist philosophy, which depends on acceptance and interdependence, has deeply influenced how people view themselves and their communities.

Ladakh has a long history of education. Until recently, however, education and religion were bound tightly together, and access to an education was limited to those who were willing to devote their lives to monastic activities and who had a certain set of chromosomes. Roughly a thousand years ago, the king of Ladakh imposed a rule that each family must send at least one son to the monastery (Dawa, 1999). Parents generally brought their youngest son to the monastery before he reached the age of ten (Childs, 2003). Formalized education was thus part of the Ladakhi tradition, but it was largely contained within the walls of the monastic institution. Farmers and herders had little need for the esoteric Buddhist scriptures that the monks spent their lives studying. When secular people did desire clarification on some aspect of the Buddhist philosophy, they sought it. They went to the monastery and asked a monk. This went on for centuries.

A little more than one hundred years ago, “modern” education came to Ladakh by way of A. H. Francke and the Moravian Mission School (Bray, 2005). Fifty years or so after the Mission School was established, India won its independence and the new nation instituted a push for rural education. National, standardized, and compulsory education is written into the Indian constitution, but it took decades to actually build and establish schools nationally. Ladakh, as a rural enclave that does not participate in many of the fundamental aspects of mainstream Indian culture, namely the Hindi language and the Hindu religion, was among the last regions to experience the government’s attempt to

bring education to all. Today, schools are everywhere in Ladakh. There are nearly 300 schools in the region according to a 1995 study (Dawa, 1999). Some are funded by the state, others by the central government. Nearly every Ladakhi village has at least a primary school, and larger towns have middle and secondary schools as well.

Most children in Ladakh attend school, and many are the first generation in their families to do so. Parents and elders remain largely illiterate (Dawa, 1999). Children in Ladakh, as is the case in many communities in India, are strongly encouraged to succeed in the classroom. Some researchers (Dawa, 1999; Hay, 1997; Norberg-Hodge, 1991) actually believe that such an attitude has the potential to be damaging to the child, the family, and the community as a whole. Norberg-Hodge argues that the age differentiation within the school ruptures the once harmonious social network that transcended a child's age or maturity level (1991). The interpersonal connections between children, which once existed despite obvious differences in age and experience, have become predetermined by class-group stratification. Hay brings up the point that modern education increases a woman's workload. Since populations are growing and parents are opting to have more children, women are already obligated to cultivate larger plots of land and spend more time in the kitchen. And with no help from her school-aged children, such a responsibility might prove overwhelming (1997). Finally, Dawa questions the practicality of modern education in pastoral Ladakh (1999). With few jobs in the government sector and an ever-increasing pool of qualified, educated applicants, Ladakhi youngsters are forced to either leave their homes and seek work elsewhere, or begin their education all over again—this time focusing on agriculture, herding,

metalwork, or construction, all skills that can be learned in a traditional Ladakhi childhood.

Despite scholarly doubts, the education system in Ladakh is thriving, at least in quantity. Government and private schools abound around Leh-town. It is clear that people in Ladakh have generally embraced modern education. Their support is apparent in the fact that most children in Ladakh today go to school. Moreover, it seems as though parents are equally enthusiastic to send boys and girls to school. The scholar Srinivas observed “no discrimination between male and female children about being sent to school” (1998, p.59). The researcher goes on to say, however, that a higher percentage of men go on to work outside the home.

All schools in Leh are English medium but offer classes in Urdu, Hindi, and Tibetan. Government schools have fewer teachers. They can be quite disorganized and often lack adequate funding. The quality of government schools can sometimes vary quite significantly. Since school districts do not exist, and parents can choose the area government school that they believe best suits their children’s needs, many children travel long distances from home to classroom. Parents also have the option of sending their children to boarding school. Government boarding schools such as J & K, located just outside Leh town, are considered quite reputable but require that students pass an entrance exam.

The government school system in Leh, and many other parts of India, is fraught with bureaucratic inconsistencies and abuses. Teacher appointments often have more to do with social contacts than with qualifications (Dawa, 1999). Resource allocation is also generally unfair. The locations of new government schools are governed not by the

need of or concern for a given community, but rather by political pressures and alliances between people in power.

Although most children in Ladakh attend school, the majority of students actually do not pass national matriculation exams. Passing the matriculation exam is a comparable achievement to earning a high school diploma. According to Mellor, 91% of students in Leh district government schools fail these exams (2001, p. 27). This statistic seems extremely high. It is likely to include all students, including those that attend school only sporadically, but the percentage is still daunting. There are numerous theories as to why it is so. The most basic and most plausible reasoning is that the difficulties Ladakhi students face, such as a language barrier, long commutes, and understaffed schools, negatively impact the quality of education they receive.

When students fail the matriculation tests, they typically begin to realize that a lot is at stake in the educational process. When children go to school, they are effectively passing up the traditional lifestyle (Mellor, 2001, p. 31). Where does this leave them when, late in adolescence, they are unable to pass their matriculation exams? Students in this situation might feel that they have given up on one world, that is, the world of their parents, and failed at the other, that is, school.

Children that attend private schools generally score higher on the matriculation exams. Private schools, which mysteriously sometimes contain the word “public” in their names, are considered more desirable than government schools. They are generally better organized and are more able to pay teachers a fair wage. All private schools around Leh are roughly the same price—between 400 and 500 rupees a month. Although private schools may have superior resources to government schools, both must follow the

standardized curriculum and, therefore, students learn essentially the same subjects from the same books. Students in private schools are presumably receiving more comprehensive instruction and individual attention, however. Private school administrators are quick to emphasize that children in their schools are generally more successful on standardized tests, such as the matriculation exams, than students in government schools (Dawa, 1999). This simple distinction is extremely attractive to parents who want their children to succeed, and who have been told that education is the only way to achieve this perception of success.

In addition to the standardized curriculum, some private schools offer extracurricular opportunities to learn and interact with peers in a non-academic environment. Computer literacy classes, music lessons, and sports teams are popular. More children attend government schools in Leh, but there is actually a larger number of private schools in the district. As Leh is beginning to follow the rest of India into its educational obsession, parents are allocating a large amount of their income to tutors and extra educational resources for their children.

Perhaps because of the pervading standardized curriculum, there is little room for intellectual philosophizing in the Ladakhi—or the Indian—classroom, whether the school is public or private. Children learn by rote. The classes are highly structured. Teachers do not discuss, they lecture. The schools I visited in Leh, like many schools in developing areas in the post-colonial era, vaguely resemble British schools from the early 20th century. The lessons are formal, the teachers are generally very strict, and the children are submissive. This setup forms a contrast between the education Ladakhi children once received from their parents. Although the basic structure of instruction

remains similar—that is, the teacher or parent is the one who informs, while the student or child is the one who listens—the tone has changed significantly. When it was parents that acted as teachers, in addition to discipline and knowledge, they provided affection and emotional support to their children. In the modern education system, the distance between teacher and child has increased considerably, in an emotional sense as well as a physical one. Furthermore, because of the teacher's very existence, the distance between parent and child has increased as well.

Leh has two colleges, both of which are funded by the government. In the Indian system, colleges are what Americans might call community colleges—the diploma is generally earned in two years and is often supplemented later by a more advanced degree. Many of the young people I met had traveled north to pursue a university education. A few had gone to Jammu, many to Delhi. But those who leave Ladakh and earn a university degree rarely return to live out the duration of their lives there. There are relatively few jobs in the region and a high volume of qualified, well-educated young people.

Education is a powerful thing. Despite or perhaps because of the fact that mature women are struggling to run the household with little or no help from their school-going children, illiterate women often lament their lack of education and encourage young women to pursue their studies, even if it means leaving the home (Chin, Dye & Lee, 2008, p. 229). Some women believe that modern education in Ladakh will help usher in a system of equality between genders (Hay, 1997). As mentioned before, this is not the case for the present generation. Mothers today are dealing with a larger workload. But

what will happen when the educated young adults begin to marry and raise children? It is not an easy thing to predict.

One major result of the modern education system is the inherent hierarchy that develops between the educated and the uneducated. This division occurs often in families where parents are illiterate but choose to send their children to school (Hay, 1997). The outcomes of such a situation can be unfortunate. The simple difference that divides these two groups becomes much more significant as the years wear on, and the children spend each day learning, listening, reading and writing in a classroom while the parents labor in the field. Because of the nature of the education Ladakhi children are exposed to in school, the difference between modern children and their parents is not just about education and lack of education, but rather about who is modern and who is traditional, or who looks at issues through the national or international lens and who sees things from a local perspective. The distribution of power within a household with illiterate parents and literate children is altered. Education has, in this way, entered the home and disrupted the traditional hierarchy in it.

Ladakhi children and adolescents are exposed to a decidedly difficult range of cultural cues. The modern, western-style education system further complicates an already complex relationship with the west. Mellor and Norberg-Hodge have both explored the issue of Ladakhi self-image. Both researchers agree that the image is conflicted. Mellor records a kind of conceptual pride in being Ladakhi, but a sense of shame and self-consciousness due to a less comprehensive education and a “perceived lack of material possessions” (Mellor, 2001, p. 31). Norberg-Hodge focuses on the physical distance that the school puts between the child and the home and worries that as the child becomes

more and more detached from his family and their way of living, he will grow to resent and feel ashamed of them (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, p. 111).

Perhaps because of the high volume of visitors from the west, namely researchers, tourists, and trekkers, Ladakhis, particularly those that live in Leh district, are often quite used to being complimented on their culture. Many of the foreigners that visit seem to covet the Ladakhi lifestyle, and they make their admiration clear by verbally lamenting the deficits of western culture and fetishizing and idealizing the Ladakhi way of life. However, tourists rarely get the chance to actually participate in the lifestyle they so admire, and thus their judgment of the culture is superficial. I'm sure that I was guilty of this, to some degree. But I was certainly not the first.

Students in Ladakh are both marginalized and empowered by their education. Faced with culturally inappropriate learning materials and in many instances unqualified instructors, Ladakhi children may in fact not be receiving a quality education, particularly in the wider context of India which has a diverse and growing range of educational opportunities. Yet in their homes, Ladakhi children attending school are expected and perhaps even needed to carry out basic functions having to do with modernity. Children in school are quite able to navigate their ways around a phone bill or a DVD player instruction manual, and are also generally much better equipped to speak English, a major feature of the education system in an increasingly globalized world. In these ways, children in Ladakh are becoming an indispensable part of the household, without participating fully in its workings. Ladakhi children no longer work the fields and prepare the meals in the ways they did before schools were widely established; yet they have carved out a productive place for themselves in their natal homes.

Monastic Culture in Ladakh

The monastery is a spiritual center of a community. The buildings themselves are generally impressive and highly organized, with sections and levels delineated for specific people, activities, and times of the year. The older monasteries, built before the 13th century, are spread out in valleys, with the long, lazy limbs of buildings embellished and added on to over time. A series of Islamic invasions compromised this style of design which was highly vulnerable to the attackers. Buddhist monasteries constructed after the year 1300 were vertical and angular, built atop cliffs, and fortified with thick stone walls.

Although modernization is typically believed to reduce the religious fervor of a traditional culture, Buddhism, at least from what I understand about it, is not fervent. Buddhists generally seem to value reflection on and consideration of their faith over ecstatic or evangelical declaration of it. Buddhism remains a strong presence in Ladakh. There is still a monastery in, or at least associated with, nearly every village in the region (Hay, 1997). Many scholars of Buddhism make the distinction that Buddhism is a philosophy, rather than a religion. Its proponents seem to enjoy a personal connection to the philosophy and to the experience of meditation.

The monastery is a sacred space, but it is also a living space—swollen with ritual and ceremony. In a sense, the monastery represents an expanded version of a Ladakhi household. Like the home, the monastery is an organized complex with gardens, fields, social spaces, and specific customs that correspond with certain days. The monastery and

the household are co-dependent. Since they rely on one another to structure membership and resource allocation, the monastery and the home are linked in a unique way.

Ladakh's Buddhist monasteries are generally quite well-maintained. The walls of the *gompas* are decorated with bright paintings of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. Some of these paintings are sumptuous enough (and old enough) to have attracted the attention of art historians and members of the Archeological Survey of India. Despite the scholarly attention that many Ladakhi monasteries seem to attract, Ladakhis still use the monasteries as centers of spiritual meditation and exploration. People turn to the *lamas* in times of uncertainty, and spend time in the monasteries participating in simple Buddhist rituals such as circumambulation and meditation.

Monasteries do not exist simply to fulfill the spiritual needs of the community. Like almost every institution in traditional Ladakhi culture, the monastery is part of a wider web of interconnected and interdependent resources. The monastery institution serves many functions. Monasteries often own a significant amount of land. Some farmers maintain a plot on the monastery's property. By doing this, farmers are able to take a portion of the monastery's annual yield and help with general agricultural upkeep of the monastery.

Historically, monasteries, along with polyandry, functioned to control and limit the region's population. If a family found itself with a surplus of sons, parents had the option of encouraging one or more to become a monk. This was presumably never an easy choice and not one that families took lightly. But, in the name of practicality, it was an option that prevented anyone from going hungry (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). Monasteries offer any man a place to rest and a place to eat, should he choose to commit

himself to a life of celibacy and spiritual reflection. Women are not so lucky. Very recently, a convent that offers comparable comforts and opportunities to the larger monasteries has opened in Dharamsala. But this facility contrasts sharply with the few other convents that do exist in the region, which are generally under-funded and under-represented. Most female monastics, usually the family's youngest daughter, remain in the natal home and work essentially as domestic servants. They lack the training and community inherent in the formalized monastic setting. According to the 1971 census, there were between 15,000 and 17,000 monks and only around 100 nuns living in monasteries and convents, respectively, in Ladakh (Harrer, 1978).

Women occupy a complicated role in Buddhist monastic life. Their role in the home is equally complex, as I have expressed in a number of different contexts, and is also related to the Buddhist philosophy. Like most religions, one of Buddhism's primary goals is to bring order to everyday life. To do this, the unusual and the uncontrolled must be harnessed. Females are believed to be unpredictable. Buddhism, particularly when it is not tainted with tantric influences, seeks predictability. Miller (1978) notes that the Tibetan Buddhists she interviewed in her study generally favored the virtues of patience and rationality in women (p. 379). And the tasks women are expected to perform each day attest to this value system. Because the monastery system does little to include or exalt women, it is, in effect, keeping their power in check by limiting their relevance outside the home and preserving their places in the field and kitchen.

The life of a young monk is, presumably, quite fulfilling. Monasteries have resources that most households do not. Monks have always had the opportunity to learn to read the fluid and fine contours of Tibetan script called *bodyik* (Mellor, 2001, p. 5).

They also can choose a craft, such as *thangka* painting, and apprentice themselves to the established craftsmen of the monastery. Monks are awarded respect from the community. They are also able to travel around the region. Although a monk usually keeps a bed and room at his home monastery, he is free to move from village to village, performing birth and death rites and leading sowing and harvest ceremonies.

At various points in the year, monasteries play host to major festivals and events. These gatherings mark significant parts of the calendar year. They also reflect and respond to pivotal Buddhist teachings. The *cham* dance, a yearly event that engages nearly every member of the monastery and represents the basic teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism, ceremoniously depicts the ultimate Buddhist triumph—the decimation and death of the ego (Norberg-Hodge, 1991).

Buddhist worship is inherently active. One has only to watch a monk or nun performing prostrations to realize this. In order to fully engage the mind in a spiritual activity, Buddhists believe that one must first engage the body. What else but the hand can keep the prayer wheels in motion? What else but the feet can carry a person while they circumambulate a *stupa*? The physical facet of Buddhist culture fits in nicely with Ladakhi culture. For Ladakhis, *life* is inherently active.

People seem to assume that Buddhism and modernity are incompatible. Yet Buddhism, unlike most other world religions, is quite dynamic. There is no central text in Buddhism, and thus nothing holding it firmly in the language and issues of a “traditional” ancient past. The issues that Buddhist texts do tackle—that is, attachment, fulfillment, dualism and desire—are still relevant today. It is no secret that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a great scholar of science and a proponent of progress. One must

wonder why, then, is it that scholars such as Norberg Hodge (1991, p. 128) predict that the Ladakhi monastic system will become obsolete?

Formal Buddhist practice does not exist only in the monastic setting. Most homes have small chapels where family members pray and meditate. The home itself can be a place charged with spiritual intensity. Buddhist iconography abounds in the decoration of the home, whether expressed in patterns hammered on the stove (Clarke, 1999), or a framed color photograph of the Dalai Lama hanging on the kitchen wall.

During my time in Ladakh, I stayed with the Miskit family, which was made up of a former monk, his two sister-wives, and their six adult children (all of whom had moved away, but three of whom had returned for the summer holidays). The man, Edi, who was quite old and worked long days at a shop he owned in Leh town, would wake up at 4:00 AM every morning to bless each room of the house. Although he had, due to circumstances beyond his control, relinquished the religious life in Tibet and lived out a successful secular one, Edi maintained a kind of relaxed religiosity. I once sat in his kitchen as he recited the 108 repetitions of “*Om Mani Padme Hum*”—Hail, the Jewel in the Lotus—as his fingers traveled around the circle of prayer beads in his lap. Feigning exhaustion and miming lack of breath, Edi smiled throughout the whole proceedings. And when he finished, he nodded and slipped back into the conversation (broken by misunderstanding and an extraordinary language barrier) that we had begun before his 108 prayers.

Buddhists in Ladakh are part of the Vajrayana school, which began in 11th century Tibet, Buddhist Ladakh’s spiritual ally. The school, which borrowed from tantric texts, added an element of mysticism, which worked in harmony with the indigenous Bon

religion. Over the centuries, Buddhism has proved to be a largely inclusive religion, as it successfully “absorbed” and tolerated aspects of other religions that did not threaten its fundamental center (Rizvi, 1996, p. 207).

At its core, Buddhism is an essentially and enthusiastically intellectual philosophy. Tantrism breathes life into the old, sober texts and teachings. Tantric teachings, which function both to challenge and to strengthen original Buddhist texts, are inherently harrowing and messy and interesting. I am not a scholar of Buddhism. But I think that the essential paradox in Vajrayana Buddhism, the struggle between order and chaos, non-dualism and dualism, is quietly present in the Ladakhi households and not just the fortified hilltop temples.

Buddhism informs the Ladakhi experience. Although my knowledge of Buddhism is not extensive, what I do know about the philosophy has helped me to understand the social and cultural topography of the Ladakhi community. Buddhists discipline themselves to avoid attachment. In a superficial sense, the result of such a value system might mean that Buddhists accrue less stuff. This, at least from what I observed in Ladakh, is often true, but the important part of devaluing attachment has nothing to do with material goods.

The Buddhist tendency to accept the vicissitudes of life, even at their most difficult, is remarkable to the western sensibility. Because of the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, people are less attached to life and its trappings. Death is not viewed as a necessarily grim and tragic event, but rather as a part of life’s eternal cycle, one spoke on a large wheel (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). Life’s foibles are generally something to laugh at rather than to bemoan. Ladakhis rarely argue. They seldom get angry, or annoyed, and

they rarely feel as though someone has wronged them. There are few petty disagreements. Neighbors hold grudges infrequently. Physical fighting is extremely uncommon. Ladakhis are able to maintain this peaceful lifestyle because they are inherently accepting of the circumstances under which they live.

Ladakhis, and presumably most every other Buddhist community, are not attached to their own interests, their own preferences, or their own comfort enough to disrupt the well-being of the group. This is not a quietly oppressive social construct, built to benefit the upper reaches of society. In Ladakh, these upper reaches don't really even exist. The Ladakhi value system simply represents an extremely different way of looking at the world—a way that westerners might find perplexing. To live in Ladakh as traditional Ladakhis lived and continue to live is to experience life with minimal interference with the ego.

As I have mentioned before, Ladakh and Tibet were historically linked by religion and other common aspects of culture and topography. Since the demise of Tibet as an independent nation, the Ladakhi monastic system has learned to exist without the support and guidance from their Tibetan brothers (Rizvi, 1996). But, even more than the loss of their eastern neighbor, Ladakhi monasteries are grappling with the modernization process. The word “modern” seems to be a euphemism for the word “secular.” As education is becoming more and more common, religiosity is receding. No longer is the monastery the only place that a child can receive formal instruction.

Although Buddhism is the most common religion in the Leh district, it is by no means the only religious philosophy in the region. A small group of converted Christian families (presumably from the Moravian mission in the late 1800s) remains in Leh.

There are few Muslims around Leh town, but the number is growing. Furthermore, in Kargil, which is in the western part of Ladakh, the population is predominantly Muslim. Muslims are very much a part of Ladakhi culture, and their influence on the Buddhist population is visible. According to Norberg-Hodge (1991), the two groups lived in harmony in the past. However, problems have arisen over the last twenty years or so. In 1989, four people were shot and killed by the Leh police. This number may sound small, but due to the ubiquitously peaceful nature of Ladakh's people, it was a shock. The event was not taken lightly. A major social boycott followed, which lasted three years, ending only in 1992 (Pinault, 1999, p. 296).

In my time in Ladakh, I was able to visit a number of monasteries. Tabo monastery is located in the Spiti Valley, just south of the border between Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. The building itself contains important examples of 10th century painting and architecture. Although the things that Tabo reveals about the past are a major part of its importance, the monastery's significance extends into the present day. It is among the oldest functioning monasteries in the Himalayan region.

Meditation meetings were scattered throughout the day at Tabo and presumably at most every other monastery. Perhaps to discourage outsiders, visitors are welcome only at the earliest meeting, which begins at 5:00 AM. I awoke before dawn, and walked with three of my colleagues to the small modern temple. The doors were locked, and I sat quietly, shoulders tensed in the cold air, waiting for someone to come. The monks came slowly, stiffly, with eyes downcast. We followed them into the pleasant room, decorated in the strident colors of a *thangka* painting—crimson, yellow, emerald green and sapphire blue.

Prayer and meditation activities are conducted in a highly formalized manner. The seating arrangement at any prayer or meditation meeting is deliberate and inflexible. The *gelong*, or prayer leader, sits at the front of the room. Closest to him sit the high-ranking monks, usually cloaked in yellow robes to connate their mastery of the core texts of Vajrayana Buddhism. The novice monks sit by the windows, around the room's perimeter. There were no child monks at this meeting, though child monks are usually very visible in the monastic setting. The prayer leader at Tabo chanted continuously for nearly two hours. Some passages were call-and-response. Others were chanted or sung simultaneously. The sounds that the monks emitted from their lungs, throats, and mouths were low, guttural, full of breath, phlegm, and saliva. Their voices revealed the residue of sleep. At roughly 7:00 AM, when the sun had risen and the town was beginning to move, a young monk with a large kettle moved around the room, filling small cups. Meditation time was over. The day was about to begin.

Gender, Age, and Power in the Ladakhi Home

Men, women, children. The roles prescribed to each group are various in Ladakh. This is true in any society. Issues of class and financial position, in concert with age and gender, often dictate the opportunities of the individual. In Ladakh, where the middle class makes up the population's majority, the ways in which power is divvied up and determined are slightly different than what one might expect. Age, as exhibited beautifully in the *dral-go* configuration, is a major determiner of authority and influence. Moreover, the dynamic within a specific family has an impact on how the identity of each of its members is constructed.

As mentioned earlier, birth order was traditionally an important signifier of authority and opportunity. To some extent, it seems like this is still true today. The oldest son is most likely to inherit family property, and the oldest daughter is the most likely to leave her natal home for a marriage contract. The oldest daughter, however, is also the least likely child to get an education (Hay, 1997, p.104), since mothers rely on children, and daughters in particular, to help with housework and farming. The eldest female is also usually denied the chance to pursue an education because she is expected to marry and, for this reason, is believed to be more in need of domestic and agricultural training than a western-style education.

Although social mobility is not a common feature of Ladakhi culture, a person's position in society is not static throughout his or her lifetime. An individual's age and the circumstances that usually surround a certain age are very important in determining his or her role in the household. Therefore, social mobility is not so much a choice in but rather a feature of the typical Ladakhi life. The status and expectations associated with an adolescent girl living in her natal home changes dramatically when, in her twenties, she moves into her new husband's household to become part of a virilocal marriage. This woman's status will change again if and when she conceives and gives birth to a child.

Life in Ladakh is governed by periods of work and periods of rest. The harsh climate and highly organized social networks provide structure to days and years. Different parts of a person's life are accompanied by different expectations. Not surprisingly, young children are encouraged to rest and play. New mothers and the elderly also enjoy a lighter workload. Older children and new brides adjust to a more

demanding set of expectations. It is clear that age and gender define an individual's responsibilities in the household.

The Ladakhi life is choreographed, but the prescribed movements are fluid and flexible. The researchers I have come to respect and admire most acknowledge this repeatedly, making it clear that although certain steps in the dance may be typical, there is ample room for improvisation.

One major feature of contemporary life in Ladakh is the shift of roles within the family. As more men seek work outside the household and children attend school, women are becoming increasingly connected to the home. This recent pattern has the capacity to change since many girls and female adolescents today are educated and may therefore work outside the home as well.

In the traditional separation of labor, gender played a nominal role. A person's status in the household and his or her age were more the determining factors in the power an individual wielded and the work an individual was expected to carry out. Gender roles, therefore, were quite fluid in the past. There were a few activities, however, that were reserved for men. These responsibilities included ploughing fields, felling trees, and slaughtering animals (Hay, 1996, p. 11). Most activities required the effort of both men and women. The traditional Ladakhi home, in order to operate fruitfully, had to be an environment of flexibility and cooperation (Bhasin, 2004, p. 244).

Now that most men work outside the home, gender does matter in the breakdown of household and agricultural labor. That is, women do most all of it. As seems to be the case in most developing countries, men in Ladakh have embraced the opportunities that a cash economy offers. Women have remained in the home, continuing to do the chores

they have done since childhood and taking on much of the work they once relied on the men of the household to do.

Many researchers believe that women in Ladakh enjoy a relatively high social status, both currently and in the past. According to Bhasin (2004, p. 237), a society generally values women more when they contribute substantially to subsistence activities. Ladakhi women are responsible for nearly all agricultural tasks, and many researchers have stated that women in the region have a high status because of their indispensability as workers.

Although women in Ladakh were traditionally quite mobile and respected, the Buddhist belief is that women are inherently inferior to men. In fact, the common term for woman in the Tibetan language is *skye-dman*, which literally translates to “low birth” (Ahmed, 2002, p. 95). Thus, females in the household (adults and children alike) are not considered to be equal to men, even if they are considered worthy of respect and appreciation. In a very practical sense, women are valued. According to the subjects of Hay’s study, daughters are generally viewed as being more helpful than sons (1997, p. 120). Girls are economically valuable since they participate in various tasks around the house and in the fields, and have also traditionally acted as caregivers to their younger siblings (Bhasin, 2004, p. 240).

Women in modern Ladakh are expected to work hard. In both families I grew to know, the women were responsible for feeding their families, not in the sense that they were expected to cook and take care of table settings, but in the sense that they worked the land, using the very short planting season to sustain their families through the winter.

They were also expected to prepare every meal—without the help of convenience foods, running water, or refrigeration.

Particularly in present-day Ladakh, the house is considered to be the women's domain. While men distance themselves from the home and its workings, it seems that in general women remain in the home and garden throughout their workday. Women do socialize with friends and neighbors that live nearby. However, it is rare that a chore would take them far outside the village.

Although research implies that the Ladakhi family is drifting apart, the typical Ladakhi home remains a lively place. In both the homes in which I spent time, I found that I was almost constantly in the presence of others. Solitude, I began to realize, is an undesirable circumstance in Ladakh. Even in times of meditation and prayer, people seem to prefer communal spaces to private ones. Family members appear to tolerate, humor, and enjoy each other. Men, women, and children seem to accept the roles that modern society has prescribed. However, as the younger generation ages, it is clear that the current social order will be disrupted. How such an upheaval will be handled is not yet known. But the flexibility and fluidity of the Ladakhi family unit, as demonstrated in the past, will likely accommodate another shift in structure.

Putting Ladakh in Context: Experiences in North India

Although I spent most of my time in India in Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh, I traveled for two weeks around Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi, an area which forms a part of what is referred to as “north India”, though Ladakh is actually farther north than these states. My experience in north India served as an important foil to what I

had seen, heard, and studied in Ladakh. It was because of the time I spent in north India that I was able to place these observations I had made in Ladakh in a wider (though still specifically Indian) context. Perhaps the most important difference between my experiences in these two regions is the fact that in Ladakh, I interacted with people in the home setting, whereas in north India, I was rarely invited into living spaces, and therefore dealt with people almost exclusively in public.

In my time in north India, I interacted with women very rarely. This was jarring. I expected the rickshaw drivers and snake charmers to be male. I wasn't surprised to find that the shamans administering *pooja* or the self-designated "guides" who loitered outside of major monuments were men. But I was surprised that the shopkeepers were almost invariably male, and that it was men who were running the markets. The rare businesswoman was usually a bangle seller. There were also often clusters of old women selling chard, turnips, and onions on the market's periphery. But men sold the dried apricots. Men sold the fabric. It was always a man with whom I dealt when haggling over a pair of silver earrings or a string of beads. It was a man who led me to my room in a guesthouse, cashed my traveler's cheques under the yellow *Western Union* signboard, prepared and served my *aloo mutter*, my rice and *dal*, my *pekoras*.

Because I never entered a north Indian home, my opportunities to converse with women were infrequent. This was unnerving, to say the least. But it also helped me to understand (at least in part) just how severe the separation of labor is in north India. Women do not participate in city life—or if they do, their participation is not visible. Instead, they are observers and supporters. Women are present as shoppers in the marketplace or passengers on mopeds. But they are rarely fruitsellers. They are rarely

chaiwallahs. I never saw a female member of the military or police force. The women who are ever-present on a Delhi street are not there by choice. They are beggars and prostitutes.

Men and women appear to live very separate lives in north India. This much I understood. But where were the women? Why did they seem to avoid prolonged exposure to public spaces? Because of the infrequency of the presence of females, men were surprised and provoked by my very being there. I was sometimes startled to realize that I was the only woman on a busy street. It was difficult to retain control in my interactions with men, particularly since I was unfamiliar with the signals that body language conveys in this culture. I was told that direct eye contact could be interpreted as a sexual invitation. I struggled to keep my eyes low and my body slightly turned when asking for directions or buying pills at the chemist.

Men on the street, in the train stations, and in the market did not just stare. They seemed to dissect my body, taking in all of its parts with eyes that moved efficiently over the body's details, sections, and contours. I often noticed the younger and wealthier men snapping photos of me with their camera phones. At first I rationalized the stares, hisses, and snaps. I chalked it up to the western media's depiction of women. I thought of the popular films and television shows. How succulent the women are! All oiled legs and foiled hair. They seem to invite consumption of one kind or another. And although I dressed modestly—I covered my limbs, plaited my hair, and draped the *dupatta* around my shoulders despite the unfathomable heat—I could not change the features that revealed my connection to these women on billboards and cinema screens. My skin color evoked associations with the highly sexualized movie stars, recording artists, and

socialites of the west that seem to saturate (and fascinate) the global media. I suppose that, at least to some degree, I excused these men—blaming their blatant interest in me and my body on my own culture’s tendency to tantalize on billboards, in films, and in music videos, using the female form.

I found it easy to assume that the way men treated me had more to do with my westernness than with my femaleness. I thought of myself as an exotic “other” from a culture that was both intriguing and provocative. But my status as a western woman was more complex than that, as it turns out. In the beginning of my time in India, I found myself all too willing to fault my own culture for the disrespect many men directed toward me. I learned quickly that this is a naïve and self-centered perspective. Inequality between the sexes is nothing new in India. I began to understand how intense the power imbalance actually is when it became clear how little social power (at least in the public sphere) women in north India seem to have.

In many cases, it is only the women who truly must work outside the home that do. There are exceptions to this, particularly for educated upper-middle and upper class women. But the majority of female workers are not in this situation. I saw women working on the road or on a construction site. Some were migrant workers, from the south, swathed in saris with wide bowls of concrete on their heads. They hoisted large rocks on their shoulders or hammered boulders into gravel in the ditches by the roadsides. They breathed through the corners of their saris. Because separate childcare is not an option, their toddlers played around the worksites. It is not uncommon to see a woman working with a baby strapped to her back, a handkerchief stretched over the infant’s cheeks and mouth to filter out the filth associated with hard labor.

According to tradition in both north India and Ladakh, girls stay with their parents and siblings until reaching the age deemed proper to marry. After a match has been arranged, they enter the home of their husbands' parents. Generally, women who have husbands to support them financially are considered fortunate. But wives that remain within the home are rarely idle. In a virilocal marriage, the work that brides do and the environment they do it in is often daunting (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). The dynamic in a virilocal home is a difficult one for the bride to navigate, and she is often forced to work hard under the mother-in-law's brutally critical eye.

Marriage and family are complex institutions everywhere, and India is no exception. Few cultures see the clash and reconciliation of the traditional and the modern in quite the same way. The popularity of arranged marriages has endured—despite the idealization of romantic love in popular Bollywood and western films. Most of the young married people I met had chosen to allow their parents to find marriage matches. And yet, with the ever-increasing opportunities for education and an expanding middle class, more and more women are well-educated. This is changing the dynamic in the middle-class home. It is unclear whether or not education has changed the power structure of a lower-class union.

Dheeraj-ji was a great friend and remains an enthusiastic correspondent. He was married over a decade ago to a woman he hardly knew. Although Dheeraj-ji is apprehensive of many aspects of his own culture, he does not regret the marriage his parents arranged for him. He has grown to love and respect his wife, Shelley, and lives with her in his parents' New Delhi home. The tradition of virilocality, in which a newly

married couple lives in the home of the husband's parents, is seemingly prominent in many parts of India.

The couple has opted to forgo raising children, at least for the time being. This has caused a great deal of anger and misunderstanding in their respective families. Members of the extended family have publicly recommended infertility specialists, consistently meddled in private matters, and chastised the couple for failing to uphold their "duty." Their reason for postponing or forgoing reproduction was so that Shelley could study for her M.B.A. and pursue a high-paying career. When I spoke with him, Dheeraj was wholly supportive of this goal, although he himself lacked any educational credentials to speak of. He faults his parents' lax attitude toward education for this. But he showed no resentment or discomfort telling me that his wife would do better on the exams than he, and that she had a better chance of finding a good job than he could ever hope to. This willingness to subvert the familiar economic structure of the north Indian household, yet to maintain the physical virilocal setup, is both progressive and puzzling. I suppose these words could be used to describe 21st century Indian culture in general.

India has more street kids than any other place I have seen. It's unnerving and uncomfortable to the western sensibility. Even more difficult to digest is the widely known fact that children who beg do not actually keep what they earn on the street. The most heavily trafficked areas of Delhi, Jaipur, and other cities are "owned" by men who claim the majority of each beggar's profits. This system, in which beggar pimps literally take money from children, is widely frowned upon. But no adequate action has been taken to destroy it. At stoplights, the beggars rush the windows. Pity cases. Women with babies. Children with hair matted and hands clapping. I watched a choreographed

circus routine with hula hoops and hand cymbals and two little girls with pretty, expectant faces.

There were few beggars in Ladakh. This is the case for a number of reasons, perhaps the most obvious one being that if a person does not have adequate housing, he would not survive the winter. But there are other reasons as well. People in Ladakh take care of each other in a way that is comprehensive and complete. Ladakhis seem to feel a significant responsibility to help their families and neighbors.

It seems incongruous or antithetical that Ladakhi Buddhists would follow the primary Buddhist teachings that discourage attachment to things and people. The social structure of the Ladakhi village, the *phaspun*, seems to be completely dependent on interrelationships, interdependence, and interpersonal connections and attachments. Ladakhi society, in a sense, depends on attachment to function. But the *phaspun* has a practical aspect that cannot be overlooked. The *phaspun* looks after its members during times of crisis. It divvies up and redistributes food when someone runs out. It oversees the running of funerals. The *phaspun* is undeniably sustained in part by interpersonal feelings like care and responsibility, but it seems to have as its root, as its primary function, the issue of survival in this cold and desolate place on the world's rooftop.

Observations in a Ladakhi Home: The Miskit Family

I arrived at the Miskit household while still recovering from a bout of acute mountain sickness. All of the Ladakhis I knew were gracious hosts, and the Miskits were no exception. I expressed only a vague impression of my condition, but they insisted that I rest for part of the day and were somewhat understanding when I could not clean my

plate at mealtimes. I had spent the previous days in bed at a guesthouse in town. I was anxious to spend time outdoors and begin to explore the villages outside Leh.

The Miskit home is in the village of Ganglas, barely fifteen kilometers outside Leh-town. But it feels far removed from the town's active streets and expensive shops. Like most villages in Ladakh, Ganglas is in a valley, where irrigation channels flow abundantly to color the rocky soil green. The village is simply a small collection of houses and gardens, with a modest Buddhist temple on the crest of a hill overlooking the patchwork configuration of buildings and fields.

The houses are connected by way of a system of well-worn paths. In the last ten years or so, the telephone wire has become part of the landscape. Interestingly, the phone only functions locally. People can only call neighbors from their home phones, not their far-flung adult children, like Rinchen, one of the oldest children in the Miskit family.

Rinchen is in her mid-twenties. She has lived in Delhi for a number of years—first moving out of Ladakh to pursue higher education. She speaks English very well. She also speaks French fluently, as she works for the French Embassy in Delhi. When I met her, she was spending her summer holiday in Ladakh with her family, as she did every summer. Because she was visiting during the temperate season, the family's workload was very high. Rinchen participated in the agricultural and domestic activities with no complaint.

Rinchen is the product of a father and two mothers—sisters, married to the same man. Polygamy is not a common marriage structure in Ladakh, but it is becoming more so in recent years. Although Hay (1997) reports that polygamy is considered “shameful” to most Ladakhis (p. 93), presumably because of the concern regarding population

control, the family seemed quite in harmony with one another and with their neighbors. The marriage construct in Ladakh allows for a good deal of flexibility (Rizvi, 1996, p. 117) and seems to be concerned with what works best in a particular situation, rather than what is “normal.” The most common, and most accepted, reason for polygamous unions to form is if a wife is barren. Traditionally, a second wife (usually the sister of the first) is not brought into the marriage until the first wife has exhausted all methods of conception. Methods believed to aid in conception are somewhat surprising. Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994) write that a sterile woman must go on pilgrimage, walking in many cases for weeks on end to visit various Buddhist shrines and temples, presumably in an attempt to please the powers-that-be and improve her fertility by doing so.

The Miskit wives are, in fact, sisters, but neither was unable to bear children. When I cautiously asked Rinchen how this arrangement was arrived at, she seemed unfazed and eager to explain. The first wife, Rinchen’s biological mother, simply felt overwhelmed by the work involved with taking care of a big house and field and asked her husband if her sister could come to their home to help and live permanently. The two women proceeded to share the work of the field and the household, share the burden and fulfillment of childrearing, and share the husband. Both women have given birth to children by Edi, their common husband. Between them, there are six children in the family, all in their twenties and early thirties. Ladakh is one of the only places in the world in which polyandry is fairly common. Polygamy, on the other hand, is not a typical marriage structure, mostly because it precipitates higher birthrates and larger families. I admit that, at first, I found this situation rather intriguing. It seemed impossible that these women would truly get along. I listened for impatient tones of

voice, looked for irritated glances. But these things were never apparent. It was quite clear that there is little tension between the two women.

Rinchen's father, Edi, had been a monk in Tibet in the early part of his life, but had fled Tibet approximately thirty years ago, when China became more aggressive. Now a shopkeeper in Leh-town's old bazaar, Edi's religiosity remains a major part of his life. Every day I stayed with the Miskits, I was awakened in the early morning by Edi's routine. He roamed the rooms before sunrise. He blessed each room in the house with incense and chanting.

Unlike most families in Ladakh, the generation preceding Edi had not lived in the house I visited. Because of Edi's unusual situation, precipitated by border disputes with China and general unrest in his home region, his lineage was broken. As he indicated while telling me his story (through Rinchen), when he got to Ladakh, he was alone. I saw photographs in black and white of his first marriage to Rinchen's mother. I pictured them moving into this house, starting a life here, and I began to realize how daunting such a situation really is. Ladakhi families are highly interactive, extremely social, and fundamentally interdependent. But without his parents or any kind of established household, the couple was on their own. By bringing the sister-wife into the union, it seems that the Miskits were, in fact, seeking to imitate, in some small way, the community of adults that live in nearly every Ladakhi household. I'm sure the agricultural and domestic help was appreciated greatly. But the coming of a friend, a confidante, a sister was equally if not more important. Since Rinchen and her siblings did not have the opportunity to live with grandparents or aunts and uncles, having the third adult in the home allowed the children to benefit from additional support and

attention, and made the Miskit home look and feel more like that of a “typical” Ladakhi family.

Each day that I spent with the Miskit family, the women weeded in the garden. It was early July, in the small sliver of the year in Ladakh that was actually quite warm. The sun was hot on my back, my wrists. The sections of the garden were small but impeccably organized. Scallions, turnips, radishes, carrots, onions, and potatoes seemed to be the main vegetables that they grew. We squatted on the soil embankments in the afternoon sun. Rinchen’s mother brought us tea in a thermos.

In the prolonged interaction I enjoyed with the Miskit family, I was able to see just how much Ladakh, and the opportunities available to the people that grew up there, have changed over the course of one generation. Rinchen, in cotton athletic pants and molded rubber flip-flops, snapped her gum as she worked. Her mothers were weeding to her left. They spoke to each other occasionally in Ladakhi, but seemed to be observing the conversation going on in English between Rinchen and myself. Rinchen was talking about Paris, where she had spent four weeks the previous year. “It was fun. So much to do there!” I myself have never been to Paris, but I smiled and asked a question to keep her on the subject. She had gone for work but had spent a lot of time getting to know the nightlife. I was amazed to see just how adaptable Rinchen was, and how eager she was to move between these disparate worlds. Rinchen is proud of where she comes from and said that she even poked fun at the French men who would approach her in bars and clubs. Her hands moved quickly, pulling out weeds with dexterous fingers and a discerning eye. “I’d make them guess where I was from,” she said, smiling widely and rolling her eyes toward the sky. “Nobody ever guesses that I’m *Indian*.”

In a way, Rinchen is a grown-up illustration of the issues I have been trying to explore. She is the product of a split childhood. Rinchen grew up in two distinct worlds: the home and the school. As a child, Rinchen was a good student, and her marks allowed her to attend and graduate from a good university in Delhi. She now works in an office—the French Embassy, as I said before—in urban New Delhi, but seems able to slip back into her Ladakhi identity without much stress or effort. Like the older women in her family, she can squat in the garden for hours on end without shifting or stretching. She wore similar clothes to the other women in the village, was efficient and quick in the kitchen, and maintained a comparable work schedule to her mothers'. From what I could tell, it seemed that Rinchen enjoyed being home. I did not really consider the fact that she had been living apart from her family for more than five years, and that her “home” may have, in fact, been in Delhi.

I had not thought too deeply about the complexity of Rinchen's current situation, as an adult Ladakhi living outside of Ladakh, until I had spent some time in the Miskit home. It was only when I saw Rinchen on her way to town, perhaps on the third day I spent in the Miskit house, that I realized just how different her life in Delhi must be. She had literally transformed her physical appearance to leave the house. Her clothes were different. She was wearing a hot pink v-neck sweater, form-fitting jeans, and stiletto heels (her brother was driving). It wasn't really her clothes, but the way that she carried herself that I found surprising. Rinchen had applied a coating of frosted lipstick, and taken her hair out of its long braid. The heels added three or four inches to her diminutive frame, and she stood up straight with her hands in her pockets. She looked like a different person. Someone I went to college with. Someone I'd seen at a

restaurant or bar in Boston. It was a surprising transformation. And one that made me think about the multiple identities Ladakhis living outside of Ladakh must continue to maintain, even years after they have left.

Rinchen is, in a sense, still living out the typical position of a Ladakhi child. She must negotiate two distinct worlds. Although she is now an adult, Rinchen is still functioning in two cultures. Moreover, she is expected to act as an advocate for each and must cobble together some kind of link between them. When the younger of the Miskit mothers went into Leh-town to see a doctor later on in the week, Rinchen went with her. Their appearances could not have varied more. The elder was dressed in her dark *goncha* with a belt of bright green. Her hair hung down in braids, nearly reaching her waist. The younger Miskit wore jeans and makeup and let her hair down, something that is considered shameful according to traditional folk culture (Aggarwal, 2004, p. 127), perhaps due to Ladakh's exposure to Islam.

Rinchen's current situation is not identical to the one that many Ladakhi children are dealing with today in that the two worlds to which she has committed herself differ geographically. But she represents, in a sense, a path that Ladakhi children today may very well take in the future. Her personal trajectory represents not an abandonment of life in Ladakh, but an exhaustion of the region's educational and occupational resources. Hers is not an uncommon position.

I spent a good deal of my time with the Miskit family doing chores out-of-doors. Although agriculture is a major aspect of the experience of the Ladakhi female, it isn't a woman's only responsibility. The Miskit women also took care of the animals. Every morning, we herded the cows toward the mountain pasture. I found out later in my

research process that this is a chore generally reserved for the young children of the household. Since the house lacks little children, Rinchen, as the member of the household with the least seniority, does it when she is home. It is a fairly pleasant chore. The cows we were looking after did not move quickly, but their pace was steady and the morning air was cool and comfortable. There was a stream that ran alongside the path. It ran in a wide streambed before branching out into narrow channels that were constantly being rerouted by families of the village. The stream could be moved when deemed necessary—for irrigation in a specific spot, or for washing by the house.

Many aspects of the Miskit household seemed incongruous to me when I stayed there. There were photographs of Rinchen and her siblings at various ages tacked to the walls in the kitchen and upstairs sunroom. Although her parents seemed happy that she was there, they did not give her special treatment. She was up at dawn every morning to bring the cows to the meadow. The upstairs of the house had attractive, sun-filled rooms. But no one slept there. It was clear to me that this was an accomplished family. I wondered why they didn't take advantage of the things they had—by using their extra bedrooms, for instance. Looking back on it now, I realize that I projecting my western worldview on this situation. I feel I now have a better grasp on the value system inherent in the Ladakhi household. Though the family had no young children living in the house at the time of my visit, I feel that when I left, I was able to better understand the dynamic of a somewhat typical Ladakhi family. The intergenerational contact that I observed, though it involved no young children, was relevant to my study.

Observations in a Ladakhi Home: The Tsering Family

The Tsering family lives only a few kilometers from Leh-town. Like nearly every house I saw in Ladakh, the Tsering home is built from whitewashed mud bricks with wooden window frames. There is a typical kitchen garden in the back of the house, with a typically astounding view of the Himalayan range. Less typical is Mr. Tsering's outdoor workshop, and the washer-dryer recently purchased and hooked up in the courtyard. The Tserings proved to be a wonderful family to get to know. They were eager to help me in my research. I am indebted to their patience and hospitality.

The household, when I visited it, was structured around the needs of the baby, who was two months old at the time. His warmth was worried over. Although it was July and quite warm, the infant wore layers of cotton, wool, and polarfleece. On his head he wore a knitted cap. Dolma tucked a piece of wool inside the hat to add extra warmth to his hairless scalp. Nima was a quiet baby. He cried very rarely. He was almost always in physical contact with a family member, so, if he did get upset, the process of calming him down was efficient and instinctual.

Nima was breastfed exclusively and enthusiastically. Chondol did not follow a schedule; she simply allowed her son to nurse when he made his hunger known. According to a study conducted by Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994), this is the norm in Ladakh. All of the 25 women interviewed said that they breast-fed when their babies wanted to eat. Because infant mortality is so common, mothers like Chondol struggle to keep their infant's weight high. From what I could tell, Nima was healthy and very large for his age.

All the women in the Tsering household were attentive and nurturing to little Nima. Mr. Tsering appeared to be equally pleased with and sensitive to the baby's presence. He held the baby expertly, spoke to the baby in high, singsong tones, and contorted his facial features into all manner of expressions in an attempt to interest and amuse the child. At the time, I thought that this kind of nurturing behavior might be unusual coming from a man. I have found in my research, however, that men in Ladakh are quite involved in childrearing, and that the relatively flexible gender constructions allow and even encourage boys and men to sweet-talk and cuddle their children without being made to feel any kind of emasculation or shame.

Neither of the elder Tserings were educated beyond secondary school. Tsering Nawang, who I addressed as Mr. Tsering, had learned the metalwork trade, specifically making prayer wheels for monasteries and public monuments, from an uncle. There was a subtle but ever-present sense of support and interdependence in the family. At times, this was expressed verbally. When I spoke to Mr. Tsering about his craft, using Atchen and Chondol as translators, the two young women supplemented his answers to my questions with their own input. "He has a sharp mind," Atchen told me, when I asked whether his training was formal or informal. Atchen looked at me and smiled. "He only watched [his uncle]. My father is very intelligent." This much was clear to me, as his work was fine and his manner was thoughtful, but I thought that it was significant that Atchen and Chondol were so diligent about making sure this was so.

As is often the case in arranged marriages, Dolma had grown up in a different village from Mr. Tsering. Presumably, this is to avoid incest, or interference with relations within the families' *phaspun* or *chutso*. Mr. Tsering's family had lived in Leh

for many generations. His parents were farmers, but, as I mentioned, his uncle was also a craftsman. Mr. Tsering began his career as a metalworker and prayer wheels maker at age twenty, after working for the archeological survey of India.

In the Tsering family, there seems to be an inherent respect that exists between the young and the old. The two groups, though they share blood, view each other over a wall cobbled together by modernization. Educational differences, language barriers, worldview, access to careers and resources—these are all things that effectively separate the young and old in Ladakh. And yet there did not seem to be tension between the two groups. Despite the hard work that must be done without their daughters and disruption of the family unit, the senior Tserings appeared to be accepting and proud of the choices their daughters were making.

The Tsering's ability to support their daughters' opportunities was obvious in physical form throughout the living space. A photograph hung in the kitchen showing Atchen posing in the traditional dress of Jammu, the region where she is attending university. When I pointed at and commented on the photo, Dolma smiled and looked at her daughter. Atchen said something to the affect of "They miss me when I'm gone," and then went on to explain the idiosyncrasies of the costume, which was perhaps as foreign to Dolma as it was to me. Besides a picture of the Dalai Lama, this is the only photograph I recall seeing in the Tsering household. Although Chondol lived at home and had not traveled outside of Ladakh to finish her education, many of her interests and aspects of her personality were distinctly modern. She spoke to her son in English and Ladakhi, switching between the two languages seamlessly. In her free moments, she leafed through a small book on learning shorthand, or pursued a volume containing the

basics of the study of political science, which she studied in college. These books sat on a low table, piled in an untidy stack along with soft-cover religious texts written in Tibetan script.

In many Ladakhi families, three generations live together in one house. Unfortunately, I experienced this living situation only partly, since Nima was still so young and could not interact as completely with his grandparents as an older child might have. But I was able to see just how much affection Tsering and Dolma had for their little grandson, and how much they were able to help their daughter with the responsibilities she faced. Ladakhis tend to age well. Helena Norberg-Hodge claims that they are spared most of the health problems common in the west (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, p. 37). Norberg-Hodge is not the only scholar to mention the common bond that exists between children and grandparents in the Ladakhi household. Although Nima was still young, I was able to observe the genuine affection that existed between the youngest and oldest members of the family. I also admired the elder Tserings' willingness to take responsibility for the infant's care.

In some ways, the structure of Chondol's marriage mirrors that of the traditional unions, in that her husband's occupation forces him to spend a good deal of time outside the home. In the past, men were often the herders or traders, and their presence in the home was not constant. One major difference is that the couple lives with Chondol's parents, thus making the union uxori-local (Haddix, 2001, p. 52), that is, present in the woman's family home. This marriage structure, in which the male is integrated into the female's natal household, is called a *magpa*. The structure did exist in traditional Ladakhi communities, but it was rare, and only possible when there was no male heir

(Hay, 1997; Rizvi, 1996). I did not ask Chondol directly, but it seems probable that this arrangement would eventually lead to her and her husband inheriting the house and land, since she is the eldest of her sisters and has returned to her natal home.

Atchen, the member of the family I spoke to most, presumably since we were close in age and she did not have a baby to care for or homework to do, was home during the summer holidays. She attends university in Jammu, and studies non-medical sciences (primarily chemistry and physics). All three Tsering girls had attended or were attending the Lamdon School, one of the most revered private schools in the vicinity.

I met Atchen when I was getting ready to leave Ladakh. I had been there for nearly a month and had some ideas about youth and young womanhood in the region. What I learned over the course of my friendship with Atchen both supported and subverted these ideas. The time I spent with her allowed me to fully acknowledge the complexities of a shifting value system.

I was lucky to have met Atchen. I was not expecting to meet and connect with another young woman my age. I was doing research for a paper on apprenticeship and craft culture and went out from Leh town to observe a prayer wheel maker and metalworker in his workshop. I had visited the house briefly once before with the man who had recommended I speak with and stay with Mr. Tsering. But at that time the contact and Mr. Tsering had spoken Ladakhi, probably hammering out logistics concerning the craftsman's timeframe and availability.

When I went back to the house with the taxi driver a few days later, I felt a bit confused and nervous. I slammed the car door and looked at the brightly painted gate before me. I was quite certain that this was the place. But not completely certain.

Hesitant to move, I surveyed the land around the house. In the distance, I could see desert and corrugated metal; one of Leh's largest military bases stood just beyond the main road. The landscape in the more immediate vicinity was rather more appealing. I could make out the forms of a number of small houses, built in the traditional Ladakhi style. They were the pleasant and solid flat-roofed structures with whitewashed mud bricks and windows decorated with carved and painted wood. These houses are typical of the region. The houses, including the one behind the blue gate, were hidden from view by a mud wall and clusters of thin saplings. All this neck craning and head turning was not amusing the driver. He yelled something to me from his open window, put his car in gear, and began to back up. He pulled his van back on to the main road before I was sure that I was, indeed, at Mr. Tsering's house. I made my way to the blue gate and knocked.

The gate swung open slowly and a young man with long, slender limbs and features more typical of peninsular India than the Himalayan region walked out cautiously. He avoided eye contact. I felt stupid and strange, standing there on the dirt path, unsure of my location, second-guessing my purpose. I must have looked desperate. I called to him and he turned to face me. "Is this Mr. Tsering's house?" I asked. He looked at me. His eyes were patient but uncertain. He didn't know English. He shook his head, shrugged, began to move away again. I rummaged in my bag, searching for my notebook. There was a page that the owner of the guesthouse had written on, stating simply the name of the metalworker. I found the book but struggled to locate the page. I pointed at the name. Then the house. The young man smiled slightly, looked down, and shook his head again. He re-entered the yard. I followed him through the gate.

Once I could see inside the gate I knew I was at the right house. I had a small daypack strapped to my back and my notebook in my hand. The young man called out, walking briskly. Mr. Tsering, a pleasant looking man with a mustache and a full, wide frame, made his way toward us on the path. I recognized him immediately, and he welcomed me with a gesture. It became immediately clear that communication between us would not be easy. After dragging a plastic chair across the tented workspace for me to sit in, he promised (using gesture and improvisation) to return shortly. It was then that I met Atchen. I stood up when Mr. Tsering and his daughter came outside. She was about my age. She had a mouth full of pleasantly crooked teeth and an easy, pleasing laugh. Atchen seemed to know what I was up to right away. “Is this a project for school?” she asked. I don’t think I did a good job of containing my excitement when I answered that yes, it was in fact a stab at academic field research. She smiled knowingly and invited me inside for tea.

When I entered the kitchen, I met two other members of the Tsering family. One was Dolma, Mr. Tsering’s wife. The other was Chondol. Chondol is the oldest of three Tsering daughters—the elder sister of Atchen. She had recently given birth to a baby boy, which the family called Nima (which I was told means “baby boy”) until the naming ceremony.

All of the Tsering women seemed strong-willed. Chondol, however, had a tendency to talk about her plethora of medical ailments. This may have related to the recent birth of her son and the general acceptance of a new mother’s inactivity.

Chondol’s husband, an astrophysicist with a coveted government job, worked a day’s drive away. He visited his wife and son every ten days or so, as his schedule

permitted. I asked Chondol if she missed him and she smiled and shrugged. Mention of Chondol's husband's profession was made on more than one occasion. It was clear to me that this marriage was one that had been celebrated. As Norberg-Hodge (1991, p. 108) points out, "In the traditional society, the most respected person was the lama. In the modern sector, it is the engineer."

Chondol, it turns out, hosts a radio show that airs once a week or so. I had to really wrangle the answers out of her. I am not sure if she was embarrassed or proud, but I sensed that she wanted me to know about this part of her life, and to approve of it. I asked Atchen about the topic of her sister's program. She answered quickly that it is a show directed at women. Chondol, apparently, is a kind of Ladakhi Martha Stewart. She supplied advice on how to carry out various chores that were typically done by women. I got the sense that Chondol infused this rather dry subject matter with some opinions of her own.

Although it was not my intention, I spent most of my time with women. The women of Ladakh are generally quite striking in appearance. Their hair is almost invariably long and worn in plaits, since loose hair is a sign of promiscuity and lack of control (Aggarwal, 2004, p. 126). They do not look like the Bollywood beauties of Delhi or Mumbai. When I was there, their faces were pleasantly tan from the work they did each day in the garden. They are strong but rarely bulky.

In traditional Ladakhi households, a father's craft was passed on to his son. Apprenticeship was approached informally but persistently. The son of a woodcarver was likely to learn the family trade. Today, with the implementation of mandatory education, children are less likely to stay home and learn woodworking or weaving, and

more likely to walk or ride to school to learn about reading and algebra. I asked the Tsering girls at dinner one night if, had they had a brother, he would have learned Mr. Tsering's occupation and taken over his business. Atchen shrugged and smiled. The others looked doubtful, and it was dubious whether any had even considered this possibility.

The Tserings have a gas stove for cooking and western-style couches in the winter kitchen. The couches are overstuffed. The stove significantly speeds up the cooking process. The television, silvery and up-to-date, sits in the corner, and is flanked by two windows. Views of the garden and mountain range serve as the television's dramatic foil. Near the stove, a five-gallon water jug with a spigot sits horizontally on a stool. This water is used for preparing food and rinsing dishes.

The adjoining summer kitchen, separated by glass panes and a curtained door, has the traditional carpeted floor cushions and low tables of a Ladakhi home. Prayer beads and Buddhist symbols adorn the tables and walls. The image of the Dalai Lama's face is framed by a garland of artificial flowers and pinned to a central supporting beam. Bright and bulbous copper pots and lidded porcelain cups sit in neat rows on shelves. In short, the summer and winter kitchens in the Tsering home seemed to separate out the traditional and the modern, but in a way that seemed both comfortable and logical. Members of the family and their guests moved between these two rooms, calmly sipping butter tea and conversing.

After weeks of sitting cross-legged on a mat or low chair, the couches in the winter kitchen seemed incongruous to me at first, but I quickly noticed how comfortable members of the Tsering family seemed to be, shuttling between the summer and winter

kitchens, the low cushions and the overstuffed sofas. However, it seemed as though certain activities corresponded to each room. Dolma prayed primarily in the summer kitchen, seated cross-legged on a cushion and spinning a hand-held prayer wheel. Naturally, television viewing was restricted to the winter kitchen area, since the location of the device was there. Tea drinking transcended the separation of these spaces, perhaps because this activity seemed to go on all day and night.

Modernity and the Ladakhi Family

The methodology of contemporary scholarship in Ladakh is quite fascinating. Ladakh's culture is very different from any culture in the western world I've come across. It stands in opposition to the values that American soldiers fight for and that presidential candidates deliver speeches on. In Ladakh, individuality is considered a frivolous concern. Independence is frowned upon. Conformity is admired. And yet western scholars praise the traditions of Ladakhi culture. As I have said, I greatly enjoyed the time I spent in Ladakh. But my status as a foreigner and a temporary entity made me exempt from the most drastically "un-western" social customs. I was comfortable because I knew that my time was limited and my place in the culture was predetermined and understood. But when I began doing secondary research and writing, I noticed that I tended more and more to identify with the Ladakhi worldview. Most of the scholars I was reading were very critical of the west, and projected an idealized and unrealistic image of Ladakh onto the page. I struggle to remain objective.

Language is an important part of any scholarly exploration. The tone and diction that a writer employs can manipulate the reader effectively into looking at a situation in a

certain way. Even I, a researcher who had traveled to Ladakh, felt my perspective shift after reading books like *Ancient Futures*, *Peace and Conflict in Ladakh*, and *Ladakh: Crossroads of High Asia*. I'm not sure if one book would have made me question my initial perceptions. But the volume of like-minded scholars bemoaning the impact of modernization, education and westernization proved overwhelming. Most scholars write about what they label as "interdependence" in the Ladakhi community. The terminology is important. For example, nearly every researcher I used in this study at one time or another mentions the word "interdependent" when writing about the people of Ladakh. Occasionally, the language changes. When I read about what Fernanda Pirie describes as an "antipathy toward individualism" (2007, p. 62) a.k.a. "interdependence", I realized the potential impact of a writer's terminology. From that point on, I paid attention not only to the facts a researcher presented, but also to the method and tone of his presentation.

Members of the same family or village or social network do, in fact, rely on one another. Ladakhi culture is interdependent, or anti-individual, depending on how you look at it. The Ladakhi family has a fairly fluid setup. According to Norberg-Hodge and Russell, traditional parents were rarely anxious about their children. Thus, children became quite autonomous at an early age. When discipline was necessary, as it was believed to be at times when dealing with older children, punishment was quick and clean. No long-winded, loud lectures, no drawn-out beatings, and no lingering guilt was projected on the child (1994, p. 529). Parents in Ladakh still exercise a remarkable amount of level-headedness and patience when dealing with children. But the amount of time that parents and children spend together today is vastly different from what it was

even twenty years ago. Children are now socialized in two distinct settings, the home and the classroom.

The power structure within a family varies from household to household, as it does in any culture. The construction of “kid culture” in Ladakh is relatively new. The ways in which Ladakhi children spend their time has changed. School has become a place for peer groups to gather independently, away from parents. Less time is spent with other members of the family unit. More time is spent with children in the same age group. Furthermore, the aura of education affects how school-aged children interact with illiterate parents. It seems only natural, then, that Ladakhi children would occupy their homes in a new way and with a different kind of power.

Play was not an aspect of a Ladakhi childhood that was emphasized until a short time ago. Before the 1960s and 70s, there was minimal separation between adults’ and children’s activities. Manufactured toys have only recently become a part of childhood experience in Ladakh (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, p. 156). The toys that have made it to the region are modeled after the western paradigms and are mainly imported from China and the other industrial centers of Asia. Many are second- (or third- or fourth-) hand. Toys, like dolls and stuffed animals, are now more common in the Ladakhi home, and children are allowed to spend more time playing than working, which was not the case in the past.

I was waiting to use the telephone in an isolated village in Sangla Valley one evening when a small group of young boys passed quickly with wide smiles and nimble feet. One boy coaxed along a thin inner tube from a bicycle tire with a whittled stick. They seemed to consolidate their energy, concentrating it on keeping the loop in motion, keeping the wheel upright. The town was quite small, so the boys looped back along the

stretch of road where I sat. Their enthusiasm for the simple toy was genuine. Although only one boy at a time could actually participate in the game, they were all engaged thoroughly. This is the kind of play that I assume has always been present in Ladakhi childhood experience. It is active and inventive. But one thing that struck me about this group was their apparently uniform age. According to Norberg-Hodge, classroom stratification has redefined not only how children play, but also with whom they play.

The emergence of western-style play and the development of bonded peer groups have occurred concurrently with the new education system in Ladakh. This seems to suggest that education has altered Ladakhi children's experience fundamentally and comprehensively—not only changing what children do from 8 to 3 on weekdays, but also how they view themselves, their parents, and their places in their homes.

In Joshua Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place*, the author discusses how ideas about childhood have changed over history in the context of technology and industrialization. The author is particularly interested in how education and specifically literacy have caused children's interests and parents' expectations to shift dramatically. Meyrowitz points to the implicit differences between 'learning by doing' and 'learning by reading' (1985, p. 263). This is a pertinent distinction in the Ladakhi situation, since in the pre-educational era, parents simply allowed children to observe and participate in daily tasks in the field and the home. Meyrowitz, along with the scholar Elizabeth Eisenstein whom he quotes, goes on to suggest that the discipline in the act of reading and writing leads to an increasingly mechanized, sequence-based system of thinking—a very *adult* way of thinking. I'm not sure if this is true in the context of Ladakh, since such a claim implies that non-literate thinking is by comparison chaotic, disorganized, or unsophisticated, and

none of the older adults I spoke with were by any stretch deficient or immature. But I do think that literacy in its very process might help children to master the complex manifestations of technology, as devices such as the television, the telephone, and the computer become ever more pervasive and unavoidable.

The changes that have occurred over the last few decades in Ladakh have fundamentally affected how childhood is constructed and how children are viewed within the family. There is a negative side to this phenomenon, which is documented in many of the books I read and have cited here. While I understand and to some extent agree with the opinions that writers like Norberg-Hodge, Russell, Pirie, Hay, and others have brought into the discussion, I also feel inclined to acknowledge that some aspects of contemporary culture are actually improving the lives of children and their families, by improving quality of life and by making basic comforts and opportunities more accessible. Other researchers have pointed this out as well (namely Mellor and Bray, among others).

The ways in which power is divided and distributed in a Ladakhi home has changed since the Ladakhi region's importation of modernity. This was an observation I made early in my primary research. But shifts in power are not unusual as cultures change over time. In *Born to Buy* (2004), Juliet Schor explores changes in family dynamics in the U.S. Children born before the baby boom were generally not called upon to help make decisions that would affect the whole family. Parents were authoritarian (p. 24), and children were encouraged to work and keep quiet. The modern American emphasis on play, self-expression, and individuality did not yet exist. Today, American children are encouraged to have opinions. They are also expected to develop

unique identities at a young age. These are perceived as positive advances in how society treats children, and they likely are. Schor compares the typical American childhood today to previous generations of children in America who were put to work “on farms, in factories, and in domestic service” (p. 29). How does this shift relate to Ladakhi constructions of childhood? The two cultures’ treatments of childhood intersect in a more urgent and interesting way than one might suspect.

In part because of the tendency to idealize and objectify the “other” in the traditions of Orientalism and perhaps even multiculturalism, many scholars (Pirie, Norberg-Hodge, Russell) seem to promote the traditional Ladakhi child-rearing techniques, and lament the present educational and economic situations, which essentially make a traditional Ladakhi childhood impossible. To a certain degree, I understand this and agree. On the other hand, I think it is important to take a close look at living conditions in Ladakh before the founding of schools, the introduction of government food subsidies, and the importation of a dependable fuel supply. Childhood in Ladakh forty or fifty years ago actually looked a lot like childhood in the pre-industrial western world. Children were often hungry, physically uncomfortable, and exposed to and active in the adult work environment from infancy onward. Children and parents worked side-by-side, often under difficult conditions relating to extreme weather and poverty. Is this so different from the dark past of the pre-industrial American child’s experience that Schor describes? Few would say it is. So why is our perception of the American children and the Ladakhi children living under similar conditions so different? We pat ourselves on the back for the presumed progress we’ve made in America, while we romanticize and idealize and bemoan the loss of how things once were for families in Ladakh.

There are many factors at work in constructing this idealized portrayal of traditional Ladakhi (and perhaps even Indian, Asian or non-western) childhood. These things include ethnocentricity, bias, guilt, and the ubiquitous “western gaze” to name a few. It is easy to point the finger at the people who have written these books and effectively written off the resources that modernity can provide. But I can’t blame everything on a small group of western scholars and researchers—a group of individuals that have done a good deal more research on the subject than I have. One of the most important factors in this debate has less to do with how certain scholars perceive Ladakhi life and more to do with how Ladakhis present it. Since Ladakhi parents have usually spent most of their lives interacting with children, in many cases caring for youngsters since they were young themselves, the system in place in the home is typically very appealing, warm, and nurturing to observers. I understand why many westerners want to preserve this feature of Ladakhi life. But does this mean that Ladakhi children should forgo modern education? The traditional Ladakhi childhood can be quite fulfilling, but it essentially prepares the child only for a traditional Ladakhi adulthood, thereby limiting Ladakhi options in an increasingly open, ambitious and entrepreneurial India.

Most likely due to their Buddhist belief system, their interconnected social setup, and their generally *laissez-faire*, laid-back outlooks, Ladakhis seem to be generally able to create pleasant and supportive home environments for young children. Hopefully, this will continue as children spend more time in school. It would be quite wonderful if Ladakhi schools were able to more closely resemble Ladakhi homes.

Today: Childhood in Contemporary Ladakh

Today, children wield a good deal of power in Ladakh. They are powerful in their homes. Many children will be part of the first literate generation in their families. They are also multilingual, and, in many cases, they are the first generation of English speakers, allowing them access to and understanding of a high volume of written and technology-based information. They are also physically mobile. With faraway schools and fewer chores, children are free and able to move from place to place, by foot or bus, generally on their own.

Children in Ladakh are not as visible as they are in the other parts of India I visited. If I had remained in Leh-town for the duration of my stay, I may never have interacted with any children directly. They commute between their classrooms and their homes. And perhaps due to the high volume of foreign visitors, they take little notice of the westerners that descend on Leh in the summer months.

Education, more than any other aspect of the modernization process, has changed how Ladakhis communicate, work, and view the world. According to Mellor (2001, p. 11), education has become Ladakh's primary development strategy. In the 1997-98 school year, the Leh district was allocated 45,297,000 rupees (or a little over a million dollars) for education. This is no meager sum.

With the introduction of free and compulsory education in the region, which was only fully realized in the last ten years or so, the experience of the Ladakhi child has shifted considerably. As mentioned before, children had traditionally stayed in their natal homes throughout their childhood. They had first observed and then participated in the subsistence activities carried out by the elders of the household. This was how they

learned. Now, most children learn not in the field or on the mountain or by the stream, but in the classroom. It is not only the location, but also the content of the modern Ladakhi child's education that has shifted substantially in the classroom setting.

Interestingly, in the first five years of life, Ladakhi children are presumably free from the educational expectations that will structure the rest of their childhood. This aligns well with the traditional Ladakhi pattern of childrearing, as outlined by Norberg-Hodge and Russell (1994). The researchers state that according to tradition, the child spends the first four to five years in the persistent presence of his or her parents. The mother, and also other family members, stays in physical contact with the child throughout the day and night. The young child is given unending affection and attention. It is only after four or five years that parents begin to punish children and begin also to establish a physical distance between themselves and their children.

It is also at around age five that children are (and always have been) expected to take on responsibility, accept discipline, and learn to think for themselves. Before the founding and popularization of schools, children made this transition within the home, when parents made it clear that such a shift was expected. Today, education intervenes. Children learn to adapt to the structure of the Kindergarten classroom and may learn many of the same types of developmental lessons from the school experience that they would have learned in the past from their parents and siblings at home. Because of the tradition in childrearing, the home also becomes a more controlled space when the child reaches age five. Therefore, when children return from school in the afternoon, they are not walking into a space devoid of discipline or structure. The two environments are not completely incongruous. Nonetheless, the classroom and the home are extremely

different in how they handle learning, responsibility, and discipline. Modern Ladakhi children are expected to adapt to and thrive in both settings.

The culture of the home and the culture of the school vary substantially. Despite the introduction of the television, the telephone, and the electric stove in some Ladakhi houses, the family's treatment of the basic elements of the traditional Ladakhi home remains the same. The family gathers in the kitchen. The children help their mothers by fetching water or chopping vegetables. The family Buddhist chapel is treated with respect and reverence (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). These are aspects of traditional home life that cannot be compromised by the construction of a road or the introduction of a cash economy. The traditional Ladakhi home is, for the time being, quite stable, despite a few convenient additions and inconvenient subtractions (namely of the men and children of the household). The Ladakhi school, on the other hand, has no history to uphold in Ladakh, no former incarnation to reference. Since the school is a fairly recent addition to the Ladakhi landscape, its culture has been largely governed by influences and examples from the outside.

Ladakhi government schools were originally modeled after the preexisting government schools in India, which in turn were modeled after an antiquated version of the British school system. Although organizations such as SECMOL (Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh) have made room for distinctly "Ladakhi" features of the education system, aspects of the original post-colonial educational model remain. Like many school systems in developing areas, Ladakhi schools (public and private alike) are generally quite strict and structured and value students that can pass tests and memorize facts over those with genuine intellectual curiosity.

The culture of a school is complex, particularly in a place where the concept of formal education was imported. There are many aspects of the educational experience that must simply feel arbitrary and misguided to Ladakhi children and parents. These things may not stand out to the foreign eye—the use of desks and benches, for instance, in a culture accustomed to sitting on low carpeted cushions, or the utilization of English and Hindi as the primary languages in the classroom, when most children have parents only proficient in Ladakhi, Tibetan, or in some cases Urdu. One goal of the Ladakhi education system, as expressed by a schoolteacher and recorded in Mellor’s research (2001), is to educate Ladakhi children so that they will be able to make good decisions about what parts of traditional culture are valid and what parts are expendable. This is a challenging value system to learn and not an easy system to teach.

It seems worthwhile to wonder whether education is effectively separating children from their culture. Many people believe this is happening. Interestingly, programs have been put in place and funded by westerners to counteract the prospect of the cultural alienation that students in Ladakhi government schools might experience. The Siddhartha School, located close to Leh in Stok, is one of such projects.

Mellor (2001) writes on the controversy that surrounded the uniforms issued for Ladakhi government schools. When they were first instituted, they were much like (or perhaps even identical to) the uniforms issued to government schools all over India. In 1996, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) instituted a new school uniform, one that members of the council believed to be more culturally appropriate than the former uniforms, which were deemed too western-looking. The new uniforms were *gonchas*, the traditional Ladakhi costume. This too proved problematic.

Gonchas, which are long formal coats, usually embellished with brass buttons fastened at the neck, near the shoulder, and under the arm, were too culturally potent to fit in the context of the modern classroom. In no other context were *gonchas* ever mass-produced. They are made individually, and made to fit individuals. Although it was certainly not the LAHDC's intent, the institution of this local costume as the school uniform caused the *goncha* to become a symbol for the failures of the government school system. Children today wear the plain uniforms common to peninsular India.

Children living in Ladakh today, and even a decade ago, do not have the perspective of their parents and grandparents, who have in many cases watched Leh and the surrounding area succumb to or embrace modernity. Particularly in the area immediately around Leh-town, the modern Ladakhi child has little connection to a truly traditional lifestyle once he walks out of his home in the morning. Perhaps because of perennially present and influential scholars and activists like Norberg-Hodge, Ladakhi children deal with the idealization of traditional life, without being able to develop their own opinions on life before and life today.

Some people idealize the past. But, lurking in the background, a darker image of traditional life in Ladakh is present. Some people remember times of hunger, sickness, and inertia. Without education or transportation, resources and opportunities were hard to come by (Mellor, 2001). Children are presented with conflicting images of what Ladakh was like before modernization began to take hold in the 1970s. Thanks to the efforts of SECMOL, some Ladakhi schoolchildren have access to textbooks that address and acknowledge aspects of traditional Ladakhi life, such as agriculture, village life, animal herding, staple Ladakhi foods, and so on. These textbooks, which the

organization began producing roughly twenty years ago, do provide an opportunity for students to connect with their heritage and history. Yet some researchers wonder whether these textbooks really are effective tools for building interest and pride in Ladakhi culture among the region's youth, or simply nostalgic propaganda that fails to acknowledge the modernization process (Mellor, 2001, p. 34). In some cases, children may be learning about "their culture" from a textbook. This may in fact prove problematic.

In the mid-1980s, the anthropologist Joshua Meyrowitz began to look at how technology has broken the limitations of physical space. Meyrowitz argues that in the west, the experiences of young children are largely limited to the home's interior. Before the advent of television, he says, adults had the ability to censor and filter information from outside the home as they saw fit. Even today, to a certain extent, western parents exercise power in a way that children cannot. They are the mobile, literate, communicative members of the family. They are the ones to take on major responsibilities. But television functioned to decimate and subvert the parents' control.

In Ladakh, television and mass media in general have proven to have powerful effects when introduced into a domestic setting. Other constructs of modernization, namely in the form of western-style education, have also changed the power structure within the family. In traditional Ladakhi culture, age was respected. A person's advanced age was believed to augment his wisdom, his knowledge, and his insight. Today, it is arguably the children that are most powerful. Older members of the family must rely on children to connect two disparate worlds.

In contemporary Ladakh, it is the youngest generation within the family that is equipped to navigate the world outside the home—a world that is becoming increasingly

relevant as the years go by. Children are the literate ones, they are the mobile ones, they are the ones best able to communicate with a wide variety of people. Someone like Meyrowitz might argue that this is due, at least in part, to television. Although children are certainly not given exclusive access to the TV screen, they are often the only ones in the family who can fully understand the narration and dialogue in the melodramas or action movies or news programs. Thus, it is the children who translate the words from one language into another, the younger family members who take the information from one cultural context and put it into another. Children are faced with the option of altering the information. Much like some parents in the west, children are able to censor, they are able to filter, and they have the power to manipulate the information before they pass it on.

Satellite dishes abound on the flat rooftops of Ladakhi homes. The entertainment options available to a family that possesses the apparatus are truly astounding and also puzzling. Running water here is rare, but American chick flicks from the 1980s and B-list Hollywood thrillers flow into these homes at the touch of a button. Children in Ladakh today cannot be protected from the rest of the world because the rest of the world has come to Ladakh. It has come by way of the western-style education system. It has come by way of the foreign tourists that walk the streets of Leh with shoulders bared, passing out candy, pens, and conversation to the schoolchildren they meet. It has even come through the television. But Ladakhi children, in general, appear to be resourceful and able to negotiate their relationship with the impending presence of western and Indian culture.

There are many things that Ladakh does not share with peninsular India. Ladakh's culture is distinct. This is the case with many Indian states. Numerous states utilize their own languages, propagate their own rituals, and continue their own religious and cultural customs. Yet the concept of "pan-Indianness" is emerging in a major way. Varma, a contemporary anthropologist and writer, seems to feel that Indian culture is becoming more uniform. "A people who have evolved in the same crucible for thousands of years," he says, "are bound to develop certain unifying traits, a tapestry of common beliefs, cultural similarities, shared outlooks and an overlapping of identities" (2004, p. 148). This is a compelling argument and one I may have thought valid had I not been given the opportunity to really examine a Ladakhi home. It was clear to me that the similarities that Ladakhis share with the rest of India—Bollywood films, Indian-style foods, Hindi language, and satellite television—are products of the government subsidy, educational infrastructure and technological progress, not the result of a slow, steady development of commerce and commonality. Television and media seem to have played a major role in creating a sense of cultural unity, or at least common cultural interests. But the way in which the older Ladakhis I knew live day-to-day is, with a few minor exceptions, specifically, intensely, wholly Ladakhi. The foods they enjoy most. The language they speak. The prayers they sing when the dawn tiptoes over the mountains and into the fields. These are their things, their customs, their ways. Perhaps it is unfair to discredit Varma's theory, since he may not have even considered Ladakh to be part of India. A major physical barrier, the Himalayan range, separates the region from the rest of country. Therefore, it really is the new ways of transmitting information—which rely

on new technologies and new methods of transportation—that have caused Ladakh to assimilate this new knowledge of what it means to “be” Indian.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

It probably comes as no surprise that I think the topic I researched deserves much deeper consideration than it has been given by me or by anyone else. As I stated in a number of previous contexts, little has been written on Ladakhi childhood experience, past or present. From what I learned in my research, childhood in Ladakh has always been an interesting topic. But the child's role in contemporary Ladakhi culture is all the more compelling. Children in Ladakh today represent a new era of multilingualism, literacy, and to some extent, secularism. A large percentage of the region's children act as the link between traditional households and a quickly shifting cultural, political, and technological climate in Ladakh's schools and towns.

Admittedly, the Ladakhi home and family have been ripe areas of anthropological exploration, and many anthropologists have studied them. Yet anthropologists who have devoted their attention toward the Ladakhi family, namely Norberg-Hodge, Russell, Angmo, Hay and Pirie, have tended to focus on women's roles in the household. Therefore, the information that researchers present about children is rendered through the lens of the experience of the Ladakhi female.

The culture of Ladakh has always been seductive to the western sensibility. This is why there is such a full history of western scholarship conducted in the tiny, remote region. The reasons for this are many, but I think the interactive and interdependent nature of all sectors of the culture is attractive to those coming from the industrialized, diversified, and individualized west. Today, Ladakh is not as harmonious as it seems to be on the pages of Harrer's luminous picture book or Waddell's incandescent travelogue. At this moment in history, the region is struggling to assimilate what many perceive to be

the onslaught of infrastructure. To be a child or adolescent or young adult in Ladakh today is, essentially, to live in two cultures. The culture of the home and the culture of the school vary vastly from one another and also affect each other significantly. The double-life of Ladakh's young warrants further investigation. Since this is an issue that may change quickly in a short period of time, I hope that such a project is carried out in the near future.

Perhaps because I spent time with families that had adolescent and adult children, I thought quite a bit about the implications of literacy and power. When children are literate, and the parents are not, the parent-child power structure is compromised. The same is likely to be true in terms of language. Young people learn to speak and write English and Hindi in school. Many of their elders only speak Ladakhi and perhaps another dialect of Tibetan. Members of the younger generation are therefore able to communicate with a wider and more diverse community of educators, researchers, and foreigners. They are also able to thoroughly engage in the various media constructs that have made their ways into the Ladakhi home, namely satellite television, Bollywood DVDS, and books and periodicals in print. I would like to see researchers explore the issues around first-generation literacy and multilingualism further.

Infrastructure has allowed for the infiltration of peninsular Indian and western cultures into Ladakh, namely through media sources that relate closely to and depend on technology. But the computer boom currently occurring on the other side of the Himalayas has not yet begun in Ladakh. Television, telephones, films, and popular music from the world outside the region's murky perimeter are becoming increasingly important to the youth of Ladakh. The Internet, however, has not entered the region in

any significant way. Even in Leh-town, the Internet cafés are frequented primarily by tourists. The rates in these establishments are high. Few schools have web access. Fewer homes have a personal computer or can access the Internet. One can't help but wonder what the implications of the Internet revolution will be when it reaches Ladakh. Will it open more jobs to the many who are educated and unemployed? Will it function to widen the gap further between the literate and the illiterate?

I hope that more scholars will devote their time to looking at how children in Ladakh are adjusting to modernization, as expressed by the introduction of technology, consumer culture, and standardized education. This is a compelling topic in any developing community. But what makes Ladakh such a fascinating place to conduct such a study is the inhospitality of the landscape to new technologies, new social norms, and new occupational opportunities. Ladakhi culture, in the traditional sense, took centuries to develop. But the system of interdependence between individuals, families, and social institutions that did emerge did so while taking into account the elevation, the long winters, the limited resources, and the tenuous methods of transportation inherent in the region's environment. What Pirie calls Ladakh's current "fragile web of order" (2007, title) was, in fact, until recently relatively strong. What will happen when the new imported technologies that lack the time-tested stability of traditional Ladakhi culture move from youth culture to mainstream culture?

Because of the Ladakhi youth's unique ability to access education, technology, and linguistic diversity, it seems clear that it is the younger generation that will come to represent Ladakh to the rest of the world. This is a major feature of modern Ladakh. It has the capacity to create a major schism on a number of levels—ranging from familial to

national to global. Although modernization may empower a certain (young) sector of the Ladakhi population, this emerging system of power marginalizes and alienates the elders of the region and those that choose not to or are unable to participate in the formalized education system. Ladakh's history is fascinating, and its traditions relate strongly to the modern lifestyle. I applaud and appreciate the research that has been done on these areas. But I also hope that researchers and scholars are able to look to the future of the region. Children and adolescents in contemporary Ladakh at this moment in time are powerful. Their story should not be ignored.

Limitations of the Study

Ladakh is a wonderful place to conduct research. This is no secret. Scholars have been looking at this region's culture and history for many years. As time has passed, and the region has become more and more accessible, the influx of westerners, as researchers, adventurers, and tourists has been significant. Not surprisingly, the presence of the west has altered the kind of research that can be done in Ladakh.

The body of knowledge that this thesis contains is inherently flawed. The two main problems I encountered over my course of study were the limited amount of time I had to spend in Ladakh and the limited amount of secondary research sources that exist on the topic I chose to explore.

This thesis uses both primary and secondary research sources. Before I left for Ladakh, I had some idea of the things in which I was most interested. I was compelled to explore the experiences of the Ladakhi child and adolescent, and to try to understand how these experiences have shifted with the importation of modern infrastructure and technology. Once I arrived in Ladakh, however, I was overwhelmed. The culture I entered into was fascinating, and the people I met and spoke to were hospitable. But several factors, including a major language barrier, a time constraint, and my own issues with acute altitude sickness, proved challenging. Furthermore, the more I learned about Ladakh and the complexity of its cultures, the more I began to realize just how ambitious my study really was. In order to understand childhood and family experience, I had to develop a working knowledge of other basic aspects of the Ladakhi experience. These were things like Vajrayana Buddhism, Ladakhi monasticism, Himalayan ecology, subsistence agriculture, and specific social systems (such as the *phaspun*, the *chutso*, and

so on) on which most Ladakhi families still rely. These are weighty subjects, and my explorations of them were not superficial.

I am certainly not an expert on Buddhism or subsistence agriculture or really any of the subjects I came to study. Yet I feel that my decision to broaden the focus of the study actually strengthened the thesis. Very few secondary sources that I consulted dealt with childhood in Ladakh in a major way. I feel that my secondary research on Ladakh has been exhaustive, but I admit that only a handful of the books I found on Ladakh directly addressed the experience of the Ladakhi child or adolescent. It is also for this reason, then, that I chose to bolster my research (primary and secondary) with background on the region.

The people I knew best, namely Atchen, Chondol, and Rinchen, were eager to answer my questions. Although these women were all about my age, I was able to ask them about their experiences within the context of their families, as children and as young adults. All members of both families were aware that I was a student conducting research for a paper. At times, they seemed puzzled by my interests, and by my desire to get involved in the workings of the households. I spent much of my time weeding with the women of the Miskit family, for instance. The first time I made my way out to the small kitchen garden and squatted in the soil in my *kurta* and sandals, the Miskit mothers cried out in what I assume was protest. Through Rinchen, I informed the women that I grew up in a family that took gardening very seriously, and that I was in fact quite content to spend the day with them picking weeds out of the onion patch. The women relaxed. Someone would fetch and pour out cups of mint tea every hour or so. This was not backbreaking labor, and it gave me a sense of the rhythm of the household.

I simply did not have enough time to fall into a routine and become more of a fixture in a household, rather than a visitor. Both families with whom I stayed were gracious and welcoming, but my presence was always obvious. I therefore was never able to experience the truly typical day-to-day life of a Ladakhi family, since I was always treated as a guest. This, I realize, is a fairly common problem. Even the most devoted researchers in Ladakh very rarely remain in the region through the winter. My time in Ladakh was very limited. Thus, the scope of the research I was able to conduct was compromised.

The limitation of my time in Ladakh also affected how many direct interactions I was able to have with children. As I have mentioned previously, children in Ladakh have a number of responsibilities. Even when I was living with a family that included a secondary school-aged daughter, I rarely was able to connect with her. Out of all the members of the Tsering family, it was the youngest daughter who spent the most time outside the home.

Despite the major limitations and the significant shortcomings in this study, one of the things I feel most proud of is my discovery that there is a lack of scholarly exploration on this subject. This may sound a bit odd—since I am in effect saying that I am proud to have found that the area I am looking at has been given little attention. But I think that researching childhood in traditional and contemporary Ladakhi society is an important exercise, and one that reveals a major flaw in the scholarship of this part of the world. Although at times very frustrating, the limited information on childhood and families in Ladakh allowed me to exercise some resourcefulness and make decisions to

alter the design of my research and writing. I was also able to hone in, specifically on the few authors that did present some material on the subjects I was researching.

During my time in Ladakh, I reflected on what it meant to be American and female in this region. I recognized that I was influencing the people I spoke to, as they were influencing me. I dressed in a *salwar kameez*, a popular north Indian outfit, as many Ladakhi women do, particularly in the summer months. I learned many of the Hindi and Ladakhi words of greeting, thanks, and courtesy. I weeded gardens, herded cows, and drank astounding quantities of butter tea. These things became important in ways I did not anticipate. They helped me to understand the culture in a way that felt immediate and tangible. Srinivas (1998) deals with this type of engagement and contemplation in her research and writes about it eloquently. She emphasizes the importance of understanding “the visceral pathways of culture.”

Interestingly enough, the scholar that really opened up the region to research and international interest was western and female. Helena Norberg-Hodge wrote *Ancient Futures* to spread awareness about recent shifts in traditional lifestyle, and the effects of these shifts on sustainability, ecology, and social customs in Ladakh (1991). Norberg-Hodge is perhaps the only scholar of Ladakhi issues that directly addresses the issues this thesis looks at—namely the structure of Ladakhi families in both traditional and contemporary contexts. For this reason, Norberg-Hodge’s work has occupied a major place in my study and process. Many contemporary scholars write on their feelings about the research process and how it can affect the research conducted. Even Norberg-Hodge, who is one of the few scholars that is truly fluent in the Ladakhi dialect of Tibetan,

cannot claim to fully “fit in,” though she has spent a substantial amount of her life living in and studying the region.

Ancient Futures is a pivotal book for Ladakh. It is the publication that really introduced this region to the global imagination. A monk at the Central Institute for Buddhist Studies, located on a large desert campus in Choglamsar, spoke ebulliently about the book, listing off the languages it has been translated into and speaking of Norberg-Hodge as though she were an old friend. He seemed proud of the research this woman had done and giddy that Ladakh was becoming better known as a result. For this reason I was a bit shocked when I read the book. It is a scathing critique of modernity’s infiltration into Ladakhi culture.

It was because of books like Norberg-Hodge’s, books that were relevant and compelling but highly politicized, that I felt motivated to broaden my research and read a range of different accounts. Because I was forced to read books and articles that fell outside the subject area I had originally intended to study, I was better able to examine and understand the general western scholarly view of Ladakh and Ladakhis. I am aware of the complex implications of being a westerner studying a culture so fundamentally different from the one I know, and I hope that my sensitivity to this issue is clearly demonstrated throughout this paper.

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