

*“Lamae Lam Stanchin”*:  
Regenerating Indigenous Governance through Education in Ladakh

“...So you are on the brink of madness. This is a good bit of news, majestic in its fearfulness, fearful in its majesty and beauty. I say that madness is the first step towards unselfishness. Be mad. Be mad and tell us what is behind the veil of ‘sanity’. The purpose of life is to bring us closer to those secrets, and madness is the only means.”

-Khalil Gibran, 1921

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*After a few days of adjusting to the harsh altitude and lull of the surrounding Zanskar Range, I found myself sitting cross-legged on the floor (as traditional in a Ladakhi dining hall), surrounded by Ladakhi youth and educators alike. Encouraged by my academic supervisors to follow my passions and experience, I waited patiently to meet with Sonam Wangchuk, director of the Student Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL), in order to etch out my possible contribution to youth and education within the Ladakhi community. It was during this initial encounter with Ladakh, SECMOL, and Ka Le (Respected Elder), that I was assured that the changes around and within me would facilitate my process of understanding in contending with the realities that unraveled before me. As Ka Lae reiterated to me again upon my departure four months later: “Lamae Lam Stanchin”. A Ladakhi proverb which insists that “paths will lead to more paths...”*

From my own experience of six years in academia, it was all too evident that universities (which were once considered the place that individuals went to in order to find their place in the universe) have merely become narrow and elitist spaces for individuals and larger collectives to overburden themselves with rhetoric.

Born to Indian parents/first generation Canadians, I was reared by eastern worldviews. I was informed of the global contribution of the ancient civilization of India; from mathematics (zero, decimal, numerals, the Pythagoras theory etc), to health science (yoga, meditation, martial arts etc), to social science (Mahatma Gandhi led one of the greatest revolutions known to man kind which influenced (and continues to) revolutions around the world), and to language (the first dictionary and document on grammar) etc. However, while my textbooks and lectures of the western education utilized these understandings, western ideals and thoughts were portrayed as greater than any other values or notions of being. So as a result of my experiences with educational institutions, I became sensitive to the imposition of foreign worldviews on immigrants to new nations<sup>i</sup> as well to the struggles of Indigenous peoples who are being exposed and/or imposed on through western value systems.

So in anticipation of my stay in Ladakh, I was eager to be immersed in a region where Indigenous peoples have consciously withstood the incursion of foreign value systems. But as I became informed, I learned that tourism, development, industrialization and economic globalization are slowly infiltrating their way into Ladakhi society and consequentially Ladakhis are being swayed by western value systems for the first time. Since Ladakhis are heavily influenced by (and not so much fortified against) this infiltration, I set out to assist in facilitating grassroots education based resistance strategies. While the imposition of modern education is presently propagating the influx of western value systems (for the advancement of western hegemony), education in Ladakh may be regenerated in order to revive communities and unite the region in overthrowing imperial impositions which threaten Ladakhi sovereignty.

When undertaking this project, I ventured to utilize my existence as a 'North American female Indo-Canadian' in the study of Indigenous peoples' education and community regeneration in order to uphold Ladakhi worldviews and value systems while de-emphasizing the imposing western worldview. Determined that my contribution to the Ladakhi community would be defined by the Ladakhi community itself, after one email exchange, one phone conversation, and endless reassurance to family and friends, I found myself stepping out onto the landing strip of the highest airport in the world. No internet site, literature, nor single conversation could prepare me for what lay ahead as I stumbled under the blinding sun and yet fierce cold of Leh, Ladakh. As I was supported in regaining my balance, it would soon become apparent that the blatant contradiction in weather symbolized the wavering governance defining this land.

As already suggested, imperial processes have and continue to inflict political, economic, cultural, and social imbalances on this trans-Himalayan region now defined by its ancestral heritage and present status as part of the northernmost state of Jammu and Kashmir in India. In Ladakh the immense *changes* which occurred for decades in between the ancient past<sup>ii</sup> and modern present are too easily glossed over. However, as Ladakhis themselves are realizing (through an expanding infrastructure of social services, status holding<sup>iii</sup>, and councils<sup>iv</sup>), by adequately affronting these *changes* (the internal and external dynamics that are responsible for influencing present communal, social, economic, and political processes), they may be able to re-invent governance structures that have been challenged by imperialism.

Traditionally, Ladakhis formed symbiotic relations with people of various religions and ethnicities, the often inhospitable climate, and the bountiful earth, in order to ensure the longevity of their community. As they endeavored to meet their own needs, they were also conscious of the importance of sustaining relations with surrounding communities to ensure that peace and resources could be shared. As a result, the notion of Ladakhi governance examined in this narrative is defined as the sustainable and equitable maintenance of the Ladakhi region by individual sovereign collectives. While cultural plurality was obviously part of the Ladakhis Indigenous heritage (Aggarwal 34)<sup>v</sup>, symbiotic processes were impeded through imperial practices such as divisionary politics (i.e. geographic and ethnic divides<sup>vi</sup>) and education. Education, a structure of governance and an integral tool used in Ladakhi communities to exercise local sovereignty while strengthening worldviews and perspectives that are conscious of the whole, was swiftly uprooted by colonial<sup>vii</sup> and post-colonial<sup>viii</sup> entities within the region. Thereby

challenging local and regional integrity, imperial impositions ushered forward the loss of communal (and thus individual) interdependence and accountability within the region. In response to this direct affront to their governance, Ladakhis began educational reforms acknowledging that education and local governance must be reinvented simultaneously.

Accordingly, my efforts to assist Ladakhis in reviving their governance structures evolved into four months (October 2006-February 2007) of facilitating a *learning* experience for a group of young people of the *Student Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh* (SECMOL). Initiated in 1988, by and for Ladakhi youth, SECMOL was and remains the most influential vehicle in Ladakh for instigating grassroots educational initiatives that positively influence and include the support of Ladakhi communities. While SECMOL leads the Ladakhi community in educational reforms, working directly with Ladakhi youth I began to realize how these youth themselves must be informed, conscious, and challenged to respond to their ever-transforming realities. As a result, with an emphasis on responding to the global impact on local issues and establishing communal accountability through re-conceptualizing education to encompass Ladakhi grass roots leadership and experiential learning it was my goal to re-politicize/inspire education amongst young Ladakhis.<sup>ix</sup>

Throughout my process of learning which took me directly to Ladakh, one story led me to another...and then to another. This narrative is indicative of the many stories that guided 'my' understanding of this land and its people. In identifying *Changes to Ladakh*, I examine the replacement of Ladakhi worldviews with western worldviews. This facilitated the incursion of imperial processes which permeated Ladakhs' sovereign identity while consequently dismantling Ladakhi governance structures. By identifying



the attempts at “Surviving” *Change* in Ladakh, I was able to comprehend the impact of modern education within Ladakh, while evaluating Ladakhi educational reforms in order to consider more effective strategies that will respond to global processes inhibiting the sovereignty of individuals and therefore communities. In forming a resistance to *change*, I worked with the Ladakhi community to re-define education and leadership while embodying grass root reforms through re-enforcing Indigenous knowledge and conceptualizing social, economic, cultural and therefore political affronts to global processes inflicting unnecessary *change* on Ladakhis and governance alike. Furthermore, through a synthesis of my experience and the work of numerous individuals whose experiences have allowed me to affirm my own as well as inspire my shortcomings, I will imbue this narrative with future recommendations for individuals keen on pursuing similar work.

It is my sincerest hope that this narrative will unravel the *paths* of truths from the many stories that it is comprised of and that it will in turn inspire the renewal of old stories and the birth of new ones.

### ***Changes to Ladakh: Local Manifestations of Western Hegemony***

*“If the valley is reached by a high pass, only the best of friends and worst of enemies are its visitors-Tibetan proverb” (Norman v).*

*I reached Ladakh (the valley of high passes) at the beginning of winter, where the end of the tourist season signaled the beginning of the ‘Ladakhi season’. Ladakhis (urban dwellers and villagers alike) overwhelmed the recently abandoned streets of Leh now lined with desolate guesthouses, internet cafes and antique stores. For business or for pleasure, they occupied the open spaces of the market place, the local newspapers, radio, television, and households. Coincidentally, winter was an opportune time for a foreigner to be exposed to the external and internal politics subtly defusing Ladakhi governance structures and resurrecting agendas which are suppressing traditional governance and welcoming oppression into the region for the first time.*

When arriving in Ladakh, I was automatically exposed to *changes* (the impact of economic globalization created by a network of tariffs, foreign investment, and a turn away from India's Soviet style planned economy to a more neo-liberal attitude towards economics) taking place within the region. However, all the while it was equally apparent that Ladakhis were engaging in political and non-political movements (please see endnotes iii and iv) to reverse these global trends. With this in mind, I was most keen on exploring non-political grass roots movements that are re-centralizing Ladakhi communities. Traditionally integral to facilitating communal and regional governance, and currently one of the most effective tools in strengthening local sovereignty, I was specifically anxious to examine educational reforms within the region. But, it was not until I peered closely at the consequences of these *changes* that I witnessed how deeply Ladakhis are embedded in imperial processes (notably liberalization and economic globalization). Furthermore, it was only after identifying these processes that I would begin to understand how the systemic oppression that Ladakhis are directly and indirectly engaged in could possibly permeate the educational system in Ladakh, transforming education itself into a tool of oppression.

Post-colonial India had a huge impact on the region which it mapped out and classified as Ladakh. As a result, the region soon reflected the policies of the state and federal governments of India while simultaneously embodying the objectives of western hegemonic processes (i.e. liberalization, economic globalization, development, and education (to be discussed in the next chapter)) which are instigating large transformations of Ladakhs' cultural, societal, economic and political landscape.

### *Liberalization and Economic Globalization*

Evident in the policies immediately initiated in Ladakh post-independence (i.e. safeguarding borders and developing ‘backward’ regions (please refer to endnote viii)), Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was heavily occupied with modernizing/fortifying India as an economic superpower. With this agenda at the forefront of all political maneuvering, India exchanged its five year economic plans<sup>x</sup> (regarded as cumbersome, inefficient and uncompetitive) for a series of economic policies collectively known as liberalization. Initiated, in 1991, by Rajiv Gandhi (then Prime Minister) and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh (current Prime Minister of India), liberalization ushered in an open market for free trade to flourish. However, as industrial nations expanded their economic activities into India, liberalization significantly altered the management role of the nation state and consequently resurrected challenges to national sovereignty and democracy.<sup>xi</sup> Negligent of the dependencies/exploitation being generated, India obediently encouraged these processes through “the signing of nuclear agreements, creation of Special Economic Zones, and imposition of new patent laws...” etc (Williams 8). Eventually the system of economic globalization pervaded the nation of India with the support of unaccountable Indian rulers (Roy 224), who continue to welcome corporatism and privatization (78).<sup>xii</sup> Roy regrettably describes the process in which India has become part:

On the global stage, beyond the jurisdiction of sovereign governments, international instruments of trade and finance oversee a complex web of multilateral laws and agreements that have entrenched a system of appropriation that puts colonialism to shame. This system allows the unrestricted entry and exit of massive amounts of speculative capital-hot money-in and out of third world countries, which then effectively dictates their economic policy. Using the threat of capital flight as a lever, international capital insinuates itself deeper and deeper into these economies. Giant transnational corporations are taking control of their

essential infrastructure and natural resources, their minerals, their water, their electricity. The World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank, virtually write economic policy and parliamentary legislation. With a deadly combination of arrogance and ruthlessness, they take their sledgehammers to fragile, interdependent, historically complex societies, and devastate them (294).

With the ruthless intent of controlling and centralizing global markets, the processes of economic globalization disrupt local industries. By uprooting local livelihood and controlling local resources, economic globalization is perpetuating the demise of local sovereignty in India.

Stewart-Harawira claims that Indigenous populations the world over have been incorporated into development initiatives in order to fulfill capitalist exploitation and expansion (123).<sup>xiii</sup> As it will soon become evident, development, as prescribed to by the nation state of India is too often linked to the initiatives of economic globalization. In India, where access to natural resources is a matter of survival (since seventy percent of the population lives in rural areas), “assets” are being sold by the State to private corporations (Roy 223-224). Within Ladakh itself, the region has similarly been exploited since 1999 for developments of technology, education and the global market (Aggarwal 30). van Beek explains that the activities of development (i.e. industrialization, modernization etc) are geared towards ensuring “people an opportunity to make money in a ‘modern’ market economy” (158). Development in Ladakh was conceived for the “common good” (van Beek 170) and was rationalized by the state and nation as an essential prerequisite for eliminating the backwardness of the region and its people (Aggarwal 11) (see endnote viii). But unlike many other scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in India whose lands and resources are being exploited through

liberalization and economic globalization, Ladakh is protected under the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir from any and all foreign or Indian (except those from the state of Jammu and Kashmir) investors. Regardless, development through the culture of globalization is being contrived in Ladakh. The resulting social, cultural, environmental, ethical, and political undertones created in the Ladakhi region are visible to foreigners and Ladakhis alike. From my own perception:

*Listening to stories and perceiving the depravity first-hand, I began to believe that the character of Ladakh was somehow tainted. As military jets paraded the sky in displays of pomp and might, the stains to this civilization slowly unveiled themselves... The holy Indus River which once appeared as white as milk, and drinking streams which were once available in abundance to visitors and residences alike, are now strewn with rubbish and excrement. Overlooking the market place, a friend recalled how young Buddhist monks were guided by the masses to lead the riots and rebellions against the Muslim populations a couple years back. In these days, stories of peace and reconciliation are replaced with the news of Saddam Hussein's death sentence, the Jolie/Pitt family visit to India, and the image of a mass-murderer plastered on magazines covers to constitute the only real threat to society.*

Norberg-Hodge acknowledges this change in attitudes and values in Ladakh and refers to this as “the birth of a new world view in Ladakh...” (108). As a result of their shift in worldview<sup>xiv</sup>, Ladakhis are beginning to reveal support for liberalization and economic globalization at the expense of their sovereignty<sup>xv</sup>. Many attribute the shift in worldviews of Ladakh to 1962 when the borders opened and consequentially ushered in tourism. Traditionally a depot of trade, Rizvi offers that visitors were not new to Ladakh, however that modern visitors (tourists) carry different worldviews than “the merchants of yesteryear...” who “...came from a similar intellectual environment and shared roughly the same framework of values and expectations as the local people” (192). Although Wangchuk claims that tourism has the effect of strengthening pride in Ladakhi cultural roots which were being challenged as a result of development policies in the region

(Norman v), the influx of materialism resulting from tourism (Namgail 5) also has the reverse effect of threatening the integrity of Ladakhi traditions (Norberg-Hodge 93).

Norberg-Hodge exclaims that “development has brought not only tourism, but also Western and Indian film and, more recently, television” (96). In addition to tourism, media has also been extremely influential in altering the worldview of Ladakhis.

Norberg-Hodge explains that westernized Indian films make Ladakhi youth “feel ashamed of their own traditions and values” (97), urging them to adopt the new traditions and values offered by economic globalization. But not naïve, Ladakhis are apprehensive of the “distorted impressions that the flood of images and products from Western consumer cultures are already promoting...” (Mingle 23). However, through hours of watching Indian films with my own students, I question whether or not these youth are aware of the long term effects of a consumer culture? Whether or not, these youth are truly cognizant of the pseudo façades of happiness plastered on television programs, magazines, billboards, which are created and maintained through singular affiliations, hollow perceptions and individualistic desires? If they are aware that the same images that promise them happiness, challenge their culture and traditions which promote plural affiliations, foresight, and communal desires?

Without forewarning the minority and/or Indigenous masses, western media scandalously promotes a culture that has the potential to devastate healthy and sustainable communities. Perhaps this is because the economic and political power generated from the contributions of global communities to the ‘modern’ market economy, are being controlled by the West (Norberg-Hodge 155). In addition to control over profit, the West is asserting cultural and racial superiority over developing countries through development

initiatives defined by the West. In assuming that “needs are everywhere the same” (152), the West’s addiction to development is pressurizing other supposed ‘backward’ areas to ‘develop’ (121). Most devastatingly, this is resulting in “a single monoculture” worldwide (152). The development process in India is no different, and has been chastised for representing western values such as relying “heavily on Western-style technological interventions” (Rizvi 178) while “loosing her unique cultural identity” (Namgail 2). Regardless of necessity, development is in the midst of transforming environments, peoples, and communities worldwide. The western style of development in Ladakh itself is resulting in a variety of painful contradictions:

*Moving back and forth from the traditional SECMOL campus to modernized Leh, I respectively experienced the effectiveness of solar powered-south facing-compressed dirt earth buildings, and ‘luxurious’ cement (imported from the south and transported through the mountains) rooms requiring portable heaters and copious amounts of fuel; In order to lure them into eventually paying for chemical enhancements, fertilizers were delivered free of cost to farmers in Ladakh who were already yielding carrots and radishes with circumferences proportionate to watermelons; With billboard signs advertising life insurance lining the main road in the city, I spent hours upon hours holding my pee in the market since most traditional latrines have been replaced with modern toilets (which are only functional in the summer (3 to 4 months of the year)); While SUVs are available in abundance, I watched the young people dig up earth to throw our recyclable (if facilities existed!) trash into the sides of mountains...*

*Development in Ladakh continued...*

*I asked my students whether or not I would be able to manage a three day journey over and back through the highest pass in Ladakh. After consulting with a number of sources who confidently approved of my journey, I wearily sought further counsel from one of my younger students. He laughed out loud and without hesitation advised against my departure, remarking that due to the present weather conditions I would most likely be snowed in on the other side of the pass which would prolong my return by weeks.*

Akin to unraveling a sweater by pulling on a single thread, gathering information in Ladakh revealed unexpected amounts of information coupled with the tiresome and yet

desperate urge to continue pulling. Question after question, book after book, verification after verification, I was able to untie and expose a part of the many interwoven truths. In grasping the impact of imperial processes through examining development initiatives in Ladakh, it is evident that western worldviews threatens to transplant Indigenous knowledge in order to perpetuate the loss of Ladakhi governance structures. As a result, challenges to Ladakhi sovereignty are being rationalized and justified by national and global policies that represent the initiatives of a new world order defined by the hegemonic agenda of the West:

Development effectively, but unfortunately leads to the erosion of capital, power, and freedom (Roy 48), which in Ladakh has resulted in increased dependency on global markets and a challenge to agency previously gained from traditional subsistence. Like most Indigenous peoples, Ladakhis had a very prosperous and intimate relationship with the land. Since the majority of Ladakhis live in villages, animal husbandry and agriculture have been the main subsistence (van Beek 163). However, akin to economic globalization processes around the world, development in Ladakh has brought in the global market “with their subsidized agricultural goods and other products with which local producers cannot possibly compete” (Roy 295). As a result, sixty percent of the region’s food is imported from the outside (Ledeg 18), leading to bankruptcy and the sale of lands (Aggarwal 73). In a skit demonstrating the impact of development on Ladakh, my students informed me that these lands are then transformed into hotels and restaurants contributing to tourism and related service sectors.

The impact of development has also led to an ever-increasing reliance on state intervention in various aspects of Ladakhi life (van Beek 151). Ladakh’s Scheduled



Tribe status (please refer to endnote iii) has made Ladakhis increasingly dependent on a government regulated reservation system (widely contested) promising better employment and educational opportunities while ironically making people more dependent and thus “eligible for federal subsidies and loans...” (Aggarwal 180). Women in Ladakh have also endured a tremendous challenge to agency since men are prized in the industrial culture created by globalization. Consequently since women are not earning substantial incomes, they are no longer regarded as “productive” (Norberg-Hodge 166). The declining status of women was visible to me when the director of a well-known Ladakhi organization relayed to me his enthusiasm about the increase in female participation that year. However, in the midst of discussions regarding youth and empowerment, the female volunteers were excused to prepare and serve tea.

Development has also had the adverse effect of undermining local self-reliance with challenges to self-sufficiency and sustainability within the region. Leh, the capital of Ladakh, is a rapidly growing urban centre with a burgeoning cash economy accommodating the finest conveniences of a ‘developed’ world (i.e. cars, roads, restaurants, shopping complexes) (Aggarwal 15). However, Norberg-Hodge claims that “development in Ladakh, as elsewhere, has worked like a whirlpool, pulling people relentlessly into the centre” (116). Enticed by facilities unknown in their villages (van Beek 44), Norberg-Hodge acknowledges a steady migration of rural populations into the city in search of jobs and education. Unfortunately, this migration is resulting in the creation of urban slums (46) since economic activity is no longer based on local resources (116) or even entirely operated by Ladakhis themselves (van Beek 190). The infiltration of the global market and resulting decline in local markets became apparent to me when

in the market I often hurried past businesses laden with North Face jackets, fake designer jeans, packaged chips, Maggie (the Indian equivalent of Mr. Noodles) (just to name a few), operated by Tibetan refugees, Kashmiris, and Punjabis alike. More invasively however, was the patriotic orange glow of Airtel, Indian Airlines, and Indian Oil, illuminating the presence of corporate India in the ever-expanding parameters of the market place.

This attraction towards modern conveniences, has also contributed to a breakdown of local interdependence in Ladakh. Once in urban centers, the disintegration of communal bonds is apparent: with the appearance of nuclear homes; labour drains in villages as men and children are sent out in search of employment or in need of ‘education’ (Mingle 21); and divisionary families since women are left to toil in villages alone (Norberg-Hodge 107). The breakdown of communities has resulted in a “reliance” on outside workers (van Beek 195) often procured from Nepal or Bihar (Mingle 21). It has also encouraged unsustainable practices through the abandonment of traditional practices (i.e. natural pesticides, cow dung for fuel, home-spun wool clothing etc) viewed as backward but which contribute to the safeguarding of personal health and the physical environment (Norberg-Hodge 114-118).

Development has also infused Ladakhi society with a competitive edge which is presenting an unfortunate challenge to co-existence in the region. Norberg-Hodge claims that political and economic structures encouraging mutual aid have disintegrated along with traditional tolerance and cooperation (116-122). While Namgail (a Ladakhi) repents the loss of a “pious society” steeped in “harmony” and “religious camaraderie” (5),

Shourie identifies the “transition to modernisation” as the key factor of these changes (Indian 38) (also please see endnote vi).

As Ladakhis contend with *changes* that were instigated by their inclusion into the nation state of India and consequently the larger discourse of western hegemony (through processes of liberalization, economic globalization, development, and education (to be discussed in the next chapter), which assert western traditions and values while advancing the capitalist expansion of the western world), they have implicated themselves within a form of dependency and oppression which perhaps has zero parallels within history. As minority groups and as an Indigenous population, Ladakhis are in a precarious position, where rights and equality within democratic systems are overburdened by capitalist agendas. The impacts of these various *agendas/changes* to Ladakh have specifically resulted in the disintegration of communal structures which previously regulated social, political, economic, and cultural stability. While past imperial processes challenged sovereignty, present imperial processes directed by more persuasive attempts by the global and local & external and internal forces of the hegemonic authority of the West, threatens to replace Ladakhi sovereignty entirely. And in essence, the loss of communal interactions which regulate the impact of individuals or larger collectives on the individuals or larger collectives within a community, is directly facilitating the loss of governance within this region.

In specifically examining how Ladakhi education has been uprooted by a modern/westernized educational system, the next two sections will also explore the process of infiltrating the modern educational system to reinvent communal infrastructures to uphold Ladakhi governance within the region.

### **“Surviving” *Change* in Ladakh: Reforms to Education**

As Ladakhis contend with *changes*, perhaps their most immediate concern is resisting the infiltration of western worldviews spread through tools such as development. But perhaps more insidious than development, modern education is also infiltrating the minds of Ladakhi youth and society. Stewart-Harawira explains that knowledge production is a central feature of global capitalism, where “the diffusion of power underpinning the global politico-economic framework is identifiable within the articulation of particular forms of knowledge and subjectivities as desirable objectives within the global economy” (219). In light of the insurgence of capitalist expansion and exploitation coupled with western style education, the West is imposing perceptions in places all around the world such as Ladakh. First introduced to Ladakh during the reign of the British Empire, this education is informed by western worldviews which are intolerant of the particularities and/or subtleties of different worldviews and values. And parallel to the linear concepts and obtrusive knowledge promoted within my own educational experience, these forms of knowledge presently enforce the objectives of western hegemony (a force greater than even the British Empire). By decentralizing power, this form of education is consequently obstructing the practice of sovereignty within the region of Ladakh.

In response to this direct affront to their governance, Ladakhis employed subversive tactics by introducing reforms to the educational system in order to re-invent governance in the region. But, in light of past (the British) and present (western hegemony) infiltrations of Ladakhi worldviews, Ladakhi youth as well as the educational system in Ladakh are heavily influenced by a western model of education. Consequently,

the relationship between local governance and education will be made obvious by the repercussions of this modern education on Ladakhi youth.

### *Traditional Education vs Modern Westernized Education*

As *changes* to the region began to impede Ladakhi governance, they also simultaneously disrupted traditional education. Prior to a foreign educational system within Ladakh, communal integrity and regional consciousness was facilitated and sustained through traditional Ladakhi education. But now akin to development in Ladakh, ‘education’ can be viewed as a strategy for propagating agendas of western hegemony while dismantling local sovereignty and regional governance. Initiated by the integration of British education into Ladakhi communities, this new education can be viewed as a shameful medium which transforms the mindset of peoples (especially youth) while ensuring their contribution to the violent process of which they are regrettably part.

Traditionally, education in Ladakh was the informal “...preparation of youth for lives of meaningful work and the transmission of Ladakh’s unique cultural values” through experience, oral stories and the practicing of community (Mingle 20). This education took place in villages, fields, and in the home (Mingle 20), where “children learned from grandparents, family, and friends” who emphasized “...the intricate web of fluctuating relationships in the natural world around them” (Norberg-Hodge 110-111). This education promoted: self-sufficiency despite the volatile political climate and harsh environment (due to the high altitude, non-existent precipitation, and long winters); sustainability in relations with nature and neighboring communities (Mingle 20); and interrelatedness since Ladakhis remained conscious of others in order to utilize the resources that they were all dependent on for survival etc (Stewart Harrawira 41).

However with influence from Britain and the repercussions of a globalized world, Ladakh's traditional education has been transformed significantly. Similar to past imperial processes, Ladakhi education began to reflect the objectives of capitalistic agendas. As a result, Indigenous worldviews of particular-ism and collectivity were replaced with western values of individualism, universalism, achievement and specificity (Stewart-Harrawira 108).

First penetrating Ladakhi villages in the 1970s, now about two hundred schools are being taught "...a poor imitation of that taught in other parts of India, which itself is an imitation of British education" (Norberg-Hodge 111). Gupta explains that the present educational system in India perpetuates many false notions of colonial rule. The most devastating of which is the notion that "modern education is the most pertinent instrument of deliverance from ignorance, superstition, social injustices and poverty" (9). Placing belief in this claim, the modern westernized education was prized especially by Ladakhi elite who set up many private schools throughout Ladakh but increasingly began sending their children outside of Ladakh for more 'refined' secondary and post-secondary education not available within the region (Aggarwal 73). However, in order to provide educational opportunities to all Ladakhis, government (public) schools opened shortly thereafter stationing unwilling teachers from Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of India in Ladakh. As a result of the frustration of the teachers, language confusion caused by inadequate teachers and curriculum, implementation of inappropriate models of instruction (Mingle 19-21), and the teaching of impractical skills (Norberg-Hodge 111), the western education was anything but adequate. This was demonstrated by the "95 percent failure rate of those taking the 10<sup>th</sup> class exam, a make-or-break test that

functions as a kind of passport for future opportunities in employment of higher education” (Mingle 19). In addition to this, through supporting mandates of federal and global agendas (ie. liberalization, economic globalization, development), the modern education began facilitating a steady integration into the hegemonic clutches of the West through enforcing the replacement of localized and sustainable practices with dependence on external services and livelihoods. Not only did education become less relevant to Ladakhi communities, but their newly displaced economy began disrupting social, cultural, and political processes. Although modern education has also brought some benefits to Ladakh (ie. increased rates of literacy and numeracy, as well as provided information about the world outside Ladakh (Norberg-Hodge 114)), by training Ladakhis to “become narrow specialists in a Westernized urban environment” (Norberg-Hodge 110)), the imperial education in Ladakh facilitated the breakdown of local sovereignty and regional governance. While earlier education meant facilitating relationships, the new educational system has “come to mean only white-collar jobs and upward mobility in the socio-economic hierarchy” (Gupta 11-12).

Fortunately, the transformation from traditional informal Ladakhi community-oriented education to a formal hegemonic-centric educational system is being reversed as current trends in educational reforms are reflecting communal integrity in education created and administered by Ladakhis. However, in considering these educational reforms in light of my recent experiences with Ladakhi youth, I will assess the need for additional reforms which can lead to Ladakhi governance.

### *Reforms to Education*

*In partnership with The Ladakh Autonomous Development Hill Council (LADHC) and under the initiative of Operation New Hope (ONH), SECMOL hosted over 2000*

*villagers to its campus to be trained as Village Education Committee (VEC) members. Villagers came in groups of 120-200 for four day periods in which they were trained to strengthen their role in the educational system and revitalize their villages/communities. Experiencing and witnessing this all first hand, it was visible to me that education in Ladakh is being rescued by the community. Me-me Les (grandfathers), Abi Les (grandmothers), Ama Les (mothers), Aba Les (fathers), aunts, uncles, sister, brothers, educators and community members alike, gathered from ten different districts to equip themselves and the region with tactics to survive change...*

The tides of change in Ladakh have left a stain upon the soil. But as van Beek states: “people in Ladakh do not simply sit around, but actively engage in the negotiation of their circumstances and try to alter them” (374). Failing to prepare Ladakhi youth for the maintenance of healthy communities and/or prosperous livelihoods, the modern educational system in Ladakh was eventually recognized as a deterrent to Ladakhi sovereignty. As a result, reforms to public education in Ladakh began in 1988, when several young Ladakhis who had experienced the broken educational system (Rizvi 188) began questioning “the Western approach to education, which is intended to produce specialists and experts...” (Mingle 24) rather than members of the various communities and/or the larger region of Ladakh. This student led non-profit initiative soon became known as the *Student Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh* (SECMOL). Determined “to explore alternatives to formal education” (Norberg-Hodge 176), SECMOL discovered four main problem areas in the public educational system: “inappropriate language medium approaches; unfamiliar and culturally irrelevant context in texts and curricula; untrained teachers; and most importantly, parents who had no sense of ownership of their community’s schools” (Mingle 21). They responded by engaging change in both government and village levels through the initiative *Operation New Hope* (ONH). Rizvi explains that “under ONH, village education committees have been formed to involve local communities, training and reorientation camps for teachers



are held, the primary school curriculum is being modified, and a beginning has been made in drawing up a series of textbooks relevant to Ladakh” (Rizvi 189). In 1996, Operation New Hope was “adopted by the newly established Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council...as its official education policy” (Mingle 21). This three-pronged strategy (involving the community, NGO, and the government) has proven to transform the progress of public school students throughout Ladakh.

In addition to reforms to the public educational system, SECMOL endorses renewable energy throughout the region through solar construction, maintains audio and video broadcasts to update the Ladakhi public on local and global issues affecting their communities, and runs youth summer camps. However, most pertinent to this study as well as most effective (in my estimation) in addressing the failures of the educational system, SECMOL has constructed and maintains an Alternative Institute campus. While functioning as the nucleus for SECMOL reforms, this sustainable and culturally relevant campus functions (in its construction and activities) as a buffer for youth from external dynamics (i.e. development, modern education (Mingle 24)) that are challenging local sovereignty. This Alternative Institute campus (more commonly referred to as SECMOL campus) is located in a valley at the foot of the Indus River, 2 km inland from the main road, and approximately that same distance from the neighboring village of Phey. In addition to traditional construction and design, the campus also utilizes modern technology to create a self-sustaining, manually efficient, solar-powered campus (often noted as the warmest place in the region during the winter) with student quarters, staff quarters, animal quarters, a common bathroom, a common kitchen, dining hall, classrooms and offices. With only a handful of full-time staff members, the campus

rotates primary school students and solar-energy students (with the majority of their instruction on-campus), and secondary school students and college students (with the majority of their instruction off-campus) for one to sometimes two or three years of training in Ladakhi arts (i.e. song, dance, carving) and traditions (i.e. animal husbandry, agriculture). The primary school students are engaged in the formal undertaking of their tenth grade standard by SECMOL campus teachers. And omitting the solar students (who are being trained for a social enterprise), the secondary school students (engaged in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard in public schools in Leh) and college level students (engaged in post-secondary institutions in Leh) receive skill-based learning in addition to their public education. As a result, this centre may be perceived as part of SECMOL's reforms to the public educational system, since the students/boarders gather from various villages throughout Ladakh to improve the skills they were unable to learn in the broken public educational system of which they were (and or are) part.

### *Re-assessing Educational Reforms*

*After getting off the bus and hiking 40 minutes through the valley I arrived at SECMOL campus. Here the teenagers/young adults would soon demonstrate to me that akin to young people everywhere, Ladakhi youth experience insecurities, confidence, dreams and indifference. Throughout my stay, I continued to observe the similarities, but was most often inspired by the differences. The various backgrounds and life experiences of Ladakhi youth unite them to one another and to the region...*

Welcomed by SECMOL, and directed by Sonam Wangchuk, I was to live and facilitate workshops amongst all forty of their campus students consisting of 15 boys and 21 girls ranging in age from 16-23. Although initially overwhelmed by the thought of memorizing all of their names and faces, I set about assessing the students' needs by acquainting myself with their personalities, characteristics, strengths/weaknesses, interests and aspirations. These youth arrived from an array of eastern, northern, and

western village communities set in low and high valley passes, mountains and pastoral nomadic plains. Indiscriminately, they represented various districts, castes, religions, and genders. Many were sent to SECMOL by their parents, others wanted to improve their academics, and others were perturbed by the commotion in their village communities and thus inspired to learn how to facilitate border region conflicts, while all were enthusiastic about equipping themselves with some sort of skill to better serve their communities. One student even abandoned a high paying job as an army porter in order to strengthen his English and mathematics at SECMOL. I was made aware of the emphasis placed on education within Ladakhi villages when one of my students recalled how he had been living alone since elementary school. In order to attend the nearest school he roughly traveled 10 km by bike twice weekly (to the school and back to his village). During the school week he learned to fend for himself by cooking food, washing clothes and focusing his additional time/energies on his studies.

Upon learning of SECMOL, I was naively optimistic about my contribution to upholding educational reforms and assisting in regenerating local sovereignty and thus regional governance in Ladakh. So in utilizing my understandings of the current economic, political, and social dimensions of North America, India and Ladakh, I began my workshops by introducing ‘leadership’ (which will be discussed in the forthcoming chapter) and attempting to generate reactions to the inadequacies of imperial governance (which from the first chapter may be viewed as the ‘leadership’ that is determining the realities within Ladakhi communities and the region at large). However, through unforeseen responses from my students, it became apparent that in spite of the educational reforms offered by SECMOL, youth of public schools as well as the public

educational system itself are still conditioned by the westernized education and thus still largely influenced by hegemonic agendas of the West. Through an evaluation of my trainings which will juxtapose traditional Ladakhi education and modern education, the *changes* wrought on by the modern education will be revealed through reactions from the youth themselves<sup>xvi</sup>:

*Right from the onset it was apparent that all my students had various talents: from gifted traditional singers and musicians to dynamic cricket and hockey players; from spirited story tellers/poets and modern/traditional dancers to inspired craftsmen and knitters/seamstresses; from committed scientists and engineers to multi-faceted actors and actresses. However while brainstorming their potentials it was clear that they are doubtful of the significance of their unique identities.*

Regardless of their large repertoires of talents and ambitions, Ladakhi youth are being shamelessly trained to become specialized (as per the western tradition). Norberg-Hodge explains that modern education in Ladakh promotes a Western model making youth ashamed of their culture (113), while the “suppression” of Ladakhi knowledge within the classroom has contributed to an inferiority complex (Mingle 22). Although this theory may presently be evident in private schools, SECMOL educational reforms have countered most of the same insecurities that previous generations endured, through culturally relevant and familiar content in texts and curricula. Also by working with youth on SECMOL campus I saw that localized information has once again instilled pride in Ladakhi culture, where girls are given equal academic opportunities as boys, traditional attire is proudly worn by students, youth are elated to create widespread understandings of their traditions, youth comprehend rural processes, and youth are dismayed to plan futures outside of their communities and/or region etc. But despite these current advantages, foreign influences have still insinuated themselves within these youth and their current education. Presently, English (globally promoted as a universal

language) is the medium in which education is delivered, giving Ladakhi youth the distinct impression that their own language is impractical beyond their local communities. Given economic realities (i.e. western hegemony), perhaps there is a need within Ladakhi communities for tri/bi lingual-ism (which actually presently exists in the region). However the danger in upholding the English language as an educational medium in Ladakh draws to close a comparison to the historical suppression of the Ladakhi language in the classroom. Made obvious in conversations regarding language with my younger students, an English medium suggests to students “that their own language is unfit for the study of “modern subjects” such as science and mathematics, and that advancement is only possible if they subordinate the project of learning in their own tongue to that of learning in English” (Mingle 22). Additionally, I believe that the strength of the Ladakhi language should be emphasized and utilized towards reviving local sovereignty since almost all of the regions 235, 000 inhabitants speak Ladakhi.

Additionally, traditional Ladakhi ways of educating within nature and through culture (Norberg-Hodge 110) using hands on processes involving the entire community (interactions between genders and various age demographics (van Beek 197)), have been displaced by singular instruction within classrooms. Norberg-Hodge believes that this has commonly resulted in children forgetting and looking down upon traditional skills (111). However, while I was inclined to speak of the importance of reviving traditional sustainable living patterns (which was routine in trainings for North American youth), I was surprised and humbled by the fact that Ladakhi youth on campus have not lost their traditional knowledge. Encouraged by Ladakhi campus staff and proudly admired by the older generation of Ladakhis, the origins of practices routinely exercised by Ladakhi

youth were made explicit to me. Similarly conveyed to me through SECMOL staff and community members, the processing of human waste as manure, the use of solar energy, healthy daily consumption with a scarcity of resources (in Leh, but to a larger extent in villages where the resource selection is especially limited in the winter), and manually efficient labour practices, are all traditional practices which train youth to be conscious and mindful of the world around them. I was informed that the customary frugality practiced on campus was initially taught to SECMOL youth in their respective villages (minus solar power). In perceiving skills that are not taught through the modern education (for they reflect the community), I was relieved to know that traditional practices are still being pursued. But unfortunately, years of imperial education pressing notions of progress (i.e. development, modernization) as solutions to Ladakh's mounting difficulties (Mingle 23), are making Ladakhi youth forget the relevance of their sustainable ways. Evident in daily interactions, Ladakhi youth are quick to abandon local skills such as traditional healing (from umchees-traditional healers) in light of western medication, or the making of traditional fabrics or foods in light of global products available in the market. The harm of this is that without being able to acknowledge the importance of their traditional processes (in light of harmful and contradictory global processes), Ladakhi youth may lose sight of teachings (i.e. communal bonds, sustainability, frugality etc) that are invaluable to survival in their region.

My students again impressed me when demonstrating their self-sufficiency and independence in the process of democratically maintaining the campus. As they planned to host over two thousand VEC members, the youth responded with foresight, respect, and diligence, utilizing their individual skills and collective powers. However as they

each plan their futures, it is obvious that the meaning of their education is obscured. The lingering impact of modern education in Ladakh has resulted in the continued idealization of occupations such as “engineers, civil servants, and other specialists” (Mingle 23-24). In Ladakh itself, these occupations do not have a large market and are leaving a disproportionate amount of young Ladakhis pursuing careers that only fill particular niches within society (Namgail 5) while the rest join the rising rate of unemployed (van Beek 44). Unlike larger and more geographically versatile societies, Ladakh cannot economically or socially afford to have its youth pursue the exact same aspirations (unless they choose to leave the region). In goal setting exercises, even my own students had a tendency to choose conventionally idealized aspirations, such as government employees or medical doctors (p. 27 in Part 2 of Trainings). But in informal conversations with my students, I learnt that many have private aspirations of becoming craftsmen, mothers, educators, social scientists, agriculturalists etc. And although they are ashamed of formally declaring these aspirations (since they are not amongst the lofty aspirations endorsed by their educational institutions), these particular aspirations are viable in the Ladakhi context, since these occupations are highly adaptable to the changing demands of the region. For example, social enterprises are being created and led by agriculturalists, social scientists, craftsmen, and educators alike who hope to preserve traditional practices and increase job opportunities within Ladakh by creating local products intended for exportation (i.e. growing traditional medicines, producing wool garments, growing organic vegetables, creating solar-powered farms to produce off-season vegetables, creation of handicrafts etc (Namgail 5)). But, most Ladakhi youth are not exposed to innovative careers such as these and instead strive to meet the objectives

set out by their modern education even though idealized aspirations are failing to fulfill the needs of Ladakhi communities. As a result, it can be perceived that idealized occupations are viewed as the ‘successful’ by-products of the modern education, because they contribute to the fulfillment of hegemonic agendas of the West.

Consequently, in brainstorming their passions, it was apparent that these youth do not view their interests or skills gained outside of the modern education as useful (p. 7-8, 16-17 in Part 1 of Trainings). As a result of the objectives of the westernized education, both youth and their goals lack passion and incentive. Kaul and Kaul remark that “...the region is presently by and large shy in talent which, in any case, is not adequate to meet its future needs.” (351). Apparently true, unmotivated and overwhelmed in their pursuits, my students are discouraged from following their passions, unique identities, and talents. As a result, as they are unable to subscribe to their own needs and are equally inept in subscribing to the actual needs of their communities, these youth are left unequipped for their futures and the futures of their communities. The narrator of *Enterprising Ladakh* expresses concern for young people and their educational system and eloquently concludes that the imperial education is deliberately failing to educate “the whole person”.

*During an English class with Ladakhi students and guest American students, there was a discrepancy in belief systems. Assuming that cultural differences between Americans and Ladakhis may have instigated this discrepancy, I asked the students for clarification... The Ladakhi youth had all agreed that it was okay for a woman to marry her rapist. The youth matter-of-factly explained to me that if a woman didn't marry her rapist, she would be chastised by society. Hearing their points of view, I asked them if men are ever punished for committing such crimes? or If they could imagine living with a man that raped them? Stumped they responded to both questions with 'no'. Still seriously perturbed, I consulted with my Ladakhi community supervisor-Tsewang Norboo. He was dismayed by the responses of the younger generation of Ladakhis, and concerned with their inability to recognize 'traditions' which must be redefined.*



Evident in this depiction of the innocent ignorance of Ladakhi youth, my most frustrating challenge with the lingering impact of the imperial education in Ladakh, is young people's persistent difficulty to expand their understandings in order to think critically and/or innovatively. Whereas, the traditional education in Ladakh utilized compassion, oral traditions and life experience to train youth with knowledge from all facets of life, the present education is indicative of the previous imperial education (British) which trained youth as narrow specialists no longer able to respond to their local (and increasingly global) environments. Namgail explains that now Ladakhi youth are only taught superlatives (2), which devoid of context (Capra 27-30), constitutes fragmented knowledge (18). Upholding arrogant views and extracting truths by separating experience from fact (Capra 51-69), now educators in Ladakh (also evident in my own academic experience and as common throughout the world) rely heavily on facts and figures, and youth progress as fast as they are able to comprehend their disjointed subject material or as well as they are able to memorize. Ultimately, the students whom I worked with have little comprehension of what they are studying. Ranging from elementary to post secondary education, even the most highly motivated students, digest information given by their schools/colleges without even thinking on it. From the outset, this was apparent in my own trainings with the youth (p. 20-36 of Part 1 of Trainings). Since youth are routinely brainwashed with material, it was consistently difficult to excite a response from them. In order to get them to actually comprehend local and global issues, I attempted to evoke their compassion (eventually visible in their happiness, sorrow, frustration) by personalizing experiences (i.e. p. 15, 42-44 in Part 1 of Trainings) and showing the relevance of this information to life (i.e. p. 44-46 in Part 1 of Trainings).

Starved for creativity, the youth responded especially well to interactive activities (games, ice breakers, warm-ups), as well as visual aids (i.e. p. 36 in Part 1 of Trainings) and shock-and-awe statistics (i.e. p. 24, 26-28, 31-32, 34-35, 39-41 Part 1 of Trainings), while surprisingly even more so to interactive activities that innovatively prompted their understanding of the material (Family Feud on p. 36 of Part 1 of Trainings).

SECMOL educational reforms attempt to bridge gaps between students comprehension and their curricula, by being consistent in a language medium (choosing English). But as a result of years of imperial and modern instruction in various languages, my students complained that they did not even have full command of one language. However from my reflections (spending hours watching and even participating in presentations and workshops delivered in the Ladakhi language), Ladakhi youth were able to express themselves most effectively in their Ladakhi language. As a result, my own instruction fluctuated between English and Hindi (as Ladakhi youth continue to learn Urdu and the majority feel more comfortable speaking this over English). I also used the support of a Ladakhi translator for my less interactive workshops (the awareness portions), while encouraging youth to present or respond with answers (via dramas, skits etc) in a language of their choice (the rest of the students then serving as my Ladakhi, Hindi or English translators).

Even more difficult than finding a means by which to communicate with these youth, my most critical and constant task was creating an environment in which my students could overcome the mental blocks (as one of the students termed it) inflicted by their past educational experiences. Freire explains that as a result of the forms of education/oppression delivered by an imperial education, young people merely “accept

the passive role imposed on them” (54) adapting to the new worlds and ideals imposed on them. Since fragmented knowledge provides a disjointed perception of reality, often then Ladakhi youth are unable to understand their realities, disabling them from even responding at all. As a result I was mindful of encouraging my students to challenge or dissent my teachings (the political environment or anything at all!), to encourage them to reveal their own perceptions. But since (out of respect) my students tended to comply with whatever I said, this proved to be more difficult than I initially anticipated. However, by delicately challenging these youth to review discrimination within their own societies (in respect to gender, caste, religion etc) they began speaking out against discriminative processes. Similarly, in discussing global and local politics, they began questioning the agenda of various leaders within the world (p. 18-58 Part 1 of Trainings).

However, it wasn't until the second set of my trainings, that my students truly began to assert themselves. Due to time constraints because of upcoming exams/VEC trainings/regular classes/chores/my workshops, these youth were forced to re-prioritize their schedules (p. 15 in Part 2 of Trainings). By removing myself entirely, I aimed to encourage my students to independently decide the remainder of our time together. But even then, it is questionable as to whether or not they were collectively making decisions without being influenced by the pressures and perceptions around them (including my own). The larger implication of the process of understanding enforced by the modern education is that it creates a standstill in the purpose and intent of knowledge, and consequently understandings remains incomplete (Bohm 6). As a result, I became fearful that my students' passivity may result in a standstill of their societal development and consciousness. But after encouraging youth to challenge their surroundings, my female

students were adamant that I teach them about sex since sex education is not being taught in Ladakhi schools although it is widely rumored that AIDS and/or HIV are on the rise in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. If they remain this persistent, they may overcome their mental blocks and critically observe and challenge the imperial reality unfolding around them.

*In a skit created and delivered by myself and SECMOL campus staff, we foreshadowed the impacts of economic globalization and the resulting degeneration of sustainability and community within Ladakh. We highlighted the change in attitudes of the younger generations towards tradition, prosperity, wealth and family. Delivered in Ladakhi, the skit set off warning bells to the younger generation (p. 51-58 in Part 1 of Trainings). But as we debriefed the skit to highlight possible preventative measures... going back to the village (however unrealistic) seemed to be the only vocalized solution (p. 1 in Part 2 of Trainings).*

Experienced through the exercise above, one of the most damaging challenges of the impact of the modern education are false promises infused in the minds of youth and society alike. The most obvious of these promises has been the ‘promise of education’. For generations now Ladakhis have encouraged their young people to engage in the process of educating themselves in order to fulfill the needs of their communities. This tradition was upheld by Ladakhis even after the initiation of the British imperial education in Ladakh. Wangchuk explains how “children were sent to schools with the hope that they would fit into another sort of educated society” (Mingle 21). Dr. Tashi Thinlas explains that even now parents feel that they are doing the best thing for their children’s futures by encouraging them to go to school (3-4). This was also evident in my students who were encouraged by their families to pursue education while they themselves felt that it was their duty and/or obligation.

By replicating the initiatives of the modern education and thus striving to meet the educational standards of India and the rest of the world, Ladakhis are now “...measured

according to performance on absolute scales” (van Beek 197), which has placed many of these students (as a result of their broken educational system) “...on the lowest rung of the global economic ladder” (Norberg-Hodge 114). As a result, this strategy has “produced a whole generation of people with at best a decent education in a labour market without jobs” (van Beek 198). Furthermore, as education has taken away emphasis from traditional subsistence’s such as agriculture (as a result of the scheduling of the school year during the agricultural season (van Beek 195)) and has instead placed emphasis on fulfilling development initiatives, individuals are becoming more dependent on a monetary economy controlled by external forces. Accordingly, with no other feasible options, Ladakhi youth are being pigeon-holed into the unsustainable and unstable occupations (Ledeg 18) of military (van Beek 190), tourism (Aggarwal 231), and agricultural production of ration/cash crops (van Beek 187-189). Despite SECMOL’s warnings to parents and youth during VEC trainings (p. 8 in Part 2 of Trainings), as well as the emphasis put on cultural vitality on campus, when I questioned my male students as to why they wanted to enroll in the army, they responded that there is nothing else available to them. From the present situation, it may be insinuated that the ‘promise of education’ has been transformed by modern education.

As aforementioned, now instead of aiming to preserve the Ladakhi community and society, modern education is promoting occupations and livelihoods that support the agendas of western hegemonic authority. Highly visible, modern education is instigating a stagnation of growth in Ladakhi society (Namgail 5) as present occupations discourage traditional subsistence (agriculture) and promote modern subsistence (that support the global market, national industries etc) while breaking down communities (as young and

old are forced to leave communities or the region in search of livelihoods). In response, SECMOL's educational reforms have strived to train appropriate teachers to guide their youth, as well as to instill parents with ownership over their community's schools (VEC) in order to re-direct educational initiatives. But it appears that education continues to be idealized within Ladakhi society while contributing to the confusion of youth.

While youth are being thrown into the pseudo promises of education, they are increasingly unable to contend with modern changes to the region, nor to the ideals that have given strength to their communities. Wangchuk explains that originally the youth "had lost the traditional skills and they had not acquired the new skills". He continues to explain that, "they were lost in between and therefore in a very depressed condition" (Mingle 21). Dr. Tashi Thinlas recognizes the same condition in youth today: "the mental state of our children is terribly disturbed...very much prone to all kinds of problems..." (3). This internal battle was all too evident in my students, who only with the support of their communities are able to attend schools which ironically do not effectively promote the prosperity of their communities. In more informal settings (bonfires, late night snacks, directly after class, within the campus library), youth reflected on our workshops and expressed their confusion with external and internal politics instigating *changes* that do not prioritize the prosperity of their communities. Unable to identify the culprits and unsure of viable solutions, Anne Waters describes a common condition called cognitive dissonance; when one's present reality is confused by one's identification with various worldviews that may be at odds with one another (170). Similar to the aspirations of all peoples (not just Indigenous!) the Ladakhi youth are enticed by modern knowledge resulting in new ways of living. In addition to

understanding the destruction being caused by economic globalization, many Ladakhi youth also acknowledge the advantages of the modern knowledge relayed through the westernized education (p. 38 in Part 1 of Trainings) (i.e. on SECMOL campus modern technology is coupled with traditional Ladakhi design to create astounding results for tapping into solar-energy). But, in discussions with my Ladakhi students it was also undeniable that despite the deficiencies within their own communities (i.e. lack of educational resources, extracurricular activities, careers, medical facilities etc), it is integral for them to preserve their communities. However, unsure of how to engage communal integrity with modern knowledge (Aggarwal 73-74), Ladakhi youth are thus struggling with “issues of assimilation and identity” (Aggarwal 74). But it was apparent that while unsure of how to uphold the original promise of education, young people are very eager to explore and seek an informed understanding.

*After reflecting on all the changes that are taking place within Ladakh, youth, and the educational system, I was overwhelmed with trying to come up with a strategy of resistance. Sharing my concerns with Ka Le (Gulam Nabi Ji-entrepreneur and social aid worker) he agreed that it is very difficult. But after looking down at his hands for some time he looked up and again and announced with a smile, “But we can try”...*

Working in Ladakh, it is now laughable to merely ‘perceive’ that SECMOL has been integral to Ladakhi communities. An evaluation of SECMOL can be best articulated through two lines of prose by Stanzin Dorjay (a student from Shayok) who states: “To know the meaning of one year, ask a SECMOL student...”. Relentless in their non-political pursuits to preserve the region, SECMOL does in fact instill integrity and dignity to Ladakhis while re-shaping the educational system. But unfortunately, from evaluating the lingering impact of the modern education on youth and on the meaning of education itself, it is apparent that these reforms are not enough. Currently,

the Ladakhi public educational system is creating additional challenges to communal integrity and thus perpetuating challenges to local sovereignty and Ladakhi governance as western hegemonic forces are internally and externally directing the regional agendas. More disturbing however, have been the lingering influences of the westernized education on young Ladakhis; such as low self-esteem, substantial loss of cultural integrity, lack of passion, inability to critically analyze, hesitancy to challenge/dissent, cognitive dissonance, and passivity. In spite of SECMOL's reforms, the current educational system is directly and indirectly conditioning youth to be complacent to the *changes* that are perpetuating disarray and dependency in the lives of Ladakhi peoples. Although successfully infusing culture and tradition within education, SECMOL educational reforms are not moving past sheltering young people from the competitive and individualistic mandates of western hegemony which do everything but advocate for the prosperity of Ladakhi communities. Accordingly, Namgail claims that although "...the education system has been pulled out of an abyss; currently it stands precariously on a ledge, and may fall down again if efforts are not sustained to lift it further up" (2). From working with young people who have clearly portrayed that the present educational system is inadvertently perpetuating the oppression of Ladakhi peoples and societies, I believe that additional educational reforms are integral to the prosperity of Ladakhi communities.

### **Resistance to *Change* in Ladakh: Kunphan Tsoghspa**

Although educational reforms were premised around re-inventing education and local governance simultaneously, unfortunately the overpowering impact of western hegemony on Ladakhi livelihoods has made the process of resisting most difficult for the



region. In my own work with Ladakhi youth (which was made easier due to the past and present efforts of SECMOL), I have attempted to describe why education and local governance must be reinvented simultaneously in Ladakh. In essence, as modern education serves the purposes of capitalist expansion and exploitation, current education can be viewed as a tool of western hegemony. Similarly, since modern education supports the dismantling of local sovereignty and governance, it again functions as a tool of western hegemony. So while modern education is the common denominator in the loss of governance/promotion of western hegemony, it can also be influenced to create the adverse effect.

The form of resistance that was created for the purposes of this project has evolved as an assertion of the need to challenge the present educational system (administered in Ladakh and around the world). Furthermore, since modern education and hegemony are synonymous, the challenge began by re-conceptualizing education and leadership for Ladakh. In re-conceptualizing education for Ladakh, the resistance that was sought out maintains that while hegemonic efforts replace Indigenous values and worldviews with those of the West, the re-affirmation of Indigenous values in non-Western civilizations must be an integral component of their respective educations. As result, in this workshop, education promotes Ladakhi skill development and the honing of talents and passions, to determine ones' intended or necessary commitment to ones' society, community, and the world. In order to overcome the obstacles presented by the modern education, I acknowledged the similarities between the education offered in North America (through my personal experiences) and the education offered in Ladakh, revealing that both are delivered in a western tradition in order to fulfill western

objectives. As a result of drawing on my own educational experiences, I was forced to understand my personal qualms while resolving my own mental blocks to facilitate the regeneration of an education in Ladakh that is inherently Ladakhi. In re-conceptualizing leadership for Ladakh, this form of resistance identifies that knowledge created and maintained through the western world is delivered without consciousness of the whole. Furthermore the western world has demanded and received authority without authenticating its value to individuals, communities, societies and the world. As a result, western hegemony must be challenged within and outside of the western sphere where Indians and Ladakhis themselves have been conditioned (through the education they seek or the perceptions that are informing their desires).

*My students unanimously decided that our trainings would culminate in services to the communities within Ladakh. Accordingly, our workshops were thus entitled by a few students as Kunphan Tsoghspa (translated as 'A Society for the Welfare of All').*

From an evaluation of my initial workshops in Ladakh, it was apparent that youth and the meaning of education itself are still heavily influenced by a modern/westernized education. This has resulted in the perpetual complacency of youth (and society at large) to the processes that are instigating their oppression (i.e. the breakdown of communal structures leading to the demise of local sovereignty and regional governance). As a result, the root purpose of my presence in Ladakh would be to work closely with the students of SECMOL, the SECMOL campus director, and the Ladakhi community in order to conceptualize and conduct strategies to supplement the inadequate public educational system. We accomplished this by first working through the barriers imposed on youth through the lingering impacts of the modern education. Successfully resulting in the empowerment of these young people, we then conceptualized social, economic,

cultural and therefore political resistances to imperial processes represented by western hegemonic forces that are disrupting communal integrity. By informing youth of their local and global realities, it was my intention to politicize them (expose them to systemic oppression and the impact of local and global forces on their futures while challenging them to evaluate their implicit roles in promoting and/or suppressing western hegemony) while encouraging them to remain apolitical (by encouraging them to respond to hegemonic processes by establishing local and global communal accountability while utilizing their traditional and modern knowledge). Through employing grassroots strategies (i.e. leadership and Ladakhi experiential learning) which reflect their communities, the objective of these trainings was to ensure that Ladakhi youth (the present and future generations of Ladakhis) *receive* an education which may simultaneously assist them in rebuilding local sovereignty and regional governance.

In order to overcome the harms of a modern education that denies local sovereignty and regional governance, I worked closely with the Ladakhi community to re-conceptualize the meaning of education. By evaluating the needs and issues within Ladakhi society (conscious of the harm of reverting to the past (please see endnote xix)), I utilized grass roots leadership to determine the objectives of Ladakhi education, governance, and community. By ultimately reflecting community (since the trainings culminated with services to the larger Ladakhi community (p. 15, 22, 29-30 in Part 2 of Trainings)), leadership in these workshops became synonymous with the objectives of education and Ladakhi governance.

It is important to explain that foreign governance to Ladakh is also being defined by a 'leadership' within the region that is promoting the objectives of Western hegemonic

forces. Wrought on by imperial processes, traditional governance in Ladakh was/is replaced with politics and politicians pushing federal and global agendas. As a result, the present leadership defining the region is inextricably linked to foreign governance structures. And to override the mandate of foreign governance is to override foreign leadership. However, this is not an easy challenge for Ladakhi communities as they are now linked to regional, state, federal, and global entities. Furthermore, dissent from these larger entities is not swiftly accepted...

In the midst of the writing of this narrative, I was informed that SECMOL's director, Sonam Wangchuk, was legally attacked by the District Magistrate of Leh, Mr. M.K. Dwivedi (a non-local) in charge of administration of Ladakh, for what can only be logically perceived as Wangchuk's non-political commitment to reviving local integrity. Through the allegations brought forward by the Magistrate, Wangchuk was accused of anti-national connections in China, land-grabbing, and violation of FCRA norms (implying misappropriation of money). In supporting Wangchuk and responding to these accusations, SECMOL was repressed from expressing their side through formal disbandment of gatherings or distribution of material. Additionally, the Magistrate utilized media to contort the situation while suppressing the public's right to express their opinion by imposing "section 44" (the riot act) when villagers expressed their support for SECMOL. After local and global intervention, the charges against Wangchuk have been dropped while the District Magistrate has been removed from this post. However, although Ladakhis were able to collectively resist this dictator, presently all educational reforms by SECMOL (textbook revision, teacher training, and village mobilizing

activities) have been suspended. This situation has also indefinitely cancelled the second phase (p. 8 in Part 2 of Trainings) of SECMOL's educational reforms.

From this unfortunate situation, it can be unequivocally perceived, that the present 'leadership' (i.e. administered by local and non-local politicians) in Ladakh, betrays the prosperity of the Ladakhi communities and region, and thus opposes Ladakhi governance. As a result, leadership must not only be re-defined for the purpose of strategizing within this paper, but it must be redefined in order to effectively evaluate the current leadership within Ladakh. Accordingly, my workshops enforced grassroots leadership (p. 5-7, 9, 15-17, 18-20, 49-51 in Part 1 of Trainings) (p. 3, 6 in Leadership Manual). This grassroots leadership embodies core values which historically and currently (as I *experienced* in Ladakh) exemplify Ladakhi relations within and outside the region. The core values of the leadership are: community by emphasizing teamwork (understanding the balance between individuality and collectivity (p. 4, 9, 17-18 in Part 1 of Trainings) (p. 4 in Leadership Manual)); accountability (to acknowledge local and global interdependency resulting from traditional practices as well as economic globalization); and responsibility (the necessity of individuals contributions to society). It was upon this platform that our leadership trainings began.

*Code of Conduct: Consciousness of the People is the Consciousness of the Facilitator*

*Prior to my departure from Turtle Island (aka North America), I was conscious of my role as a foreigner in Ladakh. With Indian ancestry I imagined I would somewhat blend into the surroundings, however when working with the Ladakhi community I soon realized that it wasn't the color of my skin or the birthplace of my parents which determined the integrity of my stay. It was a combination of my actions and intentions...*

While Ladakhis stand in the midst of defining their own terms of survival, external agencies have come to their aid since they definitely cannot depend on the "elite

ideologues” of their own country to lead them out of exploitation (Williams 8). Many foreign non-profit governmental agencies have established a stronghold in Ladakh, providing assistance for various causes from the empowerment of women, to solar design, to HIV/AIDS awareness. Although many of these foreign NGOs are now run by Ladakhis, Helena Norberg-Hodge argues that there is the risk of aid being “replaced by dependence on faraway forces”, resulting in people feeling “powerless to make decisions over their own lives” (123). Additionally, Roy explains that “the ‘NGO’ization of civil society initiative...is depoliticizing us. Making us dependent on aid and handouts” (239) while “their *real* contribution is that they defuse political anger and dole out as aid or benevolence what people ought to have by right” (312). Even smaller organizations are sometimes creating the adverse effect of sabotaging self-reliance by ignoring root problems and “pulling more and more people into dependence on the macroeconomy” (Norberg-Hodge 151). However it is not just NGOs that are creating a pool of dependence in Ladakh, Ladakhis themselves are “abdicating personal responsibility” as “...passivity, even apathy, is setting in...” (Norberg-Hodge 123). They are relinquishing their obligations towards any service provided by the government (including education, public roads etc) (Norberg-Hodge 123). It seems as external agents come in to solve their problems, Ladakhis become less capable of helping themselves.

van Beek claims that “it is the feeling that their control over these processes is not only limited, but declining, even as the effects of these processes are deepening, that leads to demands for empowerment” (van Beek 375). As a result of the consequences of foreign or even internally organized charity, there is a need for *empowerment* ‘within’ Ladakh that will respond to western hegemony. In response to foreign dependency, the

narrator of *Enterprising Ladakh* proclaims that “we have so many abilities and skills. To solve our own problems we need to use confidence and our brains”. In response to social transformations throughout the world, Mayo states that “capitalist globalization implies the *potential* as well as the *need* for citizen action on a global scale” (200). From my time in Ladakh I agree with van Beek, despite the turmoil and strife, “Ladakh is the center of the world for people there. It is there that they were born and where they want to live a good life” (van Beek 372). As a result, *empowerment* of Ladakh must begin at the grassroots...with the people.

Furthermore, the narrator of *Enterprising Ladakh* echoes that “Blind to our own mistakes, we blame the times. We forget the beautiful old phrase: Time itself does not change, but people change” (*Enterprising Ladakh*). As western hegemony asserts itself over and through the lives of Ladakhis, it is my belief that it is the responsibility of Indigenous peoples to take responsibility for their futures. While being conscious of the impact of the West, they must not cultivate uncomplicated bigotry about the West (Sen 44), as the West has done about them. If a resistance is to embody the revival of Indigenous worldviews then Indigenous populations must maintain identification with their intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotional ways of being.

As aforementioned, as a foreigner within Ladakh my role in the trainings was defined through intentions and actions that would be inspired by the empowerment of Ladakhi people. However, even though I am visibly Indian, my worldview reflects my exposure to both my Indian and foreign worldview, none of which are Ladakhi. Furthermore, during this process of evaluating my role, I was much more cognizant of the objectives of my own western education.<sup>xvii</sup> Coming from the hub of hegemonic thought

(since I was raised in the West), I realized that my academic rearing (similar to the modern education in Ladakh in terms of technique employed) promotes the ruthless expansion of the West (by forming objectives for career aspirations that are defined by western worldviews and promote western agendas, while being enforced through western perceptions of success and prosperity etc). However, perhaps it has been the traditional worldviews of my Indian ancestry that have enabled me to resist the pressure and conformity promoted by the western world of which I am part. With all of this in mind, it was my role to genuinely de-emphasize the western worldview that I may unknowingly construct (i.e. by immersing myself in a Ladakhi worldview by engaging in their lifestyle: hand washing clothes, eating their foods, watching my consumer consumptions, respecting their language, participating in daily responsibilities and maintaining relationships etc). Ultimately though, it was the universal truths between the Ladakhi youth and I that allowed any sort of relationship to develop between us. Despite language, religious, and cultural barriers, the students respected my differences as I respected theirs:

*Despite our differences, my relationship with my students and the Ladakhi community evolved into that of a family's. Celebrating each other's joy and sharing in each other's sorrows, we bridged tolerance to create understanding. Onlookers gathered as students/staff and I would sing renditions of Hindi, English and Ladakhi songs. As customary I received gifts of apricots and walnuts from elders and instinctively laughed (I was also signaled by Ladakhi villagers or students who would begin slapping my leg in euphoria) to jokes and dramas delivered in Ladakhi. Often unable to share traditions, we created new ones through friendship and love.*

It was with these understandings that I was cognizant of not imposing my views or ideals on these youth, but instead challenging them to decide the necessity for resistance within



their lives...the necessity to protect themselves in a world that is making it more difficult to survive as an Indigenous person of any culture and land.

### *A 'Real' Education: Curriculum Creation*

*The curriculum for these trainings was in a constant state of change. After every workshop the trainings were re-evaluated and lesson plans were transformed. As a result knowledge was neither static nor defined, and lessons unraveled themselves as knowledge was explored...through community.*

In creating this curriculum, I utilized my academic background as well as my past experiences in facilitating leadership workshops and/or awareness campaigns for North American youth. However since some of the academic information was vast in scale, it was important to bridge disjointed information to show how this information affected lives in Ladakh. Furthermore, adapting trainings from a North American context to a Ladakhi context did not acknowledge the economic and political disparities between the youths' respective realities. I was able to counter both of these challenges (arising from my own natural biases and misunderstandings) by creating exercises with impartial lessons (such as squandering my own contempt for economic globalization by encouraging youth to independently identify the negative and positive impacts of foreign value systems in Ladakh and/or the implications of a monetary economy within Ladakh). In order to refrain from voicing my opinions, the exercises or lectures were designed to encourage dialogue so that the participants could foster their own perspectives and draw their own conclusions or questions. Consequentially the students expanded their understandings while indirectly challenging mine.

Although it was integral that I personally understood many of the *changes* to Ladakh and the resulting challenges, moving forward and creating a resistance would have been unachievable without the guidance of the Ladakhi community. As a result, the

process of creating this curriculum was a community led initiative.<sup>xviii</sup> This curriculum was created with input from various community members and organizations throughout Ladakh, a constant flow of much needed advice and guidance from my Community Advisor (Tsewang Norboo), and feedback from students who were integral in debriefing the trainings and re-evaluating forward movement based on their needs and interests. Agency over trainings were given to my students and Community Advisor (i.e. p. 15 in Part 2 of Trainings), which altered the dynamics of the exchanges (ie. two separate classes to represent the different age brackets and open attendance in the second set) and instilled humility in the work through new challenges (i.e. other priorities of the communities such as hockey and VEC etc). Additionally, by devolving final authority to my Community Advisor and community guides, the integrity of the community was never compromised for the fulfillment of ‘a project’ or ‘timelines’.

In order to enhance my understandings to truly epitomize the needs of Ladakhi communities, the creation of this curriculum, relied heavily on contextualizing information. Depending on the Ladakhi community, I was involved in a steady process of contextualizing information by embracing a Ladakhi worldview. This visibly helped reduce the feeling of insignificance amongst the youth towards their traditions and culture, and instilled pride in their distinct identities. The training material relied on the unique abilities of local individuals (i.e. Community Advisor and guest speakers who revealed similar struggles and ambitions as the youth) to respond to the present challenges confronting youth. This strategy ensured that the alternatives created for the prosperity of Ladakh communities are adequately informed by the various dimensions of the issues and are (most importantly) relatable and approachable by Ladakhi youth. The

trainings were also conducted within local contexts (applying classrooms teachings to the rivers, gonpa's (monasteries), schools, etc) while supplementing classroom instruction with exercises on the land (teambuilding-trust, community service etc). In engaging youth in environments where they are most comfortable, the trainings effectively increased their self-esteem. Lastly, as aforementioned, these trainings were dependent on local resources. Trainings were delivered with supplies offered and available within the region, while research was conducted from a wide assortment of Ladakhi realities (ie. bringing in knowledge from NGOs, to Ladakhi tour guides, to young people outside of my classes, to Tibetan businessmen and Kashmiri traders) and a wide assortment of experiences (i.e. bus rides, holidays, community gatherings, reactions to national holidays etc):

*When I broke from my trainings to re-evaluate the hardships for young Ladakhis in reinventing governance in the region, I relayed my difficulties to my Baba Ji. He reminded me that just as I preserve every small or large step that I take into the mandir (holy place), so must I value the importance of each step along the way towards my understanding...the first step being as important as the last. As a result, I took each and every opportunity in Ladakh to comprehend the many issues. From searching out the mandates of NGOs, to conversations with business men/women, teachers, travel guides, vendors, and taxi cab drivers. From children to adults alike, I immersed myself in the various faces of the region while slowly climbing the many steps...*

Evident in my sentiments, this reliance on Ladakhi local knowledge and experiences conveyed the importance of local sovereignty while strengthening the acknowledgement of distinct but similar experiences of individuals and communities throughout the region.

### 'An Education': Curriculum Implementation

#### *Process: The Art*

*I routinely sat with Uncle Ji (a 'retired' Indian/SECMOL Volunteer) as he peeled or cut seasonal vegetables for our meals. On this particular day we enjoyed the solar*

*generated morning sauna while discussing our difficulties in reaching Ladakhi youth. He and I agreed that in classes we are often stuck re-teaching in order to teach...*

In order to challenge youth to respond to their individual and collective roles as leaders of their communities, it was important to be deliberate in assisting youth overcome their impediments formed as a result of the modern education. Accordingly, I provoked youth to think critically and innovatively. The inspiration and energy behind this in my trainings is largely derived from my own teachings from *Leaders Today*. *Leaders Today*, a re-known youth leadership organization delivering innovative local and international training experiences, embodies a concept of teaching that extends beyond methods and relies on cognition and instinct through something called **Lev3L**-defined as the Courage to Dream, the Passion to Believe, and the Intensity to Act (p. 1-3, 10-14 in Part 1 of Trainings) (p. 2 in Leadership Manual). As the facilitator, I was encouraged to depend less on rhetoric while relying on instinct to seize every opportunity to give all my energy and passion to each and every moment in our trainings. Consequentially, the potentials of the youth were revealed during improvisational innovative teaching methods (such as simulated scenarios, dramas, storytelling, songs, visioning exercises and even physical endurance) which challenged the youths' passivity by exercising their laughter, compassion, and provoking thought which leads to action. These interactive activities also helped achieve a level of comfort for students to engage in dialogue. They often worked especially well with the younger students who are further withdrawn than their seniors (through embracing his intensity, courage, and passion, my youngest male participant was able to break free of all inhibitions while encouraging the others to reflect his enthusiasm). As a positive result, the youth began recognizing their talents, unique identities, and passions. It was from their passions and gifts that we (as a class), both

individually (the inspirations of each student varied from their concerns about the environment to their passion for teaching (p. 7, 15-16 in Part 1 of Trainings) (p. 5 in Leadership Manual) and collectively (the desires to preserve Ladakhi communities that motivated us as a class), etched out our *very possible* contributions to a resistance for Ladakhis communities and the region at large.

*Means by which to 'Educate': The Science*

*In spending four months with these students, (the longest consecutive trainings I have ever pursued), it was unequivocal that these youth are unlike any young people I have ever met. As they stand in the midst of tradition (spiritual guidance, economic security, and political camaraderie) and modernity (federal mandates, insecurity of global economics, and political strife), these youth of a 'developing' region are personally experiencing the slow and steady de-centralization of power by those of the 'developed' regions.*

From the onset of my trainings I was humbly aware of the strength of the students I was fortunate to work with. Demonstrating respect for self and others, diligence in fulfilling their responsibilities, and a strong commitment to their communities, they are dignified in attempting to manage futures which are uniquely informed by the past & present and tradition & modernity<sup>xix</sup>. The Dalai Lama spoke: “As our world grows smaller, previously isolated peoples are inevitably being brought into the greater human family. Naturally, adjustment takes time, in the course of which there is bound to be change” (Norberg-Hodge ix). The grace by which my students are confronting *changes* reminded me that they are in a position of surety. Skilled from the past and hopeful for the future, their humility has bestowed upon them the gift of clarity. Through persistence and survival they will be able to utilize an education which supports stronger individuals (through intellectual and vocational training in traditional Indigenous and modern day teachings), stronger infrastructures (through nurturing innovation in communities for

present generations to respond to change with foresight), and stronger bonds (through raising levels of accountability between people and their world), which will inevitably lead to their own governance of the region. However, first they must be made aware...

As global processes infringe upon Ladakh, this region remains relatively unexposed to the actual processes which instigate its subjugation. As a result, it was integral to spurn youth to substantiate their local understanding with global understandings (p. 21-28, 28-36 in Part 1 of Trainings) in order to identify the external politics that are influencing and determining local politics (p. 37-39, 39-45 in Part 1 of Trainings). By drawing on my academic understandings and local knowledge, I was able to link global realities to their communities. Although adjusting levels and means of instruction for various ages, I informed youth of the History of Contact, Imperialism, Capitalism and Globalization. By contemplating the negative and positive consequences of these global processes I encouraged youth to foreshadow the impacts of similar consequences within their own community. However it was difficult for youth to perceive the impact of *changes* they have never experienced.

Frustrated with my inability to reach the students, I eventually realized that I was unconsciously applying a foreign worldview to my curriculum. At the beginning of this narrative I made reference to my own discontent with my own academic experience- which in Ladakh festered into a subtle but fierce contempt. Unable to express the truths to my students that I myself was encouraged to memorize and regurgitate as fact, I realized that my discontent with academia has evolved from the lack of 'experiences' within my 'academic experience'. Referring to stagnant facts as truth has resolved my own thinking and teaching methods to linear and structural procedures. Consequently, in

communicating with these students (although I was using simulated scenarios such as human knots and world maps), they were unable to comprehend the relevance of my ‘facts’. But after conversations with Ladakhi community elders and my supervisors, as well as my own interpretation of the Ladakhi worldview, I realized that these young people traditionally operate from an entirely different worldview where communal based societies learn through application. As a result, my process of ‘speaking’ with these Ladakhi youth to share knowledge was quickly displaced with the need for ‘action’. The Indigenous worldview of the Ladakhis gently graces thought which leads to direct action. Furthermore, their worldview stresses the importance of learning through experience. Being conscious of this, it became apparent, that it wouldn’t be effective nor appropriate to provide leadership training for Ladakhis that is devoid of practical application. That is to say that if Ladakhi youth are not experiencing these trainings in real scenarios, these trainings may in essence be meaningless.

So through initial trial and error, I was assisted in realizing that experience (as a process of learning), is a defining feature of Indigenous philosophies worldwide (Little Bear 30) as well as a vital component of my trainings. Working through this process by resolving my own mental blocks, I realized that academia is not to blame, but instead the fault lies in our dependence on it for representing the ‘only’ or ‘greatest’ of truths. In implementing my trainings, I realized that it is only through experience that we recognize that truth is ever-changing and developing. As a result, initially resolved to inform and then inspire youth to react, I finally realized that these processes had to happen simultaneously so that the process is never devoid of experience. David Bohm reiterates that consciousness is neither static nor complete, but instead “is in an unending process of

movement and unfoldment” (x). Additionally, our individual or collective truths are informed by our individual (internal and external (which may or may not include a collective)) experiences. And youth will only be inspired so long as they are experiencing the need for positive change.

In embracing the need for experience, I sought to empower youth with skills sets such as teambuilding, negotiation, effective communication, goal setting, and public speaking, so that youth acquired increased self-esteem and confidence necessary for action (p. 9-25 in Part 2 of Trainings) (p. 7-17 in Leadership Manual). They simultaneously applied these skills to an awareness campaign (p. 6-8 in Part 2 of Trainings) of their design and implementation to be delivered to members of the Ladakhi community. Volunteering to create an awareness campaign for educators within their villages (and members of various blocks and districts throughout the region) these youth identified the impact of the monetary economy on changing value systems within Ladakh as an issue which presently perturbs young peoples. In utilizing anecdotes which portrayed truthful perceptions of young and older generations within Ladakh, their performance generated praise and further discussion from adult educators and students alike. My students also applied these skills to community service placements (p. 1-6 in Part 2 of Trainings) (p. 15, 22, 29-30 in Part 2 of Trainings) throughout Ladakh of their choosing and initiative. In watching the youth collectively and individually respond to the needs of their communities, I was taken aback by many youths’ dedication to the tasks they set out to accomplish. After his community service placement at Phey Gonpa, Sonam articulated why he is interested in community service: “Because I want to help other people and I want to know about their ideas. I think many people don’t know how



important it is to keep good relations with other people and how many problems in our life how we can solve with it” (Campus Times 3). As articulated by Sonam and as was evident in the reactions generated by other students, in addition to building confidence, overcoming fears, extending happiness and valuing individual roles within society, awareness campaigns as well as community service placements shed light on the issues within Ladakhi communities. Since experiential knowledge exacted responses from youth, it served to be invaluable in confronting issues of societal development/consciousness, relevance to communities, stagnation of growth of society, and confusion over modern/traditional etc. Through experiential knowledge everything is relevant while instilling in youth the need to look outside of themselves...no longer within just their communities but within the globe. This compassion guides them in using their own passions to create a future that is cognizant of the whole.

*“How this affects them in the end though you may not be there to experience, but know that that element of change no matter how small will shift the original existence of a being.” –Trevor Mazurek*

As Ladakhi peoples contend with *changes* to their environments, their forms of resistance vary greatly. In creating and delivering leadership trainings to equip youth with the skills and inspiration to resist the *changes* underway in Ladakh, I was humbled by the sheer magnitude of information and experience necessary to create an educational resistance to the impact of federal and global neo-liberal economic policies representing the hegemonic authority of the West. Nonetheless, when I least expected it, the empowerment of the youth was gradually exposed through their timely arrival to class or newly thought out aspirations reflecting the Ladakhi community. However, the most challenging aspect of these trainings was leaving the youth to their own devices; whether

it was a decision to miss one of our trainings or challenging them to work through internal processes to bring in funding for their own hockey league<sup>xx</sup>. Refraining from interfering or instigating dependencies, my fear was put to its ultimate test after I left. To my surprise, after I left I heard that a student who was devoted to enlisting in military service, has changed his focus to exploring and challenging growing environmental concerns of the region. Similarly, through renewed liberation in terms of recognition of their innate talents, students were more forthright about addressing social needs (ie. health care and blood donation) within their communities. Most striking however, was when I was humbled to the point of tears after receiving an email which relayed my students' contribution to a peaceful movement of NGOs and community members regarding the case against Sonam Wangchuk (mentioned at the beginning of this section): Sent March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Achee Becky (International Volunteer Coordinator) wrote that "I think your workshop helped the students feel the strength to take action when the time came. They held a peaceful protest, mostly singing We Shall Overcome in 3 languages, and using white scarves to defuse political tension."

The incident above warrants much reflection on the importance of these trainings. In light of this incident, it is precarious as to what will happen to the public educational system and thus to the future of youth and Ladakhi governance. As a result, resistance movements in Ladakh must challenge western hegemony from both above (understanding and challenging the systemic oppression of Ladakhis) and below (understanding and challenging Ladakhi's implicit role in imperial processes such as liberalization, globalization, development, and education), while steadfast in their beliefs that education and local governance can only be re-built simultaneously. Time will

dictate whether or not these specific trainings were able to accomplish much. But with a commitment to understanding their past, strengthening traditions in their present, and having faith in their futures, changes will continue to occur and I am confident that these Ladakhi youth will continue to resist and respond.

***Pureevurtun Hee Sunsar Ka Neeyum Hai (Change is the law of the Universe)***  
**-Geeta Sar**

*Saying goodbye to my students was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. When we leave a place...we leave its people. My eyes welled with tears as I held on to my students for the last time...fearful that this goodbye would perhaps last a lifetime. Sending with me their blessings, I left my new home by delivering thanks to the land and faces that preserved my stay. However through feverish pain of having no choice but to let go, I was reminded to keep faith and to preserve my lessons learned. And so with hearts intertwined, we continue forward...*

As I recollect my recent experiences and teachings, I can't help but reflect on the changes that were synonymous with the challenges I experienced along my journey. But to deny the inevitability of *change* is to undermine the struggles and evolution of our ancestors who were able to maintain their worldview in the midst of chaos. And yet to succumb to the pressures of *change* by compromising integrity is to lose sight of our place in the creation of the universe and our responsibilities to all in existence. In examining Ladakh it is evident that a resistance to the varied *changes* must preserve the uniqueness of Ladakhi peoples while ensuring that they are in a position to fulfill their responsibilities to each other and the universe. In actually confronting *change*, Ladakhis are forced to resist both external (liberalization, economic globalization, development, education) and internal forces (federal, state and local politics, industries, infrastructure etc) that are compliant with western hegemonic structures that are not conscious of the whole. Furthermore, one of the most invasive structures of western hegemony, education, has created great disparities in ethical and communal practices in Ladakh. By

asserting a domineering western worldview, peoples of Ladakh are being spun in circles while the western world (again largely propagated by western education) affirms that their allegiance must be paid to *the West*. As a result of the dynamics that pervade modern-day politics in Ladakh, and infringe upon Ladakhi livelihoods, resistance leading to positive change in Ladakh must be reflective of the various communities within the region as a whole.

Consequently, my experiences in Ladakh introduced me to an ‘education’ not geared on objectives but instead on preserving our local and global communities and our unique places within them. As a result, this experience truly exposed me to the importance of the renewal of knowledge (through time and space). As we contend with the past and present we have to be cognizant and compassionate of the future. Paths will lead to more paths and this is where truth can be found. Similarly, violence, retribution, blame or greed, cannot and will not restore balance. And so as I endeavor to resolve my own aversion to modern education and western hegemony (its superiority of knowledge, capitalist agenda) I aim to create synergies within the academic arena. With the knowledge within this narrative, I hope to challenge the perceptions or notions of ‘education’ within the North American context. In the western world, changes have also come and gone and now we are entangled in various forms of dependency. As Indigenous communities resist (such as the Ladakhis)...we ‘the West’ must too learn to fend for ourselves (in terms of local resources, skills, knowledge etc). If we (the ‘developed’ world within the larger global community) do not look past ‘developing’ world paradigms that rationalize exploitation, then the tables will eventually reverse themselves (poetic justice)...and the third world will meet the first world, the developing

world will meet the developed world, the global South will meet the global North, the East will meet the West, and the oppressors will become the oppressed.

*Surviving Change*

This story is accompanied by layers of frustrations with the complexities that exist in a world that has changed, is changing, and will continue to change. My strength was tried, and my ability worn...however my faith endures. I often reflect back and refer to my time in Ladakh as “Surviving Change”. But “Surviving Change” does not just make reference to the young people of Ladakh or those like myself who are humbly trying to assist...but refers to the struggle in all of us. Before leaving India, my Baba Ji (Respected Elder) explained to me: “kulyuug hur admee kae under jatha hae...”-during this period, an internal battle is being waged in the mind of every individual. As a result, it is on each and every one of us to weigh the stakes and resolve inner/outer conflicts by re-defining our own terms of survival...and making our own changes...

*“As the silversmith removes impurities from silver,*

*So the wise man from himself: One by one, little by little, again and again.”*

*-Dhammapada*

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<sup>i</sup> And although, the appreciation of other values and worldviews are beginning to find voice within education, they are still presented and guided through the western tradition of education. My Mother, who was and is a trained Educator, was unable to practice her profession within Canada unless she received a new degree from a Canadian institution because of the alleged inadequacies of Indian educational institutions. Countless, professionals from developing countries are rejected because of the alleged inadequacies of their cultures/nations processes of learning.

<sup>ii</sup> Starting from 990 A.D., Ladakh, administered by the Rajas of Ladakh, was an independent kingdom for about 800 years (Kaul, Kaul 337). A blend of two Aryan groups (the Mons of Northern India and the Dards of Gilgit) with Mongolian nomads from Tibet (Norberg-Hodge 10), the region of Ladakh enjoyed its place as “a hub in the busy Central Asian trading routes” (Mingle 20). Its prosperity was acquired particularly from an “intra-Ladakhi trade” as well as a caravan trade which was especially prosperous for Leh, its capital, and its aristocracy which monopolized on long distance trade (van Beek 162).

<sup>iii</sup> Although all Ladakhis became citizens of India (with some giving allegiance to this new power), more and more Ladakhis held deep grievances due to discrimination and inadequate representation (van Beek 380). In reaction to their grievances, Ladakhis began rallying for Union Territory (UT) status which they believed would recognize their distinct identities (culturally, geographically and religiously) and regional and geopolitical dimensions (Chosjar 9). However, when Ladakhis were denied UT status by the federal government, new internal movements formed in Ladakh to challenge India’s questionable representation of its citizenry. Amongst these, in 1980, a group of Ladakhis demanded special treatment as Indigenous peoples claiming rights for historical abuses (van Beek 54, 245-248). They believed that by being granted ‘Scheduled Tribe’ status (affirmation of their Indigene-ity and acknowledgement of their need for special treatment since their historical presence binds them to the region (245)), they would “avail themselves of the economic and political provisions for affirmative action in the Indian Constitution...” (Aggarwal 11), increasing their access to money and power (van Beek 244). Although successful acquired by most Ladakhis, this Scheduled Tribe status strengthened India’s territorial hold on Ladakh by rationalizing policies of control over a region deemed ‘backwards’ and in need of assistance. In agreement, Shourie argues that both Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in India are victim to “inefficient administration” which betrays its promises to its subjects due to the “...overriding mandate of the Constitution” (195) which favours “politicians pressing their immediate advantage” (Shourie, *Indian v*). It is therefore evident that in reacting to their loss of agency, Ladakhis unknowingly began ushering in a cycle of dependency on the Indian government whose allegiances were elsewhere...and remain elsewhere.

<sup>iv</sup> Aware of their plight, Ladakhis made a direct correlation between capitalism/state-intervention and challenges to Ladakhi sovereignty (van Beek 152). As a result, in order to redeem national representation of local needs and realities (295) the Ladakhi people began an Agitation in 1989 which resulted in the passing of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act in 1995. This gave Ladakhis “provisions for assuming decision making and financial control in virtually every department previously managed by the State government, except law and order and the judiciary, which are still largely part of the state portfolio” (Aggarwal 8). Although the *Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council* (LADHC) has left Ladakhis ‘seemingly’ independent of state/nation state, they are still inextricably linked to the politics, economics, and social concerns that define both of these entities. van Beek argues that “the Ladakhi claim for autonomy, its justification and representation, does not challenge the system, but merely its internal organization” (384). As a result, since the processes of economic globalization are “beyond the control of local administration” (366), the council receives severe criticism from the Ladakhi public (295), whose grievances for “recognition and representation” remain in tact (389). Additionally, as a result of the failure of the LADHC, many Ladakhis are currently vying for *Union Territory Status* (UT). However, under UT status it may be speculated that Ladakh will still fall under the agenda of a nation state that promotes a global agenda. Especially since it is doubtful that India will even support UT status since the creation of a new state amidst a turbulent region could potentially aggravate border conflicts and tarnish the national and international images constructed of traditional and modern India as secular (Chosjar 9).

<sup>v</sup> Aggarwal conveys:

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John Bray (1991, 118) suggests that before the Dogra invasion, there was no feeling of broad identification and national unity among the general populace and that Ladakhis identified with their village, monastery, or valley and not the region as a whole. But even though identification with a sovereign territorial Ladakh was not always stable or encompassing, it would be erroneous to deny the existence of all forms of regional cohesion and unity given the highly integrated systems of monarchic and monastic control in even the remotest vicinity of Ladakh... (34).

<sup>vi</sup> van Beek similarly acknowledges social disintegration in Ladakh as a resultant of “an emergent world disorder characterized by social Darwinism and new constitutionalism, rapid economic polarization and continued glaring disparities in power relations” (41). He continues to explain that with a break down of interdependencies, maintained through practices of identification and resource allocation, the management of the changes (i.e. development) has made “the meaning of belonging contested and contestable” (170). Furthermore, instigated by global politics which exacerbate religion and ethnicity (Namgail 2), territorial disputes and border allocations undermine inequality in economic power and regional ways of knowing (Aggarwal 101), enhancing chauvinism through cultural identity (3) and intensifying disparities between social groups (8). van Beek explains that while identity is becoming contested and strengthening the need for representation since it is “perhaps the last remaining weapon of those who find themselves marginalized...” (384), empowerment through “groupness” generates further fragmentation (389). However, Shourie explains that ‘groupness’ (especially religious) acts as a fortification against hardships and dislocation caused by modernization (35-37). Mayo adds that resistance often takes “the form of conservative cultural and/or religious movements, seeking to preserve an idealized past from the incursions of a globalized future” (17-18). Sen refers to exclusive identity groups as representing “singular affiliations” (20), which is evident in Ladakh where both Muslims and Buddhists alike are being pigeon-holed into representing divergent views as a result of their religious orientation. Consequentially, this vs. them mentality is reflected in the party politics of Ladakh, where language (Sheikh 13-23), and various professions that are favored by modernization (i.e. entrepreneurship) (Aggarwal 75), are being politicized by religion and ethnicity to advance particular group agendas. Sheikh concludes that “religious segregation is widening the chasm between social classes and communities (13), while ultimately, according to Sen, negating our “shared membership of the human race” (3).

<sup>vii</sup> In 1834 Ladakh lost its independence to the British Empire. Although Britain had never before been interested in the isolated region (van Beek 89), military interests facilitated the incorporation of Ladakh into the empire under “the realm of the Dogra kingdom of Jammu” (Aggarwal 5). Under the Dogra rule, Ladakhis were deemed “incapable of self-rule” (35-36), and held in the hands of the Wazir Zorawar Singh, General of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu. And when “the Dogras acquired Kashmir through the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846” Ladakhis became part of the present state of Jammu and Kashmir (Kaul, Kaul 337), where they presently remain.

<sup>viii</sup> After the independence of India in 1947, the state of Jammu and Kashmir (which to India’s delight included Ladakh) was reclaimed from the British Empire. Aggarwal explains that Ladakh was esteemed nationally for several reasons: its strategic importance to territorial integrity as it was (and presently is) geographically tied to the contested borders of Kashmir (another region within the state of Jammu and Kashmir), China, and Pakistan (Mingle 20); its ‘pitiful’ image of economic backwardness in comparison to ‘modern’ regions that had industries, high literacy rates, high cash incomes, electricity etc (van Beek 157-159); and the prevalence of Buddhism in the region (Aggarwal 114) which would contribute to the newly venerated ideal in India of unity in diversity (38-39). Accordingly, van Beek states that “administrative and political interest in Ladakh after Independence, then, focused on safeguarding the borders and developing the backward region” (90). This being said, “Ladakhi space and the meaning of place was transformed, while land as a resource was mapped, classified, and commodified” (90). Interestingly enough, this loss of self-sufficiency and agency was ushered in by Ladakhi leaders who argued that “it was morally incumbent on the state to remove their economic backwardness and guarantee them freedom to maintain their distinct heritage, for which they would offer it loyalty and patriotism in return” (Aggarwal 39). As a result, Wangchuk exclaims that the people of Ladakh became bombarded with notions of their primitiveness and were urged to “‘civilize and develop’ to be like the ‘proper humans’ in the cities” (Norman v). Undergoing

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huge transformations such as the division of their region into Leh District and Kargil District (van Beek 90), as well as the widespread integration of an imperial educational system with predominantly British standards and regulations, Ladakh was being transformed.

<sup>ix</sup> In re-politicizing education, I was committed to helping youth realize the necessity of their role in the establishment of the right kind of education which will facilitate local and global governance.

<sup>x</sup> Through Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns for *swadeshi* (strength of Indigenous knowledge), *swaraj* (self-rule), and *satyagraha* (the struggle for truth), India gained independence from the British colonial rule in 1947 (Shiva, Globalisation 12-14). Administered by its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, modern India soon introduced a Soviet style five year plan (commonly referred to as 'punch vershiyae yojna'), to raise the shattered new nation out of economic disparity (which had resulted from the hasty exit of the British and the sudden separation of India and Pakistan on the eve of Independence). However, it wouldn't be long before India would begin to abandon her founding virtues.

<sup>xi</sup> Intent on spreading wealth to poorer nations (Stewart-Harawira 7), liberalization allowed industrial nations to expand their business into economically frail nations. Mayo explains that liberalization meant that debtor countries had to reduce tariff barriers, enabling a free market to flourish internationally "through free trade... free circulation... and freedom of investment" (19). However, van Beek argues that as India began her policies of liberalization, the abandonment of her planned economy interrupted her climb to power, as it significantly decreased the management role of the state (152). Roy explains that free markets break down national barriers and in doing so also disrupt national sovereignty and democracy (40-41). Questionably intent on spreading prosperity, Stewart-Harawira remarks that this transformation of the state's functions in both developing and developed countries leads to "changes in the productive powers and the balance of social and financial forces throughout the interstate system" (177). As a result, this system of management is resulting in gains in the developed world and yet further oppression in the developing world, perpetuating the continuance of this structure.

<sup>xii</sup> However, the growing "international confederation of loyal, corrupt, authoritarian governments in poorer countries..." (41), suggests that such an overwhelming allegiance is being bred because individual states cannot influence nor override the power being generated by transnational corporations (Mayo 16).

<sup>xiii</sup> Consequently, both liberalization and economic globalization, which align local communities to transnational corporations, are facilitating disparities between wealth and poverty as well as the exploitation of third world countries and minority groups. Stewart Harawira states that the declining role of the nation state in a globalized world has particularly had huge consequences for the "aspirations of indigenous peoples" (178). In the face of rising demands set forth by these global processes, the world's 370 million indigenous peoples (238) are continually dispossessed of land and resources needed for the expansion of capital, consequently resulting in grave threats to their sovereignty.

<sup>xiv</sup> Indigenous worldviews are commonly reformulated in order to endorse and propagate agendas of imperial processes. Stewart-Harawira explains, that it was essential for imperial powers to reform Indigenous peoples' "traditional cognitive and social patterns, modes of governance and ontological world views" since they were "identified as 'obstacles to development' and at odds with those of an economically based society" (108).

<sup>xv</sup> Development policies (specifically experienced through tourism and media) administered by the state government of Jammu and Kashmir and the central government in Delhi, (Norberg-Hodge 92) are slowly seeping into the fibers of Ladakhi society and attracting a wide array of reactions (van Beek 373-374). While the *changes* that have come to Ladakh are met with two, at first glance contradictory responses. First, as the preceding anecdote shows, people deplore the loss of what they consider their 'traditional' way of life, their sense of community. This 'conservative' reaction sometimes is expressed through calls for different approaches to development since there is concern regarding the impact of these developmental policies on the "development of the human element" in Ladakh (Kaul, Kaul 325). For example, the Development Commissioner of Ladakh in 1981 claimed that, "If Ladakh is ever going to be developed we



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have to figure out how to make these people more greedy” (Norberg-Hodge 141). This type of development mentality raises skepticism as to whether or not development is truly a necessity for the region of Ladakh. Yet ‘development’ is generally seen as necessary and inevitable. At the same time, and often in the same people, the promise of development is welcomed, and frustrations arise from what is perceived to be the slow pace of change, the lack of ‘facilities’ and opportunities in the new, ‘modern’ life” (van Beek 373-374).

<sup>xvi</sup> While my impression of the impact of imperial education within Ladakh is drawn entirely from the students of SECMOL, it is these students who stand to gain the most from educational reforms as they reside at the centre of creation (SECMOL staff utilizes the campus for preparation/events) and implementation (these youth help prepare and then participate in VEC trainings).

<sup>xvii</sup> Western hegemonic forces are not just supported by policies and processes or elite leaders within developing worlds, but by the allegiance of individuals and/or larger collectives within western society that support the acquisition of global resources and thus the appropriation of peoples and governance structures that manage those resources.

<sup>xviii</sup> Please see Appendix 1 for Outline of Trainings  
Appendix 2 & 3 for Curriculums Part 1 & 2  
Appendix 4 for Leadership Manual

<sup>xix</sup> Individuals, groups, organizations, and especially academics (van Beek 90) are coming to Ladakh from all over the world to experience what they perceive to be a paradise...an ‘unspoiled’ civilization-one of the last of its kind. As articulated by van Beek, “this static, Shangri-la image is common among foreign observers of Ladakh (initially including myself) and one which continues to plague modern scholarship...” (160). However, these impressions of a ‘mythical Ladakh’ are not only incorrect but harmful as they project a false representation of a past which is in the process of becoming-modern day. More specifically, many Ladakhis are presently resisting global processes, but with “urgent attempts to renew a sense of pride in Ladakh and salvage what remains of its unique history and environment” (Sheikh 13). But as van Beek reiterates “...this celebration of empowerment of the ‘brave people of Ladakh’ is only possible by ignoring the fragmented and polarized...positions of people in Ladakh” (376).

By exploring traditional Ladakh society, it is apparent that Ladakhis enjoyed a liberation unseen in present day. For one, women in Ladakh held “an emancipated position” (Kaul, Kaul, 157), where gender never confined nor limited women to particular roles (Norberg-Hodge 66-70). Also Ladakhis were part of a “synergistic society” where mutual aid defined their economy (51). Through communal labour (xii), traditional Ladakhi society was highly interdependent (86). Hand in hand with this, Ladakhis enjoyed stable relations beyond their “frontier” as well as within (van Beek 160). An area of predominately Buddhists, Muslims and Christians, they shared respect and tolerance (Norberg-Hodge 73), perhaps conscious “that goodwill among neighbours is in fact a survival mechanism” (Rizvi 136). While being cognizant of the importance of tolerance, Ladakhis were also respectful of natural limits (Norberg-Hodge 136), consciously using limited resources (25) while this frugality ensured sustainability (Ledeg 15) and survival in a region with challenging elements (Namgail 1).

Although there are many redeeming qualities of traditional Ladakhi society, there are also some practices that bring into question the history of sovereign stability within the region. One of which was a caste system existing in both Buddhist and Muslim communities (Aggarwal 173). Smiths, musicians and Beda constituted the lowest rungs of villages often occupying a subservient role within society (159). In some cases, education as well as various employment opportunities (emerging from the global economy) have created opportunities to eradicate these distinctions (172). van Beek claims that while this practice was acceptable in traditional society, the modern nation state ensures that this practice is formally contestable (382).

The theory of an actual unified Ladakh also sheds light on questions surrounding Ladakhi sovereignty prior to external influences. The people of Ladakh are of numerous communities with distinct origins and ways of being, although they are collectively regarded as Ladakhis. Aggarwal explains that in traditional Ladakhi society they did not have a sense of broad identification and instead identified more

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with their village, valley etc (34). However, global processes within Ladakh have created great communal friction through divisionary practices ie. border allocation (77). As already mentioned, Ladakh was also divided into the two districts of Leh and Kargil (divisively representing two of the religious majorities in the region-Buddhism and Islam respectively) (15). Serving as a macro-example, these divisionary politics encourage regional unification of an area that was not ever seemingly unified. As a result, in consolidating Ladakhis to confront *changes* underway in Ladakh, Ladakhis must be prepared to acknowledge the micro implications of this and then represent the “immense richness and varied realities of Ladakhi society” (Sheikh 30) since perhaps “Ladakhiness” does not exist (van Beek 377).

Today, a realistic depiction of Ladakh’s social and cultural history is integral to establishing regional governance that will adequately portray the diversity and integrity of the regions peoples. Essentially, as Ladakh contends with *changes*, an alternative to the region’s present situation cannot romanticize or idealize a ‘mythical’ past that owes its people the chance to *evolve*. Without these understandings, internal frictions are moving in support of global processes infringing upon Ladakh.

<sup>xx</sup> The students hoped that I would start a campaign in Canada to collect hockey equipment. Initially in agreement, I realized that this was an opportunity for the youth to independently work towards their goals. I especially felt strongly about encouraging the youth to tackle this project on their own since they could most easily obtain corporate sponsorship in India to support one of the few hockey teams in the nation.

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