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Los Angeles

Being Ladakhi and Becoming Educated:
Childhoods at School in the Western Himalayas

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology

by

Bonnie Olivia Richard

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Nancy Levine, Chair

Young Ladakhis experience markedly different childhoods from those of their parents and previous generations. In this rural region of the western Himalayas, a transition has occurred since the 1990s wherein education is now widely supported among Ladakhis as a priority for children, and economic provisions from the government and NGOs make school accessible. While financial returns on education are not guaranteed due to slow job growth, being educated has become a valued social marker that is important for full personhood. This dissertation explores what is at stake for Ladakh young people in light of significant socioeconomic transformations. Data derive from ethnographic research with pre-teens, teenagers, and parents of school-age children, carried out over ten months between 2011 and 2014 in villages and towns of Leh District, Jammu and Kashmir state, India. Because many Ladakhi parents received only primary schooling or none at all, the responsibility for learning and academic achievement falls

on children, with parents perceiving that they have very limited agency in educational processes. Preteens and teenagers aspire to achievements that their parents support—to earn a higher education credential and then a professional career. But also, Ladakhi children must balance aspirations for modern lifestyles with popular narratives that lament the purported loss of traditional practices. Thus, they are actively engaged in developing contemporary Ladakhi identities that incorporate valued attributes of both the modern and the traditional. The persistence of the family as the central economic and social organizing unit in Ladakhi culture means children grow up learning to prioritize obligations to family. Therefore, the end result of education is not just about individual betterment; teenagers also hope to be able to support their families and improve their communities. However, family obligations can lead to friction with teenage students' individual hopes and dreams. Children from poor families are more likely to struggle to complete enough education to compete for good jobs that will move them out of poverty due to their cultural obligations to assist their families, suggesting the persistent reproduction of economic class despite widespread access to education and consistent belief in its transformational value.

The dissertation of Bonnie Olivia Richard is approved.

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2015

Dedicated to all of the Ladakhi young people who so graciously
gave their time and energy to participate in this research.

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ACRONYMS

ALUYA	All Ladakh Unemployed Youth Association
INR	Indian Rupee
ISEC	Local Futures/International Society for Ecology and Culture
LAHDC	Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council
LBA	Ladakh Buddhist Association
LBES	Ladakh Buddhist Education Society
NFHS	National Family Household Survey
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PDS	Public Distribution System
SECMOL	Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UT	Union Territory
YMBA	Young Men’s Buddhist Association

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CHAPTER ONE

STUDYING CHILDHOOD, WELLBEING, AND CHANGE IN LADAKH, INDIA

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

This dissertation is a study of the values, priorities, responsibilities, hopes, and constraints that frame the experiences of pre-teens and teenagers growing up in the 2010s in Ladakh, a rural region of the western Himalayas. Being a child in Ladakh today means living a rather different life from that of previous generations—the focus is on going to school, ideally through completion of a college or university degree, with the aim of working in a professional, salaried job as an adult. In contrast, many of the parents of today’s children did not attend school, or attended only through elementary or middle school. While much has changed over the course of a generation, there are continuities with the past as well. Children participate in many “traditional” Ladakhi cultural practices, both implicitly and explicitly, within a climate that values cultural preservation and maintenance of ethnic identity and values. Therefore, children perpetuate a new kind of Ladakhi-ness by integrating values associated with being “developed” and “modern” within their Ladakhi identity. Negotiating this tension, and all that it entails, is central to understanding what it means to be young and Ladakhi today.

I began the research with broad questions: What constitutes a good life, or wellbeing, for Ladakhi children? What practices are associated with fostering children’s wellbeing, and what do parents and children’s priorities reveal about Ladakhis’ engagements with socioeconomic change and non-Ladakhi perspectives? Through this focus on wellbeing, I sought to ascertain the

broader goals that formed the foundation of parents and children’s everyday practices. Doing so revealed a great deal about the experience of childhood in Ladakh, as well as how children themselves go about becoming Ladakhi persons in a society that has embraced markers of development—such as education and technologies that improve their lives—but also simultaneously holds a revered place for “traditional” Ladakhi culture. As it was so important to Ladakhi families, education quickly became central to the research, and thus is the focal point from which I will explore the complexities of young Ladakhi lives. In the remainder of this chapter, I present the background to the dissertation research, situating this study within scholarly literature as well as the ethnographic context of Ladakh. I also describe the research methods and provide an overview of the dissertation.

BACKGROUND

Why Study Children?

The Anthropological Study of Children

Anthropological studies of children and youth have a long history that spans anthropology’s subfields—socio-cultural, psychological, linguistic, and biological anthropologists have studied topics such as child socialization, child development, parenting, resource allocations, child work and other activities, and rites of passage from childhood to later phases of life. Child socialization—or the everyday implicit and explicit practices through which young members of a group learn their culture—has been, and continues to be, a major aspect of cultural anthropologists’ research on children. Learning culture involves everything from how to effectively communicate and interact with others, how to subsist and be a productive member of

society, to how to make sense out of the world and phenomena. The everyday practices of child socialization are embedded within, reflect, and reproduce the types of behaviors and moral foundations that are valued in a given community, and therefore such processes vary greatly across cultures (Lancy 2008, Montgomery 2008, LeVine and New 2008). Rich ethnographic accounts of babies and young children, in particular, demonstrate the massive diversity in childrearing practices, in turn uncovering the roles, meanings, and expectations that societies have of their youngest members. For example, the Beng of West Africa treat their infants with great respect—they are reincarnated elders and must be encouraged to remain in the living world, a place more trying and difficult than the afterlife from which they came (Gottlieb 2004). In many cultures, the task of caring for toddlers may be entrusted to slightly older siblings, as young as five or six years old, while their mothers are busy with household, agricultural, or other work (Lancy 2008:128-132). In Sri Lanka, Chapin observed that parents seemed to give babies and toddlers whatever they asked for, but somewhere, embedded within these interactions, was a socialization pattern that resulted in teens and young adults who were highly respectful, selfless, and deferent to authority (Chapin 2014).

While child socialization is fascinating and remains anthropologically insightful, a more recent turn among anthropologists studying children has been to balance the long-time emphasis on socialization—what happens *to* children and what *adults* tell us about children—with greater attention to children’s agency and voices—what *children* do and what *children* tell us about themselves (James 1998). In response to the historical emphasis on socialization, anthropologist Charlotte Hardman argues that children are “people to be studied in their own right, and not just as receptacles of adult teaching,” because children are agents who think about and make choices in how they interact with and affect their worlds (2001:504). Contemporary anthropologists who

study children and childhood argue that the perspectives and experiences of children are data sources (Hardman 2001, Lancy 2008, Montgomery 2008, Schwartzman 2001). They also take into account that the analysis of children's agency must be balanced with ongoing child socialization, which substantially influences children's experiences, actions, interpretations, and understandings of the world around them. Further, just as with adults, social structures may limit their options and impose behavioral expectations, but children's capacity for agency means that they also make decisions, take action, or resist, and thus are active in changing as well as reproducing social structures (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin 2007, Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1984, Lancy 2008). Indeed, as agents always embedded within the social structures they are learning to navigate, children can actively think about the dilemmas and paradoxes with which they engage—during a period of social change, for example—while at other times they may unquestioningly accept cultural norms and expectations, and follow suit with appropriate behaviors.

What is a child and childhood?

In Western cultures childhood is the period of time during which humans are developing, but in fact childhood is not a universal concept, and the status and period of time or events that constitute different life phases may be defined very differently depending upon culture (James 1998, Stephens 1995). Further, the meaning of children and their value to family and community are also determined within each child's local cultural context (James 1998). A child may be defined by relationship and not by age or biological development; for example a forty-year-old man may in some cultures remain a "child" to his parents. However, in recent decades, Western cultures' legal and age-specific definition of childhood has influenced international definitions and meanings of childhood. In the U.S., for example, those under 18 years old have a special

status because they are not full members of society—they are protected from extensive work (aside from school) and from being conscripted to fight in the military, are provided with education and have lessened accountability for crimes they commit, but, they cannot vote, make contractual agreements, nor live independently from a parent or adult guardian.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has established international standards for the protection of children, and thus has been a major pathway for the internationalization of global norms regarding the meaning and definition of childhood. The UNCRC constructs children as a special class of persons with inherent rights to things like education and safety, and makes governments responsible for ensuring these rights, provisions, and protections. However, a legal international definition of childhood does not preclude the sociocultural meanings and variations in how societies view their young members. For example, while an American 18-year-old may legally be an adult, she may still be fully reliant on her parents for financial support; her ongoing dependence would signal to many that she has not reached full adulthood, signaling that there is a more complicated idea of the meanings of children, adults, and perhaps a need for other categories. In many cultures, people are not fully adults until they have children with a spouse, despite the fact that they may have earned a college degree and even established a well-paying career (Montgomery 2008). Thus, the cultural meaning of childhood might not have a distinctive end, it can instead fade into a period of pre-adulthood—which some researchers refer to as “youth”—or it may end with a specific achievement that could occur at varied ages.

In this study, I use the term “children” to describe anyone under the age of 18, often interchangeably with the terms “teenagers” and “teens” when I describe the children I worked with, the majority of whom were between ages 12 and 16 at the beginning of the study. I avoid

using the term “youth” because researchers have defined it in vastly differing ways (sometimes meaning unmarried people in their twenties, at other times referring to much younger children). Instead of “youth,” I employ the term “young people” when describing a broader section of the population, under the approximate age of 25, which is the general time when contemporary Ladakhis are moving towards marriage and beginning their own families.

Studying Children to Understand Socioeconomic Change

Child work and access to school are issues that have been moralized in the global human rights and economic development discourses of the late-20th and 21st centuries. However, children have been historically, and continue to be, an important source of labor for families in rural and less-developed areas where people subsist through agriculture, pastoralism, craft-making, and other home-based trades (Lancy 2008). As families respond to changing economic conditions—often the result of national or international economic development programs—children often grow up in very different situations than their parents did. For example, many rural, agrarian communities in South Asia are currently undergoing economic transformation, marked by families’ greater overall engagement with the cash economy and increased participation in wage labor—and this has led to a greater importance of formal schooling (Dyson 2007). Children may have previously been expected to work around the home, assist their parents with farming or herding, and generally contribute to daily subsistence, but now are expected to defer economic engagement and spend their time in school (Alex 2007). Thus, in less-developed and developing societies, children may be among the first generation in their family to attend school—meaning that their parents and other adult community members experienced vastly different childhoods, and there may be marked disparity in the values and behaviors that schools promote as compared to those learned by older generations. On the other

hand, parents may be fully aware that children's formal education is beneficial in the long term, but not permit them to attend school because they need children's help to sustain the family in the present-day (e.g. Gold 2010). Also, as families engage with the cash economy, this often leads to household partition as some members move to urban centers for jobs, with the potential for changes in family role expectations for both children and adults (e.g. Edwards and Whiting 2004, Seymour 1999, 2010, Yan 2010).

Even though many children still remain out of school, these days most of the world's children access at least an elementary education (UNESCO 2015:6). Therefore, it is important to point out that child socialization does not only happen at home through interactions with parents, elder siblings, other kin, and community, but also takes place in the formal learning environment of school classrooms (Lancy 2008, LeCompte 1978, Bangsbo 2008). At school, children do not just learn reading, arithmetic, and facts, they also learn behavior patterns specific to the contemporary economic public sphere, where they will one day need to operate as adult professionals in formal workplaces (LeCompte 1978, Rival 1996). Schooling socializes additional forms of hierarchy, as well as camaraderie, it inculcates students in ways of speaking and relating that are specific to formal contemporary work and social contexts, and teaches children an understanding of oneself along lines of formal achievement scales and potential for earnings (Anderson-Levitt 2005, Lancy 2008, LeVine and White 1986). Further, schooling is also a political vehicle of nations seeking to inculcate a society's youngest members to understand themselves as citizens of a certain type (Anderson-Levitt 2005, Bangsbo 2008). For example, the Tibetan Government in Exile (based in India) provides schools for Tibetan refugee children which have integrated into their curriculum a political perspective that socializes Tibetan children to understand their identity as exiled Tibetans with rights to their homeland,

currently occupied illegally by China (Bangsbo 2008). Government schools across the world commonly incorporate patriotism and national identity socialization into their daily practices and curriculum as well, and private schools may or may not support nationalistic socialization, in addition to ideological and religious socialization that some also may provide.

What can an ethnographic study of children in Ladakh tell us about how things are changing and what change means for families' everyday lives? Further, how can the study of childhood give us anthropological insights about society more broadly? How a society's younger members learn to function in their society, develop a sense of themselves as social persons with complex identities, learn from as well as teach each other and adults, can tell us a lot about what is most important and valued in a society as well as how people are responding to immense changes, because children are often the vehicle through which families can be most responsive to change.

Theorizing Wellbeing from an Anthropological Perspective

The concept of wellbeing helped me to explore what matters in Ladakhi children's lives, and what priorities and beliefs shape their experiences, expectations, and practices. Wellbeing is a growing area of interest in the sub-fields of medical, psychological, and cultural anthropology (e.g. Jiménez 2008, Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a). In particular, the concept of wellbeing moves beyond the common disciplinary focus on suffering, towards exploring what it means to be doing well or having a good life (Robbins 2013). An anthropological framework for research on wellbeing inherently requires understanding local norms, values, and struggles (Adelson 2000, Hollan 2009, Weisner 2010). Anthropologists emphasize that well-being should be operationalized with an understanding of socio-cultural context, taking into account that in many cultures well-being is a family or group experience (Adelson 2000, Izquierdo 2005, Jiménez

2008, Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a, Weisner 2014, Wilk 1999). Emphasizing cultural context, this approach provides an alternative to the limitations of macro-level analyses that are founded upon non-indigenous assumptions about standards of living and ideals, and falls in line with a shift among applied social scientists towards greater utilization of qualitative methods and subjective measures in assessing how well or poorly people are doing (Ben-Arieh 2007, Crivello et al. 2009).

An idea of wellbeing is an implicit foundation to people's everyday actions, woven into marked and mundane cultural practices. From the perspective of ecocultural theory, Weisner defines wellbeing as "the engaged participation in the activities that are deemed desirable and valued in a cultural community and the psychological experiences that are produced by such engagement" (2014:90). Wellbeing is "an ongoing project" embedded within everyday life routines, which are constituted by the practices of groups and individuals that make life continue productively and meaningfully (Weisner 2009:230, Weisner 2014). This is important for methodological concerns, as the perspective requires that research explore how people enact everyday life in light of their experience of constraints and potentialities, morals and values, aspirations and ideals. Such a view of wellbeing is similar to the idea of healthiness in contemporary American mainstream society—being "healthy" is often viewed as a lifestyle, a way of living that is sought after, worked towards, and, when achieved, must be readily maintained through ongoing practices (Crawford 2006, see also Garro 2010, 2013). Following Weisner (2014), I argue that achieving and maintaining wellbeing is foundational to people's actions, particularly when directed towards engaging new opportunities, such as schooling or formal economic participation. Thus, understanding what wellbeing is within a given sociocultural context is critical to addressing the relationship between education and social

change, and children's experiences and practices therein.

Wellbeing can be construed of as a “hybrid” concept that “has both objective and subjective aspects” that “cannot be effectively separated from each other” (Wilk 1999:92). Objective indicators are those that are measurable in neutral terms (for example, family economic resources or a child's height and weight), whereas subjective indicators are those that involve individual interpretation of one's own experience (such as affective experience or perception of one's status in the community). Despite exploration and further research that attends to both subjective and objective aspects, wellbeing remains an amorphous concept in anthropological and social science literature. According to McAlister's (2005) review of literature on wellbeing, most scholars agree that the major domains that comprise wellbeing include physical, material, social, and emotional aspects of one's life, but within these major domains there is much potential for variation across cultures. Mathews and Izquierdo put forth the argument that wellbeing has four dimensions: physical, interpersonal, existential, and institutional (2009b:261-263). I believe that considering these dimensions or domains is particularly productive at the exploratory phase of research.

In applied research—much of it related to the planning, implementation, and assessment of international economic development policies and interventions—the use of quantitative, objective indicators for measuring wellbeing and related indicators was predominant until the past decade (Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2011, Ben-Arieh 2007, Bradshaw 2015). Since the early-2000s, interdisciplinary researchers have successfully pushed for a greater accounting of cultural context and local perspectives in the development of indicators, which means considering objective and subjective components, as well as integrating qualitative, exploratory research to complement the classic quantitative methods of analysis.

An exemplary mixed-methods study of child wellbeing that I drew on to develop my research is the UK-based “Young Lives” study, a longitudinal project focused on understanding child poverty in four countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam). Research in this project uses child wellbeing as a major analytical focus, viewing wellbeing as having various possible interpretations that arise within local cultural contexts (Crivello et al. 2009). Crivello et al. explain that the study conceptualizes wellbeing as “a socially contingent, culturally-anchored construct that changes over time, both in terms of individual life course changes as well as changes in socio-cultural context” (2009:53). Thus, the goal is to document “contextualized indicators of what it means for ‘these’ children, in ‘this’ place, to be doing well (or not), and to explain changes in expectations and experiences over time” (Crivello et al. 2009:54). The emphasis on context-specific indicators of wellbeing in this large-scale project provided a practical foundation on which to build my research in Ladakh, especially during the exploratory phases.

My research in Ladakh aimed to determine how Ladakhi children and parents imagine wellbeing for children and for their future adult lives—essentially asking about what is centrally important for children, both now as they develop, and in the future when they are adults. For this research, I defined wellbeing as: a multidimensional set of imagined standards for preferred life situations, and encompassing, yet going beyond, the fulfillment of basic biological needs, lack of illness, or material wealth. “Multidimensional” implies that wellbeing involves various subjective and objective aspects of life and experience, can involve various domains or dimensions as suggested above, and that wellbeing is much more than just health or happiness. I use the term “imagined standards” because this signifies that people have a more or less implicit sense of what constitutes wellbeing in their society and how it is (or could be) enacted. That

wellbeing is defined by a set of preferred life situations does not limit wellbeing to being a state but may be an ongoing process or enactment, and importantly, also suggests that wellbeing is something that is attainable, rather than idealized. I could not operationalize wellbeing before conducting the research because the criteria for it are culturally specific. Thus I relied on this broad idea to orient data collection in such a way that it would allow participants to teach me what it meant to them to be doing well. By exploring what elements contribute to wellbeing in Ladakh, the field methods enabled a grounded approach to addressing the initial research questions, as well as refocusing the second portion of the research to collect in-depth data related to Ladakhis' priorities (particularly education) and to use those priorities to build an understanding of children's lives and experiences.

LADAKH IN CONTEXT

Ladakh: Past to Present

Ladakh is the northernmost region of India, and lies at the Western end of the Himalayan range, along India's borders with Pakistan and China. Before events during the mid—20th century that led to tightening of borders to its north and east, Ladakh was connected via trade to Central Asia (Bray 2005, Fewkes 2009, Rizvi 1996). Because of its position along pan-Asian trade routes, Ladakh is often referred to as a “crossroads” of ancient civilizations. Few trade goods were produced in Ladakh, and the region was not a major end market for goods; instead, Ladakh was important geographically as a stopping point and for the exchange of goods passing in various directions. Nomadic communities of eastern Ladakh and western Tibet produced the two major products to originate in the region: pashmina (or cashmere)—the fine wool from the

longhaired pashmina goats—and Himalayan salt. Besides the nomads who traded in raw product for their subsistence, most Ladakhis were not economic beneficiaries of trade, as they were mainly subsistence farmers, and full-time involvement in trade was the realm of a small minority of people, many of whom were outsiders.

For nearly a millennium, up until the 19th century, Ladakh was a small and fairly independent mountain kingdom that maintained close religious and political ties to Tibet, its neighbor to the East. More recently, during the 17th century, territorial advances from neighboring kingdoms and disputes with Tibet led Ladakh's rulers to form an alliance with the more powerful leaders of Kashmir, its neighbor to the west, which required allegiance. As part of the agreement, the Ladakhi king took a Kashmiri bride and himself converted to Islam. While Ladakhis had been Tibetan Buddhist since well before this time, the relationship with Kashmir, which shifted numerous times since that initial treaty, resulted in an eventual shift in the religious orientations of the population—with more Ladakhis converting to Islam. Ladakh's relationship with Tibet was not completely severed, and they maintained close religious ties, sending monks to study in Tibet and hosting Tibetan religious teachers in Ladakh, until 1950.

In 1834, the Dogras—the ruling ethnic group at the time of Ladakh's and Kashmir's southern neighbor, Jammu—sent armies to invade Ladakh (Bray 2005). While finally successful in conquering Ladakh in 1842, their campaign of expansion was relatively short lived, as the British annexed the entire region in 1846 after winning conflicts in nearby regions. Throughout the remainder of the British Raj, Ladakh was part of its Jammu & Kashmir state. However, in this area of the colony, the British maintained only a minimal presence. Instead, Ladakh was administered by rulers from more powerful and populous neighboring Jammu and Kashmir regions, particularly the Dogras who had by then aligned with the British (Bray 2005). When

India gained independence, Ladakh became part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (commonly referred to as J and K). Later in the twentieth century, Ladakh was split into two districts, Leh District and Kargil District, both named for their largest respective towns. While under the British, Ladakh had been geographically much larger, the northern areas of Ladakh, also known as the Spiti region and Baltistan, are now administered by Pakistan. Just as with the partition of Kashmir, Ladakhis were cut off from their kin on either side of this arbitrary border, which remains heavily guarded by armies on both sides. Today, Buddhists make up the majority population of Leh District, and Muslims are the majority in Kargil District; if the two districts are taken together as “Ladakh,” the population is about equally split between the two religions. The research undertaken for this dissertation was situated in towns and villages in Leh District, and thus the majority of research participants were Tibetan Buddhist.

The region is a mountainous high-altitude desert. Many of its valleys—where most of the population lives—are at least 10 thousand feet above sea level. Rainfall is very low and rivers are fed through glacial runoff and snowmelt. The rugged landscape and harsh ecology figure prominently into the Ladakhi sense of self and connection to their homeland. The geography also helps to explain the remote “feel” of the region, its seeming disconnection to the rest of India, and the difficulties of transportation infrastructure experienced in Ladakh. Two roads access the region from “outside” (one going south, the other west), but both close for about six months of the year due to heavy snowfall which blocks mountain passes. Air transport and traveling by foot along frozen river valleys are the only ways in and out of Ladakh during the winter. Leh District’s one commercial airport was established during military buildup in the 1970s when there were border clashes with China and Pakistan; the tourism industry and permanent military presence have since then sustained and bolstered the airport.

Economic and Political Context

Ladakhis are a minority population within both their state as well as nationally, but they are just one of many minority groups within the multi-ethnic nation of India. Ladakhis benefit from India's policies aimed at bolstering the welfare of minorities. Ladakhis pay very little in taxes and receive government subsidies of food and other daily living staples. At the same time, Ladakhis experience disenfranchisement, as the population is politically and socially marginal relative to the Indian state, and the region has little to offer in terms of resources. Indeed, many rural residents across India experience similar forms of disenfranchisement. Corruption and mismanagement means economic and other resources intended to improve rural areas throughout the country often do not efficiently or effectively reach these populations, and rural residents in turn have little clout in such dealings.

Ladakhis have sought greater political representation and autonomy, particularly arguing that as part of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, they are a minority within a state and Ladakh's needs do not match those of the state government's priorities. The militarization and extended conflict in the Kashmir region with Pakistan is likely a major aspect of this problem, as the conflict diverts resources and attention from other needs. Tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim populations of Ladakh have also fueled efforts for greater autonomy, as Buddhists in particular feel marginalized at the level of the state government, which has a Muslim majority. The goal of such efforts in the late-1980s and 1990s was to achieve "Union Territory" status, which would remove the region from the state of Jammu and Kashmir and place it under administration of the country's Central Government. Ladakhis were not successful in achieving UT status, and some still maintain it should be sought. However, in 1995 the government granted a greater version of autonomy by allowing Ladakhis to form the Ladakh Autonomous Hill

Development Council (LAHDC). The LAHDC is run by elected Ladakhis and gives them oversight of funds, priorities, and policies in the region. This important political change also brought about changes in the staff of local government agencies, with an increase in local Ladakhis rather than outsiders running these arms of the bureaucracy.

According to India's most recent census in 2011, Leh District's population is 133,487 (Census of India 2011). That count, however, included the substantial number of (predominantly male) military troops stationed in the district, and found a worrisome gender ratio, with 78,971 males and only 54,516 females. The disparity was later concluded to be entirely due to military presence and not a result of gender bias as can be found in other regions of India (Singh and Sharma 2011). In fact, the 2011 national census counted nearly equal numbers of male (6,174) and female (5,842) children between the ages of 0-6 in Leh District (Census of India 2011). The total number of households was 21,909, making the average household size about 6 people, considering the population, including military (Census of India 2011).

The local economy has shifted in recent decades to being increasingly cash-oriented, due to growth in the tourism sector, sustained military presence, and economic development (van Beek and Pirie 2008). Ladakh has been the subject of substantial governmental and NGO economic development efforts, especially since the 1980s. But despite improvements, Ladakh remains immensely underserved in terms of transportation and technology infrastructure, and is politically and economically marginal relative to India's urban centers of power (Aggarwal 2004, van Beek 2000a). One of the findings of this dissertation—Ladakhis' widespread acceptance of education as something in which all children should unquestionably participate—seems unusual in light of the region's economic characteristics and its extent of development.

In terms of transportation and technology infrastructure, "standard of living," and various

other wealth and development indicators, Ladakh is easily categorized as poor, underdeveloped, and underserved. For example, most homes in Ladakh do not have indoor plumbing, and instead use outhouse-style composting toilets. And though they may have electrical connectivity, actual service is irregular and even when available electricity is rationed to certain parts of the day, as is the case in many developing countries. Geographic features mean the region is difficult to reach and at the margins of the nation, but also, Ladakhis are members of an ethnic and religious minority, enhancing their own sense of being symbolically peripheral to India's economic and power centers as well. Indian narratives on the economy and development characterize Ladakh and its people as "backward" (e.g. Kaul and Kaul 2004, Gillespie 2006).¹ From the other extreme, popular travel accounts, literature, and films often romanticize Ladakh, portraying it as a peaceful place of simpler times, its good-natured inhabitants living simple, ecologically sound lives as they exemplify their Buddhist ideals.²

In economic terms, Ladakhis are relatively poor. Leh and Kargil districts have the lowest gross domestic product of all districts of Jammu and Kashmir state (Government of Jammu and

¹ Ladakhis are well aware of this characterization and use it to describe themselves or to describe aspects of the region and/or its people that are either under-developed or lack modern characteristics (see also Gillespie 2006). I discuss this further in Chapter Five.

² For example, there is the nonfiction book *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*, by Helena Norberg-Hodge (1991), the travelogue *A Journey in Ladakh* by David Harvey, and the fictional account, *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton (1933) (though unnamed, some believe that the story's setting is based on Ladakh). In addition, documentary films such as "Schooling the World: The White Man's Last Burden" (2010), "Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh" (1993), as well as Bollywood films such as "3 Idiots" (2009) romanticize "traditional" Ladakhi culture. These narratives and perspectives of Ladakh are further explored in Chapter Four.

Kashmir 2009:113). Both districts also rank among the lowest in the state for annual per capita income, as reported in the state’s 2008-09 Economic Survey (Government of Jammu and Kashmir 2009). In 2008, Leh district’s per capita income was INR 15,728 and Kargil district’s was INR 13,509, whereas their state’s average was much higher, at INR 20,604. The national per capita income is higher still, at INR 27,442 (Government of Jammu and Kashmir 2009:114-15).³ Despite all of these characteristics, Leh District’s literacy rate rose to 77.2 percent in the 2011 census from 65.3 percent in 2001; the district’s literacy rate now also surpasses the national average of 74 percent (Census of India 2011).

Table 1.1: 2008 Annual Per Capita Income (Government of Jammu and Kashmir 2009:114-5)

	Per Capita Income	Approx. US \$ (avg. 2008 rate)
Kargil District	INR 13,509	\$309.70
Leh District	INR 15,728	\$360.57
Jammu & Kashmir (State)	INR 20,604	\$477.72
India	INR 27,442	\$636.26

Table 1.2: Literacy Rates, age 7+ (Census of India 2011)

	2001	2011
Kargil District	60.8%	74.49%
Leh District	65.3%	80.48%
Jammu & Kashmir (State)	55.52%	67.16%
India	64.8%	74.04%

³ Average exchange rate in 2008: US\$ 1 = INR 43.62.

RESEARCH METHODS

Overview

Field research utilized multiple methods for collecting data on the subjects of childhood, schooling, and social change. Research took place in Leh District, Jammu & Kashmir State, India, over a total of ten months from 2011-14. Primary methods were qualitative: an interview-style household survey with Ladakhi parents, focus group interviews with children, and after-school English language practice and tutorials for children. These methods were supplemented with participant observation with families and small groups of children, time spent volunteering as an assistant at a school, as well as interviews with teachers, school administrators, and government administrators. Additionally, the household survey collected some quantitative information on family characteristics, and I also collected unpublished quantitative data related to education, schools, and employment from government departments and private school records.

Household interviews and group interviews were mainly conducted over three months in August through November 2011. During this period, I lived with a family in Leh who had two teenage sons. After-school tutorials were the main research activity during March through June 2012. Other research activities took place throughout the 2011-12 research phases. I returned to Ladakh for two months in August and September of 2013, in order to conduct follow up interviews with children who had participated in the after school tutorials. This allowed me to begin a longitudinal component to the data, and to crosscheck preliminary analysis of the initial data. I returned again to Ladakh in September through October 2014 to continue the longitudinal project, again following up with students from the after school tutorials, as well as collecting further statistical data from the government as relevant. Since this time, I have utilized social

media to maintain contact with many of the after-school participants, as well as with other contacts in Ladakh.

Previous Research

The development and undertaking of this research benefitted from four months of previous ethnographic research conducted in Leh and Kargil districts of Jammu and Kashmir in 2006, 2008, and 2009, focusing on childhood disability and family accommodation for children with cognitive and physical disabilities (Richard 2014). The focus of the project was to explore what having a child with a major disability means for families, how parents make sense of their child's condition, and the role of government and private organizations in assisting such children and their parents or families. Methods included interviews with parents, physiotherapists (Ladakhi and foreign), special educators (Ladakhi and foreign), community members, and leaders of disability-related NGOs. During this project, I improved my skills with interviewing, made varied contacts throughout the Ladakhi community in Leh, and became comfortable with elementary Ladakhi language and customs.

Household Survey

I designed the household survey to meet three main goals, encompassing exploratory and descriptive functions: 1) collect baseline data that would ensure a broader understanding of variation across the district's families, 2) develop a working understanding of how wellbeing is understood and applied in practice especially in relation to children, and 3) to document patterns in intra-household disparities in children's access to resources. For the first two goals, the survey proved effective, but the third goal became irrelevant because there was little variation among siblings in their access to key resources within families.

In order to allow for various possible types and levels of analysis, the instrument I developed included structured and semi-structured questions, and collected quantitative and qualitative data about both the household as a whole as well as the individual members of the household. In designing it, I drew upon relevant portions of the Young Lives Household Survey administered successfully in four countries, including India (Boyden 2014, Johnston 2008). The Young Lives survey documented household attributes in order to understand the potential for a wide variety of factors to have a role in children's experiences and wellbeing, specifically relating to their access to education, work requirements, and the ways in which children spend their time (Galab et al. 2008). Administering the survey in an early period of the research helped to establish a broader knowledge of trends related to children's lives and child-rearing decisions, and confirmed education as the unquestionable priority for today's children, which framed later portions of the research agenda.

The sampling frames were all households in two rural villages in the Sham area (approximately two hundred households) and the urban town of Leh and nearby areas (approximately six thousand households). The inclusion criteria for the urban and rural samples are: (1) household was in Leh or selected village, respectively, (2) household had at least two children,⁴ at least one of whom was within ages 8-16,⁵ and (3) household was willing to

⁴ Reflecting the average number of children in contemporary families in Ladakh, which is about two children, although statistics from different sources show variation in rates of children ever born (CEB) and total fertility rate (TFR), with some showing a rate between one and two children, and others reporting a rate of closer to three children (Aengst 2013b:27).

⁵ The inclusion criteria for was expanded from ages 10-14 to 8-16 for at least one child, because especially in rural areas it was potentially ruling out too many families that seemed otherwise relevant to the broader study goals.

participate with parent giving verbal consent. Convenience sampling was used in the rural villages: my Ladakhi research assistant and I went house to house and many were eliminated due to not having children young enough to fit the criteria. Given that everyone we asked was willing to participate, those rural households comprise a large majority of the households in these two villages with children in this age range. For the urban sample, we first divided the town area into neighborhoods, and then used convenience sampling as well as informant-driven sampling to find families fitting the criteria in each neighborhood, aiming to qualitatively represent the variety present in the Leh population. Families who did not identify as Ladakhi, such as in the urban area where there are migrants who have settled with their families for work opportunities as well as Tibetan refugees, were excluded. I conducted the household survey with parents from a total of 97 households, 54 of which were rural, and 43 urban. Reflecting the population of Leh District, the majority of the households (90) were Buddhist, with seven Muslim families (all urban) also participating. The household survey required about 30 to 45 minutes, though we sometimes spent more time if the participants wanted to socialize, and it was formatted as a semi-structured interview. The survey was orally administered with a Ladakhi research assistant who translated when necessary, and answers were recorded in writing during the survey as well as on a digital audio recorder for later transcription.

The first portion of the survey elicited structured, quantifiable data, and parents had the

In addition, I still found a number of families with children who wanted to take part in the study but did not fit the inclusion criteria for age range. In the rural areas especially, it was more useful to collect the data on families with school age children than to strictly limit the data collection in this way. Thus the number of families fitting the inclusion criteria is 80. An additional 17 families were included because they had other relevant demographic criteria (children in school/school age).

opportunity to explain or comment on their answers. Data included household attributes, focusing on indicators of wealth, productive resources, outside sources of income, and media availability (such as television or radio). The survey documented all members of the household, their relationships, ages, occupations, education level, and key responsibilities to the household. It documented who earned income, how they earned it, whether it was shared, and who was responsible for financial and other decision-making. Parents were also asked about the existence of a chronic condition, disability, developmental concern, or major injury in the past year, as well as ongoing health concerns for each member of the household.

The second portion of the survey collected additional information about all children in the household regarding their household responsibilities, their educational opportunities, health status, and expected outcome of the children's current pathways. The data collected on individual children reflected both objective and subjective measures, in order to have data on aspects of childhood wellbeing that were locally unique as well as data on common indicative markers of wellbeing used cross-culturally such as health, education, resources, child work, and children's other activities. Parents were asked to provide information on school attendance and average academic performance (marks or class rank) for each child.

In the final portion of the survey, parents were asked to provide open-ended responses on questions related to their future expectations for the children, as well as to describe what they believe children need in order to have a good life, and to explain why these things are so crucial. They were asked to compare their memories of growing up as a child in Ladakh to the lives they see their children living today. Finally, they were asked to explain what they would like to provide for their children that they cannot currently provide, or that they would provide if more resources became available to the family. This open-ended portion of the survey encouraged

discussion of the responses with the researcher and often involved additional probing for further explanations and expansion.

Children's Wellbeing Group Interviews

The goal of the children's wellbeing exercise focus groups was to ascertain how Ladakhi children characterize wellbeing, as well as to explore related issues. Group activity-style interviews after which this phase has been modeled were used successfully in research on children's notions of wellbeing in India, Peru, Ethiopia, and Vietnam as part of the Young Lives longitudinal study of child poverty and child wellbeing (Crivello et al. 2009:60-64). The exercise took approximately forty-five minutes, was arranged through my contacts with school administrators, and took place at both private and government schools in urban and rural locations. The participants in the focus groups were selected in conjunction with school administrators to represent typical students within the age range of 11 through 16, and care was taken to avoid a sample biased towards only high achieving students.

Working with a Ladakhi research assistant who translated my speech from English to Ladakhi as well as students speech if they chose to use Ladakhi, I began the group interviews by introducing myself and reiterating the goals of the research. I then asked the students to introduce themselves and provide a bit of biographical information—what class they were in and what was their favorite subject in school. I encouraged the participants that they could answer freely, that they should share what they think, and that there were no wrong answers to the questions. I then initiated a series of discussion prompts to initiate ideas about what it means to do well as a child in Ladakh and what having a good life as a child looks like. The prompts elicited responses about children's visions of a "good life" and how wellbeing can be accomplished. We also discussed the importance of school, what problems Ladakh was facing, and various aspects of their future

hopes and aspirations. Depending on the answers, I often asked for follow up explanations. Some groups were more open, whereas others needed additional encouragement to probe for responses at different points. When children were particularly shy at the outset, I asked them to discuss their ideas to the first prompt in groups of two or three and then had a leader from each group share with everyone. We then continued with the exercise in the same full group format, as children began to share more willingly on their own behalf.

In the urban Leh Town area, I conducted nine group interviews, six in state government schools and three in private schools. I conducted four group interviews—three in government schools and one in a private school—in the same two villages where the household surveys took place. Most of the groups had 10 to 12 students, the majority of whom were in Classes VIII or IX. The groups were mixed gender with an about equal number of boys and girls participating. All rural participants were Buddhist, as were the vast majority of town participants, though there were three Muslim students participating.

Children used both English and Ladakhi, thus the amount of translation from the research assistant that participants required varied from one group to the next. Younger students as well as those in government schools typically needed more translation assistance than others. I took notes during the interviews, and also wrote additional notes afterward. The research assistant provided further insight during post-focus group note-writing and I reviewed the notes with her in order to assure that I understood the meaning as well as context of the students' responses and that no responses were misunderstood or not fully recorded. I also audio recorded the focus groups for later transcription.

Preliminary Analysis and Revising Methods

During the winter of 2012, I conducted a cursory analysis of data and consulted with my

committee members in order to more fully develop the methodology for the next phase of the project. While one of the main premises of the original research plan was to understand why siblings might not have access to the same educational opportunities due to differences in their parents' resource allocations, this initial question was irrelevant as it was clear that nearly all children were in school and most families provided equal opportunities for their children. Qualitative analysis of survey and focus group responses clearly showed education to be a defining aspect of contemporary Ladakhi childhood, a shift for the current generation. Thus, instead of focusing on understanding the distribution of family resources, I determined that there was important insight to be gained through spending greater time with older children (around ages 12-16), since as teenagers they began to develop a sense of their identity and roles in terms of family and society as well as think seriously about personal desires and goals for adulthood. I then developed the second phase—after-school English tutorials—in order to spend more time with children of this age range, drawing on my established contacts with school administration.

After-School English Tutorials

Data from the second phase, conducting over three months in 2012, derives from after-school English language tutorials with two groups of students. I met with each group for approximately one hour daily, five days per week (Monday through Friday) for twelve weeks between March and June. The group at the first school (“Group A”) comprised a range of ages, from 11 years through 16 (with the majority of students in this group ages 12 to 14), and had an equal number of boys and girls. The Group A students lived in a village about 15 miles from Leh, and rode the bus daily to attend a private school in Leh. Their village is peri-urban, with a mix of farming and professional occupations among the adults of the village, urban-equivalent technological and transportation infrastructures, and the relative ease with which residents can

access the resources of Leh town. The group at the second school (“Group B”) were students ages 15 to 16, mostly boys in Class X, all of whom lived in their private school’s on-campus hostel. The majority of attendees were from rural villages, with just a couple from within the peri-urban areas near Leh Town.

Each group had a regular attendance of about 15 students, but because of other activities and obligations, the number of students attending was occasionally larger or smaller. Each group had the same core dozen or so students, with an additional set of students attending somewhat less frequently. I chose to allow the groups to be less obligatory than a regular school- day class, in order to stress to students that while respect for the tutor (the researcher) was expected given cultural roles for instructor-student relationships, the students could also speak or write honestly during class assignments and tutorials. Free expression is atypical within the formal learning environment as the curriculum rewards rote memorization.

I assigned essays in which students discussed their experiences in school and leisure time, stated goals, their expectations of economic development and modernity, and family and community responsibilities. I also initiated group conversations during which students explained aspects of their lives or responded to questions asking for their opinions on relevant topics. I introduced other activities, such as writing or brainstorming in pairs or small groups, during which time I could speak with the students in smaller groups. In addition to focusing on topics that would reveal data related to my research goals, I also interspersed their assignments and discussion prompts with fun and creative activities, such as sharing about favorite Bollywood actors or sports stars, telling me about yetis and folk beliefs, and sharing which teachers dressed fashionably and which did not. Through showing interest in their own experiences and ideas, being encouraging about their use of English, having some fun, and spending time daily, I was

able to develop strong rapport. Eventually, students invited me to spend time in their homes on Sundays (for those in Group A) and when there was an extra day off for a holiday (enough time to travel by bus for a few hours to villages of some of the students in Group B), and during those times, many trusted me with more personal information. This method allowed me to assist students with a crucial skill (English) and also to collect rich qualitative data that illuminated children's perceptions of themselves, their responsibilities and struggles, the importance of schooling and expected outcomes, the importance and complex nature of family, and ways in which children exercise agency in daily life.

The data I collected during these after-school sessions fall under two categories. First, I recorded the content of students' written assignments, as they were often tasked with responding to prompts their experiences with school, their families, their short and long term goals, their ideas about economic development and modernity, and their educational and extracurricular interests. Second, I wrote field notes during and after group conversations where students discussed or explained aspects of their lives, or responded to questions asking for their opinions on a variety of topics relevant to their lives and Ladakhi and Indian societies more broadly. While I often had to clarify and expand my notes in the evenings after the sessions had ended, my writing of notes during the conversations and tutorials ensured accuracy, and, importantly, served as a reminder to students that they were participating in research.

Participant Observation

Throughout the research, I utilized participant observation as an important supplement to the more systematic modes of data collection. Participating in and observing daily life through residing in the community for extended time periods allowed me to access and understand more about children's everyday lives, activities, and struggles. Participant observation was crucially

important for this project because it improved rapport, which was necessary for conducting successful ethnographic interviews and for reducing potential reactivity (Punch 2001, Bernard 2006). Also, observation provided the opportunity to view children's responsibilities and opportunities in the context of daily life, allowing for validation, expansion, and/or contradiction of survey and interview data (Garro 2010). In a survey or single interview, respondents may not list all of a child's household tasks, for example, as they may not consider them noteworthy, whereas observation and participation in daily life in households provides the opportunity to more fully account for children's typical daily activities, responsibilities, and relationships (Punch 2001).

For about five months (Fall 2011 and Summer 2013), I resided with a family with two teenagers in school. I spent the three months of Spring 2012 living on my own which enabled me to spend Sundays and holidays visiting and staying over night in the homes of various students participating in the after-school tutorials. This unstructured time with children and their families gave insights into children's relationships with their parents, families, and communities as well as their behavior and practices outside of school. I wrote field notes during and after periods of participant observation.

Supplemental Data Collection

Throughout my time in Ladakh, I also collected various supplemental data. I collected unpublished statistical data in 2011 and 2013 from the Leh District Department of Education on number, type, and location of the district's government schools, the numbers of teachers employed and students enrolled, and pass rates for Classes X and XII. At the offices of the Department of Education, the Statistical Assistant discussed the data that the office kept and provided copies of his most up-to-date spreadsheets with the information I deemed relevant. I

also interviewed the Deputy administrator for the Department of Education about the status of government schools in the district, the history of education in the area, curricular reform and medium of instruction, and his perceptions of teaching quality, parent involvement, and child learning. In 2013, I also collected statistics on government job offerings and applicants from a key administrator at the Leh District Department of Employment.

Throughout my time in Ladakh, I conducted a variety of interviews with school administrators (principals and assistant principals) at schools where I conducted research. These interviews were mainly unstructured, and I sought to collect broader information and viewpoints, particularly in response to my explanations of my research (why I was at their school, and in particular why I was seeking to interview their students during the group interview phase, as well as to collect statistics on their student populations). Some were brief while others were substantive, and there were a few principals with whom I had multiple conversations. A number of them were interested in having extended conversations with me, sharing their experiences with students, parents, and teachers, their teaching and leadership philosophies, and their opinions about the ways Ladakhi society and particularly how its young people are changing in contemporary times. Additionally, throughout the project, I conversed with various teachers about children, teaching, and the importance of education in Ladakhi society. While these interviews were generally unstructured and conversational, all participants were aware that I was collecting information for my research, and agreed to participate.

To gain greater perspective on what school was like, I served as a volunteer at a private school in Leh during spring of 2012. I spent a few hours a day, about two to three days per week, assisting with the library, where secondary school students had one mandatory session per week, and with rehearsals and preparations for a Class X performance of Macbeth. In the library, I

chatted with students as they chose which book they would check out (they were required to check out a book each week), and sometimes helped them select books. I also helped students who were rehearsing to perform Macbeth, as a tutor in language pronunciation and diction and an assistant for various preparations. Additionally, as the teachers at this school became comfortable with my presence and voluntary role, I gained the rapport needed to sit in on their classes with the clear understanding that I was neither an evaluator nor a critic. I observed about ten different classes, from between Class VII to Class X, of various subjects including Social Studies, English, and Math. These activities provided me with greater understanding of how schools operated in the day-to-day and how students interacted in more and less structured settings with one another and with their teachers. My participation, conversations, and observations during these times was unstructured, as I did not aim to collect systematic data but rather to gain an implicit understanding of school as a daily event and practice in the lives of children.

In May 2012, I visited one of the government's two "nomadic residential" schools run by the government, located in the eastern part of the district in an area known as the Chang Thang Plateau. On an earlier visit to the Leh District Department of Education, one of the head administrators told me about the school and its success educating children of Ladakh's transhumant groups. A new format of a boarding school run by the government, and opened in 2007, this school, along with a second school in another part of this vast, high plateau area, are considered to be highly successful, especially in comparison to earlier efforts of the government in sending teachers, individually, to live for most of the year with nomadic groups, educating children while they lived at home. Preferable in ideal terms, it was decidedly unsuccessful in terms of learning achievement. The new format provided a school and place to live with other

nomad children on the plateau—for many, still a long distance from home, but not nearly as far as Leh or other towns where there were opportunities to board at a school. The government administrators strongly encouraged me to visit the school, so I made arrangements and spent two days there. I interviewed the older students about their experiences in school, plans for the future, and collected various details on their families, particularly their modes of subsistence and members' education levels. They took me on a tour of their school, residence areas, and the area around the school. I interviewed the principal and vice principals, and some of the teachers as well, learning about their work with the students, perceptions of their needs, and their educational philosophies.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

As education became central to this research project, it is necessary to provide further background on the history and influences of education in Ladakh, leading to the current situation today. Chapter Two charts the implementation of modern institutionalized schooling in Ladakh, in light of the broader socio-political history of the region during the British Raj and India's independence. I argue that it was a combination of both external and local influences, at crucial points in Ladakh's recent history, as well as key economic shifts that functioned to eventually secure the prominent place of schooling in contemporary Ladakhi children's lives. Chapter Two ends with an introduction and overview of the basics of the school system today, from curriculum and language medium to costs and the differences in government-run and private schools, as well as an introduction to the dynamics of inequalities in schooling access.

Economic conditions and the perceived financial benefits of schooling are taken up in Chapter Three, which also presents an alternative to the overly simplistic assumption that people

go to school so that they can make money. I argue that schools have become so important for Ladakhi young people that they are necessary for any kind of respectable and meaningful adulthood. Education defines persons, gives members of society a key component to their social identity; one can no longer do anything in life without it.

In Chapter Four, I discuss who is responsible for schooling success, and how this relates to agency as well as constraints, for both parents and children. Parents hoped for good outcomes but were vague or uncertain about how well or how much their children would achieve in adulthood. They could provide financially, some more than others, but could do little else in terms of helping their children learn, achieve academically, and make decisions about the best fitting career trajectories. This meant that children instead shouldered much of the responsibility for the day-to-day efforts in studying and doing well on exams, and in trying to figure out which career pathways they should pursue. I discuss how Ladakhis framed good and bad parenting behaviors, and in turn how children could influence their futures, as well as understand their constraints, all in effort to achieve educated personhood and live well.

While education is crucial for full social personhood, this does not mean that Ladakhi children have abandoned their ethnic identity for one that is entirely “modern” and “developed.” Children negotiate narratives of Ladakh as a place and people in need of development alongside ones purporting that Ladakh should maintain its cultural heritage, should uphold tradition in the face of modernity. In Chapter Five, I describe and analyze children’s engagements with these two narratives, and show how they integrate them in their practices and perspectives on what it means to be Ladakhi and their goals for the future. Through this, they participate in constructing what it means to be a Ladakhi today. They combine modern attributes such as being educated, literate, and exposed to others, as well as upholding an ethnic Ladakhi identity and prizing

cultural practices, landscape, and moral orientations.

A major part of being Ladakhi, and one that could be easily categorized in the “tradition” category from Chapter Five, is a family group orientation, and the perpetuation of roles and responsibilities morally associated with family. Thus in Chapter Six, I discuss the ongoing family orientations that young people upheld in their practices, even, at times, at the cost of education. What this means is important in that it shows they are not being socialized towards individualistic economic and social views of themselves, and instead that a Ladakhi idea of being a modern educated person also includes adherence to a moral code of giving and sharing. The ongoing family group role of children also means responsibilities that can in fact get in the way of what is otherwise their foremost priority: education. It is both their family’s economic background, essentially their class, in combination with the continuity of their importance of responsibility to family and seeing oneself as a member of the group that leads to a disadvantage for poorer children, commonly from rural areas.

I conclude the dissertation with an afterword discussing applications of the research presented here as well as future directions for additional research on education, childhood, and social change in Ladakh.

DEVELOPING AN EDUCATED SOCIETY: THE HISTORY OF SCHOOLING IN LADAKH

INTRODUCTION

This chapter traces the history of education and the rise of schooling in Ladakh, highlighting key changes in macro and micro contexts over the past century that have affected how children spend their days. The first part of the chapter describes the educational situation in Ladakh from the late nineteenth century leading up to the major education reforms of the 1990s. I describe the introduction of formal western-style education, and the major events and organizations that have influenced its meaning. I discuss the ways that formal education has influenced Ladakhi society, with particular attention to access to schools, as well as how attitudes and beliefs about schooling influenced uptake. In the latter part of the chapter, I focus on the period from the 1990s to present, describing the significant shift in Ladakhis' attitudes and practices regarding children's schooling beginning with a major grassroots reform movement. I analyze these changes in terms of other economic, socio-cultural, and political processes that have occurred during this time period, as well as prior to it, with the ultimate effect of engaging the general population in fully supporting children's schooling.

Ladakhis today consider education to be the crucial component of children's development, but this was not always the case, as my interviews with parents, grandparents, and

other adult Ladakhis demonstrate. While formal western education⁶ has existed in Ladakh for over a century, a critical shift towards valuing this type of education for all children only began to occur in the 1990s, coinciding with a global era marked by economic liberalization as well as substantial increase international NGO involvement with marginalized populations. Before then, children's access to schools was limited, students who did attend showed poor results on exams, and serious, full-time study in school was only the pursuit of a relative few Ladakhi children. Thus, examining the history of the local educational landscape provides a foundation upon which to build the analysis of data on contemporary childhood in Ladakh and in particular, in understanding, the cultural meaning of education in Ladakh.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES PRIOR TO THE BRITISH RAJ

The history of formal education in Ladakh is linked with broader South and Central Asian political shifts of the colonial and post-colonial periods. Formal education has existed in these regions for centuries, since well before colonization, but it was predominantly for children of the elite, was linked with religious institutions, and often emphasized religious curricula (Ghosh 2000:6-7, P. Jeffery 2005:15-16). For the majority of the population, however, children's education was home-based, aimed at learning the necessary skills for subsistence activities—learning happened at home, in fields, or in workshops (P. Jeffery 2005). Similarly, in Ladakh, formal education before the late-19th century was entirely oriented towards religious pursuits.

Like many Tibetan Buddhists throughout the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau, Ladakhi

⁶ Formal, western education implies the standardized classroom based learning that prioritizes a secular curriculum of sciences, mathematics, and the humanities.

families traditionally sent one younger son to become a monk at a monastery. Sometimes a daughter was sent to a nunnery, but the practice was not consistent as it was with boys. By placing a child in a monastery, parents, kin, and the child himself would receive spiritual benefits. But in terms of household economics, the benefits were diminished by drawbacks. The arrangement took the burden off of a family in terms of having one less child to provide for, but on the other hand, it also meant that there would be one less set of hands to help with subsistence and household work. Families in Ladakh usually did not have to directly support the child sent to the monastery, because he would be cared for by an adult monk—often another family member—who was in an established patronage relationship with the sending family (Goldstein and Tsarong 1985:20). Monasteries maintained symbiotic relations with neighboring villages through a complex of economic and spiritual obligations between the members of each community (Grimshaw 1983). Ladakhi monks commonly travelled to Tibet for a few years during their pre-teen and teenage years to study and train at major monasteries (Goldstein and Tsarong 1985:28).⁷ The formalized education of monks was focused on religious pursuits and ritual duties, and included very limited literacy in classical Tibetan.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Muslim populations became established in Ladakh, especially in the western region of Kargil. As a result, many villages had a *maktab*, or Muslim religious primary school, where boys learned to read the Koran and other important religious texts (Sheikh 2005). Until the late nineteenth century, religious training was the only form of

⁷ Since then, Ladakhi monasteries have formed new training relationships with large Tibetan Buddhist monasteries located in other parts of India, which have been established by members of the Tibetan diaspora. These days, Ladakhi monks often spend a few years or more at these larger monasteries when they are teenagers.

formal education available to Ladakhis. For the majority of the population, education was informal. It was focused on learning one's family's form of subsistence (mainly agriculture, animal husbandry, and herding), and took place through experience and hands-on instruction on the farm, in the home, in the pastures grazing animals, or in the fields.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Education Policy in British India

European (and especially British) ideas about formal education and valued forms of knowledge greatly influenced South Asian society during the colonial period (1858-1946), and beyond (P. Jeffery 2005). The British, who controlled educational policy in India from 1858-1919, provided relatively low public funding for education (Chaudhary 2009:269). Due to Indian elite influence over resource allocation, public spending was directed in greater amounts towards secondary rather than primary education (Chaudhary 2009:269-270). High status, influential elites desired higher education opportunities for their own children, and therefore, their influence on the expansion of the educational system only at the highest levels did little to broaden access to basic primary education for the bulk of the population (Chaudhary 2009). Under the British, educational policy effectively perpetuated social inequalities by directing educational allocations mostly towards the better-off urban elite, and as a result, literacy rates remained extremely low throughout the colonial period (Chaudhary 2009).

Also during the period, missionaries from Europe opened private schools throughout the subcontinent, teaching using a western model (Ghosh 2000). The cultural capital they brought as westerners helped to promote the view of schools, and the knowledge obtained therein, as places

of elite education and opportunity. These processes of introduction and integration of formal education in India solidified schools as holding the opportunity for obtaining the most valued forms of cultural capital. Formal schooling and its language—English—took on a higher value and prestige than informal subsistence learning (Ghosh 2000). The importance of English and value placed on it as a language of the elite remains today; it is one of India’s official languages and is considered an important subject in school if children are to compete for the best opportunities. In Ladakh, learning English is considered a crucial component of schooling and for competitiveness for government and other desired jobs, and parents often told me that they chose a certain private school because of its reputation for high quality English training.⁸ The significance of English as an elite language exemplifies the power and influence of what had been a foreign educational system.

Education Enters Ladakh

European influence in Ladakh was most profound due to missionaries from the Moravian Church⁹ who established a school and medical clinic in Leh in 1887, two years after they founded a mission station there (Bray 1985). The Moravians were the earliest to implement modern, western-style education to the region, and their efforts have had lasting effects. Moravian missionaries came to Leh as part of the church’s broader efforts to target the

⁸ English language instruction also figured prominently in the politics of school reform in Ladakh, which I discuss later.

⁹ The Moravian Church is a Protestant denomination, originating in what is now the Czech Republic in the 14th century. At the time of mission outreach in Ladakh, the church had a large base in eastern Germany and had been involved in wide-ranging global missionary efforts since the eighteenth century.

Himalayas, Tibet, and Mongolia for evangelization accompanied by social work (particularly education and healthcare) and linguistic research (Bray 1983, 1985).¹⁰ Initially, the Moravian school was poorly attended. But in 1889, the Wazir—a term for the Kashmiri official appointed as governor of the Ladakh region—ordered all local families to send one of their children to the school. This measure bolstered enrollment somewhat, as there were thirty students in regular attendance that year (Moravian 2009). The Moravians subsequently opened branches of their school in Shey, a town near Leh, and Khalatse, about 100 km from Leh. Students studied various subjects including math, science, English, Urdu, and Tibetan; Bible classes were optional (Moravian 2009). In addition to the Moravians, Roman Catholic missionaries maintained a station in Leh in the late nineteenth century for about a decade, and in 1892 they attempted to open a school. The effort, initially with six boys in attendance, did not last long as parents demanded payment in exchange for sending their children (Bray 1985, Bray 1997:34-35).

By 1891, there were other schools in Leh competing for pupils with the Moravians (Francke 2005:283). Muslims had opened *maktab* schools in Leh, which were often the choice of Muslim families for their boys. The addition of Muslim-run schools made it more difficult for the Moravian Mission School to maintain pupils because, aside from the children of Christian converts, Muslims were the main demographic interested in obtaining education for their children (Francke 2005:282-283). In a report to his church in Europe, August Hermann Francke, a Moravian missionary in Leh in the late-19th century and scholar of Ladakhi history and language, remarked disdainfully about the decided unwillingness of Buddhist families (the majority of the population in the Leh area) to send their children to school, because of their

¹⁰ Some of the earliest Western scholars of Tibetan and Ladakhi linguistics and societies were also missionaries.

“view that agriculture is best carried out by those who have no book learning” (Francke 2005:282-283). He also described a sense of mistrust of schools among Ladakhis, citing worries that schooling might be the government’s effort to train boys for military purposes or that the school’s goal was to make converts to Christianity (Francke 2005:282-285).

The Dogras, who administered Ladakh under the British, paid little attention to education; during their governance of Ladakh, over a half century passed before the government allocated funds for schools in the region (Sheikh 2005). Leh’s first government school was opened in 1892, and offered only elementary education (Classes I through V) until 1899, when it was expanded to middle school (Classes VI through VIII) (Sheikh 2005). The government subsequently opened primary schools in Ladakh’s other major towns, Skardu to the north,¹¹ in 1899, and Kargil in the west, in 1900. In 1900 there were 14 students attending at the school in Leh, 20 in Skardu, and 48 in Kargil (Sheikh 2005). Whether Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian, it was only boys who were sent to school during this period.

There is less documentation on Ladakhi Muslim families’ specific motivations surrounding their children’s education around the turn of the century, as compared to the missionary accounts regarding Buddhists’ disinterest and distrust in it. We know from the missionary accounts that Muslims were much more open to formal education, but that religious education was viewed as a positive endeavor for boys, so *maktabs* competed with secular schools for pupils (Sheikh 2005). Muslims’ greater interest in sending children to school during this time, in contrast to Buddhists, may owe to a number of factors. Muslims in Leh were mainly traders,

¹¹ Skardu is a town located in the contemporary region of Gilgit-Baltistan (formerly Northern Areas), in Pakistan.

not farmers, meaning they had somewhat greater wealth, involvement in the cash economy, access to resources, and exposure to other cultures and ideas (Fewkes 2009, Rizvi 1999). This would have implied different economic role expectations for their children, as well as a different attitude towards the utility of education. Thus, the contrasting livelihood strategies of the Buddhists and Muslims likely influenced their attitudes towards formal education when it was introduced in the region.

Though these schools were non-profit and free or low cost, schooling continued to be a pursuit of few Ladakhis. Ladakhi life was very harsh due to the high-altitude, low rainfall, and extremely cold winters, and therefore dependent upon making the most of every resource and potential laborer. Agriculture and animal husbandry were the sole modes of survival for most Ladakhis. There were very few job opportunities for the application of school-based education, and the local economy was not cash-oriented. Thus, for the average Ladakhi, schooling was not economically or socially meaningful (Bray 1983). The popular view was that education was only for children of wealthier families, and, more importantly, that educated people made poor farmers (Sheikh 2005). Pragmatic constraints meant that the amount of education offered at schools was rather limited. The Moravian schools were only open in the winter months, to enable pupils to help their families with farm and household subsistence tasks during the warmer half of the year (Bray 1985:50, Bray 1983:87). Further, the government schools had poorly trained teachers whose salaries were irregular, and the quality of instruction in these schools was low (Sheikh 2005).

The small number of children who attended school in these early days of modern education in Ladakh found economic and social advantage as adults, and passed these benefits on to their children. According to historian John Bray, those few children “who did obtain a good

education at the mission school were more likely to obtain prestigious government jobs. They were also more likely to be members of the small Christian community” (1983:87). During his research in Ladakh in the 1980s, Bray found: “the small Christian community still has a disproportionate number of government officers,” an elite achievement owing to the tradition of education among Christian families that the early missionaries had instilled (1983:88).¹²

THE LATE COLONIAL PERIOD IN LADAKH

Slow Improvement in Education

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Moravians continued with their educational efforts with schools in Leh, Shey, and Khalatse. The government also continued to expand its offerings by adding higher levels to existing schools, and building new schools throughout the region. The government’s efforts encountered a significant problem, however, in that during this time there were so few teachers available that they could not staff the new schools. Few local people were qualified to teach, and it was difficult to find outsiders willing to live in these remote areas. Private schools also expanded educational opportunities for girls; in 1920, the Moravians opened a separate school for girls in Leh, and reported attendance of 42 pupils there in 1924 (Sheikh 2005). In 1930, a Shia Muslim group opened a school in Leh with

¹² While the other Moravian mission stations in the Western Himalayas closed during the first half of the 20th century, the Leh Moravian church remains today, run entirely by Ladakhis, along with its branches in Shey and Khalatse (villages in Leh District). The European missionaries’ conversion efforts were minimally effective with only a small number of Ladakhi converts. By the turn of the century, new Christians were mainly those children born to Christian families, rather than converts (Bray 1983).

37 students, 21 of whom were girls (Sheikh 2005). Overall, however, girls' enrollment and participation in schooling remained lower than that of boys until recent decades (Sheikh 2005).

In the 1930s, the Dogra administration set up a commission to review and make recommendations regarding the educational needs in the regions under its immediate control: Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh (Sheikh 2005). In Ladakh, the commission found very low rates of schooling, particularly among Buddhists. Their report noted that as a result of low education levels, few Buddhists were serving in local government posts, and therefore Buddhist Ladakhis were markedly underrepresented in the local government administration. The commission made numerous recommendations to address this problem, some of which the government implemented. For example, in the late-1930s, the government set aside six higher education scholarships for Buddhist Ladakhi students. Despite the good intentions, however, no Buddhist Ladakhis took them up, and the award lapsed (Sheikh 2005).

Based on the commission's suggestions, in 1938 a minister was appointed to oversee the government schools in Ladakh (at that time, the region was much larger, as it included Baltistan, which is in present-day Pakistan). The appointee, Shridhar Dullu, was an officer with a unique background: born a Kashmiri Pandit (a Hindu minority) he had embraced Buddhism as an adult. Dullu's detailed logs, reviewed by the Ladakhi historian Abdul Ghani Sheikh, demonstrate that he took his job seriously and that he was determined to make a positive impact on Ladakh's schools (Sheikh 2005, AGS interview with author Aug 24, 2013). Dullu travelled throughout the region on horseback, visiting each school annually. His reports describe his observations of classroom instruction, as well his discussions with students and teachers. He gave specific criticisms and suggestions for improvement to the teachers, none of who were local Ladakhis, and followed up with them each subsequent year. His records show careful attention to the

quality of instruction and a desire to foster improvement in teaching and learning; he also reported his concern that Buddhists were not attending school at nearly the rates of Muslims or Christians (Sheikh 2005). His appointment was the first hint of meaningful oversight the region's government schools had seen.

Cultural Politics and Reform Movements in Ladakh

In the 1930s, there were various active Hindu political reform movements in India, some of which influenced and enhanced Ladakhi political awareness. In 1933, a small cohort of Ladakhi Buddhist men formed the Ladakh Buddhist Education Society (LBES). The LBES was concerned with spurring reform on various fronts, especially in aspects of society and governance that dealt with the preservation and perpetuation of Buddhist values and Ladakhi identity and language (van Beek 2001). The group was particularly influenced by Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement, which emphasized the importance of education for all as one of its major concerns. The idea behind this was that if more people became educated, this would lead to increased social and political awareness and involvement, and ultimately result in meaningful social change. The prominent Indian reformer, Rahula Sankrtyayana, assisted the LBES during his visit to Ladakh in the summer of 1933. During this time he also helped to write Ladakh's first Tibetan readers and a Tibetan grammar book (van Beek 2001).

The LBES took up various political issues related to cultural identity and representation. The organization emphasized Buddhism as part of Ladakhis' cultural heritage and thus some of its advocacy efforts are directed towards preservation of a particular idea of Ladakhi culture as inherently Buddhist. For example, its members were concerned that the Ladakhi Buddhist population was not growing as fast as the Ladakhi Muslim population (though the concern was based on fear rather than data). They blamed the perceived low population growth on the practice

of polyandry among Buddhists. In response, the LBES sought to outlaw polyandry because they linked it to population decline. Fearing that the population decline was a direct threat to their religion and culture, the LBES advocated for pronatalist policies. Outlawing polyandry matched with government concerns to eliminate “backward” social practices, so ultimately this effort was successful.

The LBES, like Arya Samaj, also viewed an educated population as an important component to gaining political influence and sustaining Ladakhi culture, but its efforts in this domain were largely unsuccessful. The LBES lobbied for a shift in the language medium used in schools in the Ladakh region: instead of Urdu (the language of Kashmir) they petitioned for Ladakhi to be the medium of instruction throughout primary school, with the switch to Urdu only occurring in secondary school. They also sought to add teachers in Ladakhi schools who knew the Tibetan script,¹³ and requested scholarships for advanced study to be reserved for Ladakhi students (van Beek 2001). However, most of these concerns went unmet for decades—through the early 1990s, the medium of instruction was Urdu, few teachers were Ladakhis, and there was little if any teaching of the Ladakhi written or spoken language in government schools.

Despite the work of the LBES, there were still very few educated Buddhist Ladakhis in the 1930s. Even with a few elites who were attempting to advance schooling, the majority continued to see little use for education for their livelihoods. It was difficult for the LBES to gain political traction and advance their agenda at higher levels of power, and it seems that they generally failed to promote education among the population. Around 1938, the LBES dissolved and most of its leaders formed the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA), which

¹³ Ladakhi language is closely related to Tibetan, and it uses the same script.

continued to lobby for these educational issues because they were considered closely related to preservation of Buddhist Ladakhis' identity and language, which they linked to the goal of gaining greater political influence.¹⁴

While the agendas of these early-century reform movements included education, they revolved around larger political issues of representation and identity, and these issues have continued to form and even enforce the ways in which Ladakhis view themselves vis-à-vis other Ladakhis (of different religions), the state leadership of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as the nation as a whole. Concerns about the size of the Buddhist Ladakhi population continue today, as Ladakhis view themselves as marginalized and peripheral to their Muslim-majority state and Hindu-majority nation, and such views have set a tone of defense regarding Ladakhi culture and identity (especially, but not exclusively, among Buddhists) (van Beek 2000a, Aengst 2013a, Smith 2009). Education itself, as well as schools' curriculum and language medium of instruction, have become wrapped up in the larger issues related to political representation and autonomy for Ladakhis.

INDEPENDENCE AND THE SPREAD OF IDEOLOGIES OF EDUCATION

When India achieved independence from Britain in 1950, economic development and national identity were major concerns of political leaders. In his writings, Prime Minister

¹⁴ The YMBA was the predecessor of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA), which is today a major political organization in Leh district, with substantial influence.

Jawaharlal Nehru explicitly linked education to economic and national development, and emphasized the social, economic, and individual benefits of increasing access to schooling (P. Jeffery 2005:18). India's 1950 constitution states a commitment to providing free and compulsory education to all children through age fourteen, and set a goal to achieve this within ten years (Colclough and De 2010:9). Subsequent "Five-Year Plans" throughout the remainder of the twentieth century have restated this still-elusive goal of education for all children through age fourteen (Kingdon 2007:171). Across India today, especially in rural areas and among poorer demographics, educational access remains incomplete. As sociologist Patricia Jeffrey states, "the gulf between values and policy implementation has been persistent" (2005:13). Education is held in high regard in Indian policy, and has been considered a pillar of the nation's development and economic stability, yet the reality demonstrates a lack of concern and commitment from the government. For most of the twentieth century, many of India's rural regions, including Ladakh, lagged far behind the nation's stated goals for education and literacy.

During the early years of India's Independence from Britain, it was necessary to appoint government leaders at local levels who could represent their regions while supporting the central government policies and intentions directed towards solidifying India's nationhood. Ladakh found its regional representative in the appointment of the 19th Kushok Bakula Rinpoche (1917-2003), a reincarnated monk born to a Ladakhi noble family who had gained a high-level of religious education in Tibet. He served first as a state government minister, then as a member of India's parliament representing the region from 1967-1977, and as a member of the Commission on Minorities through the 1980s. From 1990-2000, he served as India's ambassador to Mongolia.

Kushok Bakula Rinpoche was a major influence on Ladakhi society from Independence through the end of the century, and is well known throughout Ladakh for his efforts at promoting

development of the region and championing the needs of Ladakhis (Shakspo and Vyner 2006). He is widely credited with laying much of the groundwork for the cultural shift in Ladakhis' attitudes regarding the importance and value of education. Ladakhis consider him to have been a great religious, cultural, and political leader. He fervently promulgated the message that development, modernization, and secular education were necessary for Ladakhis, in order to improve their lives and protect them from exploitation and discrimination (Afridi 2006). In interviews during my research, parents often mentioned his work in going out among villages to encourage people to send their children to school, and remembered him as a noble statesman who fought for the betterment of his people. Some of the earliest indigenous scholars of Ladakh benefitted from his efforts. For example, Nawang Tsering Shakspo, a scholar of Ladakhi history, was able to attend a university in the 1960s thanks to Bakula Rinpoche's efforts in securing a handful of scholarships for Ladakhi students to achieve higher education (NTS, interview with author April 18, 2013). Bakula Rinpoche is well-known in Ladakh to have spent a good deal of time traveling by horseback throughout the region and stopping in villages to promote education for children in order to help the next generation of Ladakhis be able to represent themselves, understand and engage with government powers, and know their rights and responsibilities as citizens of a secular democracy (Mohammed 2006, Paldan 2006). Finally, Bakula Rinpoche worked to expand the government schools throughout the region to make them more accessible to the rural population, following his stated view that government schools were preferable to private schools, because anyone could afford to attend (Shakspo and Vyner 2006). He too lobbied unsuccessfully for the use of Ladakhi language in schools as the medium of instruction to replace Urdu (Paldan 2006:55).

Poor Quality Schools

Until the 1990s, for the majority of Ladakhis, the only option for schooling was in government-run schools, because there were few private schools, all of which were located in or around Leh town.¹⁵ Many children lived too far from Leh to consider taking advantage of the higher quality education found in this small number of private schools, nor could their families have afforded the tuition and fees.

In my interviews, parents (the majority of whom were in their forties) commonly lamented the poor quality of the government schools when they had been children, and specifically disparaged the curriculum's lack of emphasis on English language. As English is considered an important component to today's schooling and future success, a common way that parents criticized the curriculum of their childhood was by explaining to me, often in incredulous tones, that they were not taught "A-B-C-D" until class VI. This meant that they only began to learn the rudiments of English after completion of elementary school, which, in comparison with today's English-medium schools, is a major insult regarding school quality. Instead, the government schools used Urdu, the official language of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, as the medium of instruction throughout primary school (Classes I through VIII). When students reached middle school, Classes VI through VIII, the curriculum added English language classes; as with all other subjects, English was taught through the language medium of Urdu. When students reached secondary school the medium of instruction for all subjects switched abruptly to

¹⁵ The Moravian schools lost prominence in mid-century, and closed by 1960. They reopened to renewed interest in Leh in 1980 (Moravian 2009). The Buddhist Lamdon Society opened the non-profit Lamdon Model School in the 1970s (Lamdon Model School 2011). A Muslim non-profit school, Imamiya, opened in 1982 (Imamiya Mission 2014).

English (Dawa 1999). Ladakhi students struggled because they had little to no exposure to Urdu outside of school, and conversely, the language spoken in their homes and communities, Ladakhi, was used very little in school, as few teachers were Ladakhi. Ladakhi students were not well prepared for the English medium matriculation exam to certify completion of Class X. When the Moravian church reopened their school in Leh in 1980, it quickly regained prominence, not least because English was the medium of instruction (Bray 1983:51).

Another problem that negatively affected the quality of government schools in Ladakh was that state government authorities from outside the region oversaw and managed the education system. This is an example of one of the many ways in which Ladakhis experienced their minority status within larger structures of non-local governance. Those in charge were not invested in the goal of improving schools in Ladakh (Dawa 1999). Further, teachers often had little training in pedagogy, and since they were mainly outsiders, not Ladakhis, they experienced their stationing in Ladakh negatively, as if it were a punishment (Fewkes 2010). It meant they had to reside in the harsh high-altitude climate of these rural and resource-poor locations which were very far from their own homes and families (Mingle 2003). Also, textbooks came from Delhi and had information and examples that were irrelevant to Ladakhi life and unknown to Ladakhi children, making it difficult for students to relate to the subject material (SECMOL 2006).¹⁶ With all of these problems, it is not surprising that pass rates for Ladakhi students taking the matriculation exam were so low and that a vast majority failed (SECMOL 2006).

¹⁶ The Western Himalayas have a drastically different ecosystem, as well as culture, from the Indian plains. With no television access, Ladakhi children had no point of reference through which to understand lessons that referenced things like elephants or monsoons.

Not only was the system unsupportive of its students (or potential students), but also, Ladakhis did not view school as a realistic endeavor, as many were living rural subsistence livelihoods, and school did not seem to have attainable benefits. When describing the view of schooling during their own childhoods, parents often expressed that there was a sense of apathy (though not negativity) among most Ladakhis towards schooling. Among parents who received some education, they typically remembered that they and their peers did not enjoy school, that they struggled to learn the material, and that they did not experience parental or societal pressure to excel in their studies. Parents might have sent them off to school in the mornings, but they would run away from school with friends and play during the day. The sense was that school was a good thing to do but not realistic or necessary for most people. At this time, children could drop out of school without social repercussions. Parents who attended school did not believe they received a quality education, as compared with the improved curriculum of today's schools and their view of what their children are learning in school now (cf. Dawa 1999).

Indian Education in the Late twentieth Century

At the national level, significant changes took place in education initiatives in the 1990s, because for the first time India accepted wide-reaching and substantial international donor allocations for elementary education (Colclough and De 2010:7). When India began accepting such aid, the assistance was used to improve primary school facilities in the most basic ways, such as providing running water, toilets, books, and furniture; however, many schools are still in poor shape today (Kingdon 2007:182). In 1990, the World Bank, UNICEF, and other international development organizations began the Education for All (EFA) initiative, with the main goal of achieving universal primary education by 2000. With a substantial portion of India's children still not in school at this time, the nation became a primary target of EFA

funding (Colclough and De 2010).

By the early 1990s, India had already set improving access to elementary education as a policy focus, therefore the global policy initiative fit well with its national goals (Colclough and De 2010). In 1992, lawmakers amended India's constitution in ways that decentralized various government functions, including education. This shift placed the responsibility for running schools at state rather than national levels (Colclough and De 2010:11). While there are variations across regions and demographics, India has succeeded in a meaningful increase in the rate of school attendance at the primary level in the 2000s in comparison to the 1990s (Kingdon 2007). The increase in attendance rates across India can be explained by a combination of an improved supply of educational opportunities as well as increase in demand. According to Kingdon's economic analysis, the overall increase in demand is the result of a number of social and cultural transformations in the 1990s: rise in educational aspirations, poverty reduction, lowering of fertility rates, and increase in the economic rate of return on education (Kingdon 2007:172).

However, despite greater funding and concern for their improvement, India's government schools continue to be widely regarded as low-quality, both in the view of the public as well as scholars. The problems are all relevant to the situation in Ladakh, where government schools still show low rates of students passing the matriculation exam. Geeta Kingdon, a development economist, presents her analysis of national educational data and combines it with a review of the findings of other major studies (2007). She notes that, nation-wide, one significant problem is that government schools have high teacher absentee rates, as well as a common trend that when the teachers are at their posts, many spend minimal time actually engaging with students—in spite of salaries being markedly higher than those of private-school teachers (Kingdon 2007:182-

183). Problems with teacher performance not only negatively impact student learning, but they enhance the public's negative perception of government schools. Kingdon also found that learning achievement is significantly lower among students at government schools as compared with private schools, as measured by various measures of achievement, controlling for other variables such as family background (2007:187). Privately funded education is increasingly the choice of families with greater resources to leverage, a trend that relegates public education to those who have limited means, including finances, geographical isolation, or exclusion due to caste, gender, or other social criteria (P. Jeffery 2005:27).

THE RISE OF SCHOOLING IN LADAKH

For much of the twentieth century in Ladakh, becoming formally educated was a respectable pursuit for elites but impractical for the most Ladakhis who were subsistence farmers. It was not until the late twentieth century that education became a widespread goal for children from average Ladakhi families. The shift is not a result of one event but rather resulted from a culmination of economic changes at the everyday pragmatic level, political movements, influential leadership, grassroots campaigning, local NGO-initiated curricular reform, as well as increased importance of money and consumption of non-local goods.

Political Struggles

The late twentieth century saw an important shift in governance of the Ladakh region. A political movement, begun in 1989, lobbied for Union Territory (UT) status for Ladakh, which would have removed the region from the state of Jammu and Kashmir and brought its administration directly under the national government. The desire for UT status arose from

resentment and concern that outsiders were administering Ladakh, and this sentiment was especially resonant among Buddhists, a minority within the mostly Muslim and Hindu Jammu and Kashmir state.¹⁷ A compromise was reached in 1995, and the two districts that comprise modern-day Ladakh (Leh and Kargil) were allowed to form semi-independent governing bodies, known as the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils, or LAHDC Leh and LAHDC Kargil (Van Beek 2000a). The creation of these councils has brought decidedly greater power in many aspects of governance to Ladakhis who otherwise primarily dealt with a bureaucracy that was formerly run mostly by non-Ladakhi civil servants. This includes a local governing body for education. The LAHDC Leh prioritized improving education in the district, and now Ladakhis lead the Leh district education department.

Renewed Calls for Educational Reform

The Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh, founded by a small group of university-educated Ladakhis in 1988 and commonly known as SECMOL, played a meaningful role in educational reforms in Ladakh. From 1994 through 2007, SECMOL coordinated with the Leh District Education Department, with the support of the LAHDC, to implement major reforms in the government schools. Through this collaboration, called Operation New Hope, SECMOL implemented programs to enhance teacher training, develop textbooks that draw on relevant ecological and cultural references, and encourage community members' participation in the local schools. Further, the group successfully lobbied to change the medium of instruction from Urdu to English, starting from primary school, and the new policy

¹⁷ For more on the communal conflict and politicization of religious identities in Ladakh, see van Beek 2000a and Aggarwal 2004.

was implemented throughout the 1990s in coordination with supplemental teacher training programs. However, SECMOL was unsuccessful in its attempts to change the system of teacher transfers every two years, which it saw as negatively impacting teaching (SECMOL 2006). SECMOL's efforts urged rural, unschooled farmers to realize themselves as involved citizens with rights and responsibilities, specifically in assuring that their local government school is providing the education promised to their community's children (Mingle 2003). Various other NGOs with funding from national and international sources supplemented SECMOL's work in Ladakh the 1990s, including the Leh Nutrition Project, Ladakh Ecological Development Group, and the Lion's Club Leh. Such organizations implemented smaller, varied programs that helped to improve Ladakhi children's access to education (Dawa 1999).

Political changes that saw Ladakhis involved in a struggle for greater autonomy, combined with grassroots efforts of organizations concerned with improving the education of Ladakhis, especially SECMOL, created a climate that spurred meaningful change throughout the region in the 1990s. SECMOL's work to encourage villagers' involvement in their local schools was supplemented by efforts of the government schools to encourage enrollment. Specifically, teachers stationed in the rural schools were tasked with periodically going from house-to-house, meeting with parents, and stressing the importance of education and the idea that children needed to be in school so that they could have good opportunities as adults. Parents learned to hope for more for their children than subsistence farming, desiring them to earn government jobs after completing at least secondary school. These combined efforts, operating at local levels, helped to institute an effective shift in attitudes towards schooling.

Economic Changes

The change in popular Ladakhi attitudes towards schooling acted in concert with

important economic shifts at the household level that made it much more feasible for children from average families to spend their days at school. National initiatives in the decades since Independence have improved life in Ladakh in ways that allow more free time for children, and less need of children's assistance with subsistence labor. These include India's national Public Distribution System (PDS), which provides food staples at subsidized prices to low-income families, and the implementation of basic technologies that have simplified time-consuming and sometimes laborious tasks, such as carrying water and collecting dung for cooking fuel.

Research by geographers Dame and Nüsser (2011) as well as recollections of parents and grandparents during the household survey in my research show a major shift in food sources after the early 1980s. Wider access to PDS ration stores during this time combined with rural Ladakhis' greater integration into the cash-based economy resulted in a lessened reliance upon home-grown crops and greater use of subsidies in the diet of Ladakhis. While farming remains Ladakhis' "main pillar of food production and primary food source," the increased utilization of government rations for staples has shifted the types of crops that are planted, and has encouraged greater participation in the cash economy (Dame and Nüsser 2011:186). Nearly all (over 98% as of 2007-08) Ladakhi households hold ration cards that allow them to purchase goods such as wheat flour, lentils, rice, and cooking fuel at very low prices (Dame and Nüsser 2011:189). Qualification for PDS requires status as an officially recognized ethnic minority; there is no income requirement. PDS food provision has both improved overall nutrition as well as changed some aspects of the local diet; rice (which cannot be grown in Ladakh) has become a staple in household cooking, especially during the summer months, and wheat, which is difficult to grow in Ladakh, is now a second major staple. Adults recollected that rice was formerly a luxury food,

served only at very special occasions.¹⁸

These dietary changes have reduced Ladakhis' reliance upon subsistence agriculture, especially for grain, even though many families still grow some crops, especially vegetables. In turn, families require less labor to subsist, which enables children to spend time elsewhere—particularly at school. Without such a shift in access to food, the ideological shift in valuing education would not alone have been enough to result in such a widespread uptake of children's education. Thus, these practical economic variables are a crucial component to the broader change in childhoods.

Other seemingly simple developments have changed the shape of rural Ladakhi household economies. For example, the installation of water pumps throughout villages provides access to drinking water close to homes, thereby saving families a good deal of time hauling water, especially in the winter when many above-ground sources freeze. The subsidized provision of cooking gas cylinders through the PDS, again at a price that is affordable to families with only small income sources, such as selling vegetables and dairy products, has lessened the need for ongoing collection and storage of dung and firewood, a simple yet time-consuming chore often tasked, in the past, to children. The government also provides subsidies for seeds, fertilizer, and grain processing machines, efforts which have “fostered the implementation of new inputs and technologies” in food production and marketability (Dame and Nüsser 2011:186). While life in rural Ladakh is still in many ways quite low-tech, these improvements in relation to basic necessities of food, water, and cooking, have meant that children are less

¹⁸ For further information on 1980s household economies (before the introduction of PDS), see Attenborough 1994, Crowden 1994, Gokhale-Chatterji 1994, Osmaston 1994.

necessary for household subsistence, and more of their time is available for school.

While families are increasingly nucleated, most Ladakhi families still reside on family land, and therefore do not make rent or mortgage payments. In many other parts of the world, households might spend a fair proportion of their income on housing, so it is important to point out that housing is not a typical expense in Ladakh. As more families have achieved a regular monetary income, this has enabled them to pay for school fees and related supplies, and has led over half of the school-going population to attend private schools. In addition, the trend toward smaller families, meaning that many families only have two or three children to send to school, makes it more feasible for families with steady incomes to afford tuition for their children.¹⁹ Rural families with some income have also been migrating to areas in and around Leh town, usually buying small parcels of land and building houses with savings from private work (i.e. driving a taxi or bus) or army salaries, and less commonly taking out loans to purchase the land.

The shift to an increasingly cash-oriented economy means that while many families still have some agricultural production, farming is only one component of household economies, and farming is lessening in overall importance for most Ladakhi families. While there are a number of entrepreneurial modes through which Ladakhis can earn money, the preferred types of jobs (mainly in government agencies) require educational credentials, and with more Ladakhis attending school, there is more competition and thus pressure to attain ever-higher credentials. The desire for paid employment versus agricultural labor or animal husbandry also stems from a belief that jobs are physically easier and more comfortable, and through earning wages, one can

¹⁹ Census data shows that for Leh district, the population of children ages 0-6 has declined between 2001 and 2011 by over 7%, indicating a move towards smaller families (Census of India 2011).

further comfort and wellbeing through improving the amenities of one's living conditions. The desire for consumer goods and displays of wealth through new homes is spurred on both by want of comfort and disdain for the harsh living conditions of older Ladakhi homes, as well as by social pressures to display and match others' wealth through status items. As jobs, cash, and material commodities have become increasingly accessible as well as symbols of and means to attain wellbeing or a good life, the importance of education has solidified.

EDUCATION IN LADAKH TODAY

In the Ladakhi perspective, "education" (the English term is typically used, as well as the Ladakhi term *silches*, meaning "to study") happens within modern schools. Ladakhis do not consider what others might call "informal education," such as learning how to do housework, fieldwork, or herding, to be education. Thus, in typical Ladakhi families, children's school-related work is prioritized over these other potential forms of learning and socialization. Due to the economic changes discussed above, full-time child work is generally unnecessary for household subsistence in Ladakh, eliminating this type of economic barrier that is common in other parts of India. Further, I found no evidence, in theory or practice, of gender or birth order favoritism in regards to accessing quality education among today's families.

Typical Ladakhi schools are in session six days a week, with Sundays off. Monday through Friday, the typical school schedule involves six hours in school, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, and a shortened day on Saturday, from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Some schools also offer one Saturday per month as an additional day off from school. With many students attending private schools, the school year, holidays, and breaks vary somewhat from one school to the next, but the general pattern is a three-month winter holiday from about mid-December through mid-

March, and a two-week break in the middle of the summer. All schools observe major national holidays, whereas religious holidays are observed varyingly depending upon the particular institution.

The school system follows that which is standard throughout India, with Lower Kindergarten (LKG) and Upper Kindergarten (UKG) for children ages 4 to 5, and Classes I through V (ages 6 to 10, approximately) constituting “primary” school, Classes VI through VIII for “middle school” (for ages 11 to 13, approximately), Classes IX and X make up “lower secondary” school (ages 14 to 15, approximately), and XI and XII “upper secondary” school (ages 16 to 17, approximately). Standardized exams assess students at the end of Classes VIII, X, and XII, and depending upon the school, these exams are either state or national assessments. In the recent past, a passing score on the Class VIII was enough to qualify for some jobs, such as military enlistment, but these days Ladakhis, along with middle-class Indians, agree that Class X is the minimum necessary for any meaningful work. Military enlistment rules now follow this standard as well. Passing Class X is also commonly referred to as “matriculation” and passing Class XII is also known as “ten plus two.”

English language is the medium of instruction in all of Leh District’s schools, both government and private. Students in all schools also study at least one additional language, and their options typically include Hindi, Urdu, and “Bodhi” which is the written Ladakhi language using the Tibetan script. These second languages are also assessed on the major exams, with students choosing one language in which to take a subject exam along with the standard curriculum. All subjects are taught in English, and knowing the English language is highly valued among Ladakhis, as it is an important skill for success in higher education. However, using English outside of the confines of the curriculum and exams tends to be an area in which

many Ladakhi children struggle even into secondary school. Even if students can pass their exams using English, they often cannot use it outside of the curriculum. For example, it is common that when students attend higher education outside of Ladakh, they struggle to communicate in English with their new peers and teachers. I also observed that students consistently preferred to switch to using Ladakhi at any time that they were not required by a teacher to use English, and also sometimes combined Hindi as well which they become more comfortable with through a vast amount of media exposure. This is seen as an overarching problem among educators for children if they are to become more competitive with their counterparts in other areas of India who are learning this important language well. On the other hand, this phenomenon also points to the continued relevance of the local language—Ladakhi—in the everyday lives of the region’s children, which can be viewed as an important component to cultural preservation, a topic taken up in greater depth in Chapter Five.

In most schools, teachers typically teach one or two subjects, and move to different classrooms throughout the day. Students therefore remain in their assigned classroom for most of the day, aside from lunch and certain classes that require special equipment or facilities located elsewhere. The major subjects taught are Math, Sciences (life and physical), Social Studies (including history, economics, geography, and political science), English, and an additional language. Middle and Secondary School students add a computer technology class as well. The curriculum also includes weekly physical education as well as art and music, though offerings vary by school. Students are commonly ranked with against peers, and students are aware of their own ranking, usually determined by annual or biannual standardized exams.

In addition to daily time spent at school, children spend, loosely, an additional one to three hours per day when school is in session studying and completing homework assignments,

with more time spent studying the material in the weeks leading up to major exams. Students also often attend “tuition,” meaning review and tutorial classes held privately, usually for a fee, before and after school, and during the day over summer and winter breaks. Teachers from government and private schools usually lead tuition classes. Tuition has various formats, sometimes the classes are held throughout the school year, for a few weeks or months at a time, or during the breaks from school, all with the goal of helping students understand more complex material, especially leading up to exams. Fees for these classes range depending upon length and duration of the class. For example, tuition for secondary school students held over winter break costs around INR one thousand per subject (about US \$18-20 during the time of research in 2012), and typical winter break courses were held for an hour daily over the course of three to four weeks. Thus students might attend more than one tuition course per day depending upon their academic needs. In a poorer rural area, parents told me that a teacher at the local secondary school was offering tuition at no charge to students in preparation for exams. But that was unusual—for most students and parents I knew, there was typically payment involved in attending tuition. Students in Classes VIII through XII are more likely to be in attendance at tuition classes, than their younger peers who might only attend tuition if they were doing very poorly or behind in a subject. The older students attending tuition included even the most successful students, as it was considered necessary to do well on the important upcoming exams for matriculation.

In Ladakh, there are both government-run and private schools. Government schools do not require students to pay fees for attendance, but there are costs associated with attending government schools that families must provide for, such as uniforms, notebooks and pens, bus transportation (when necessary), and exam fees. Poorer students can qualify to receive a small

stipend from the government that will cover most of these expenses. In Ladakh, there are two types of government schools: those financed by the state, and those by the central government. State government schools are commonly called simply “government” schools, whereas the central government schools are referred to by their widely known colloquial abbreviations, “JNV” for Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya and “KV” for Kendriya Vidyalaya, both of which have satellite campuses throughout India. State government schools follow the state’s curriculum, while central government schools follow a nationally recognized curriculum that many private schools also follow. State schools are located throughout Leh and Kargil districts, with at least a primary school in nearly every village, whereas there are two Central government schools in each of Ladakh’s districts, and they offer primary through higher secondary classes. Any child may attend the state schools, but the central government schools have a competitive, merit-based process for admissions, and they only admit new students at certain Class levels. The JNV and KV schools have operated in Leh district since the 1980s. Unlike the state schools, central government schools are generally considered to provide quality education, and thus are an ideal alternative for families who struggle to afford private schools, if their children can gain entry.

Leh district has both for-profit and non-profit private schools, with more for-profit schools opening over the past decade to meet the increased demand, a trend also seen throughout urban areas of India. Many of the district’s private schools are located in Leh town or within a few kilometers of its outskirts, or in the few larger villages throughout the district. Larger and well-established private schools such as Lamdon, Moravian, and Mahabodhi have satellite campuses in larger villages that offer primary school, after which students can move to the schools’ main Leh-area campuses and board in a hostel, or live with relatives when possible. While many of these schools, especially those that are non-profit, are associated with religious

organizations, they all follow nationally recognized secular curricula. The government schooling system in Ladakh is administered by Ladakhis, and employs Ladakhis in the vast majority of teaching positions. In private schools, the majority of teachers are also Ladakhis, but it is more common to find non-Ladakhi teachers in private schools as well, such as other Indians, Tibetans, and, occasionally, foreigners.

Ladakh as an Outlier

Considering that many comparable regions of India still do not have a high rate of schooling, Ladakh may be seen as doing well in terms of schooling participation. National level intensive educational initiatives that began in the early-1990s have had mixed results across India, with rural areas especially struggling. Across India, rates of schooling today still vary widely; on the whole there have been major improvements in school attendance since the 1990s, but there are still many Indian children who do not attend school regularly, or at all (Kingdon 2007). The most recent household-level survey²⁰ (National Family Household Survey, or NFHS) found that primary school attendance nationally was at 72 percent and secondary school attendance was at 51 percent of the population of appropriately aged children (IIPS 2007:xxx). For Ladakh's state, Jammu & Kashmir, the NFHS found that 89 percent of children between 6-10 years were attending school, 86 percent of 11-14 year-olds, but only 53 percent of 15-17 year-olds (IIPS 2009:3). In 2013, an official from Leh District's education department informed me that Leh had reached a 100 percent schooling rate in terms of attendance for children less than 16

²⁰ The NFHS aims to more accurately count schooling by asking about child attendance, rather than other methods that look only at enrollment lists kept by schools. Data drawn from schools' lists is problematic because it does not account for children who may be on a roll but rarely or never actually attend (IIPS 2007, 2009).

years, which is backed up in my own findings. During my research from 2011-14, I was unable to find any family with a child under 17 years old who was healthy and was not attending school.²¹ While it is difficult to get comparable data on attendance rates because surveys use various measures and age/grade groupings, it is clear that Leh district's school attendance rates, all the way through secondary school, are much higher than both Jammu and Kashmir state and national averages.

In contrast to Ladakh, many of the peoples of rural agricultural areas of India still do not utilize schooling, despite increased availability of schools and extensive promotion of children's education through government and NGO campaigns (e.g. Gold 2010, Chaluda 2012). At the national level, educational indicators show ongoing disparities between rural and urban populations in rates of schooling. For example, 82 percent of urban Indian children complete primary school as compared to only 74 percent of rural children (Chaluda 2012). According to census figures, a majority of Leh district's population (65.78 percent in 2011, down from 75.57 percent in 2001) is considered "rural" (Census of India 2011). And, further, areas considered "urban" in Leh district, mainly Leh Town and its vicinity, are still decidedly under-resourced in terms of technological, transportation, sanitation, and educational infrastructures. Therefore,

²¹ The exceptions are children with severe physical and cognitive disabilities. Due to my previous research (Richard 2014), I know of a number of children in and around Leh town and in a few rural areas who have never attended school due to physical and cognitive disabilities that prevent inclusion. Also, as a foreigner to India I am not permitted from visiting the most remote villages that border China, where some out-of-school children likely reside. During my research, I met one 16-year-old boy who had recently quit school after finishing Class IX. His was a very poor rural family that had recently migrated to the outskirts of Leh. This is the only such situation that I could find of a healthy child not in school.

even “urban” Ladakhi children do not have many of the opportunities and resources of children in Indian cities. Thus, the region’s overall economic characteristics make the high rate of school attendance stand out against national norm.

Disparities within Ladakh

While Ladakh has achieved near 100 percent enrollment rate for primary and secondary school, there are ongoing disparities in the quality of schooling that children receive. That, in turn, results in further disparities in children’s eventual ability to compete for higher education and jobs. The efforts of SECMOL and the LAHDC during the 1990s to reform state government schools were successful in instituting important curricular changes, but the improvement leveled off and quality is, by most standards, still well below that of Ladakh’s private and central government schools. The poor quality is evident when comparing the exam pass rates for Class X. Between 2007 and 2011, the pass rate average was only 28 percent for state government school students (Office of the CEO Leh 2011), but was above 90 percent for private and Central Government school students.²² Because passing the exam for Class X gives the student a crucial educational credential (similar to the widespread need for a high school diploma or GED in the US for minimum wage jobs), a school’s pass rate is considered by Ladakhis to be a key marker of school quality. And generally, most Ladakhi parents and children believe there is a big difference in overall quality of the schools as well.²³ Of the households I surveyed, not one parent who is a teacher in a government school had a child attending a government school. All

²² Pass rates from private schools are based on data from three of the larger private schools in Leh Town.

²³ Smith also noted this attitude among her research participants (2009:6).

wanted (and could afford, thanks to the government salary) to provide their children with education in a private school.²⁴ These days, students who fail the Class X exam often spend the next year or more taking tuition classes in order to learn what they need to pass the exam on a second or even third attempt, which is offered annually. The government does not keep statistics on pass rates for repeat exam takers, so it is difficult to know what percentage of young people eventually pass the exam after initially failing.

Not only in Ladakh, but also throughout India, there has been rapid growth in private sector for-profit schools over the past two decades. These for-profit institutions have responded to a growing demand for quality education, by many families who are concerned about the low quality of government schools and are willing to pay for a better opportunity (Kingdon 2007:183). Kingdon explains that “the growth of private schooling...signals growing inequality of educational opportunity...[and] suggests growing inequality in terms of access to quality education” (2007:186). Private schools are readily available in urban areas of India, but are still less common in rural areas (Kingdon 2007:184). In Ladakh, private for-profit schools first appeared in Leh during the mid-1990s, and their numbers have increased since then (Dawa 1999:73). Across Leh district, there are currently 41 private (including both for-profit and non-profit) schools, 352 government schools, and seven schools run by the central government

²⁴ A handful of rural parents interviewed suggested that the local government schools were of acceptable quality. In the village that had a private school, one mother suggested that the government school was better because the class sizes were so much smaller (a testament to how few students were still enrolled there, as most had switched to the local private school). In this perspective, the teachers could devote more time to each student’s individual learning needs in the government school, versus a private school with 30-40 students per teacher. However, this was not a commonly held view.

(Office of the CEO Leh 2011). However, private school student enrollment comprises nearly half (49.6%) of the total student enrollment in primary and secondary schools Leh district, with 10,953 students enrolled in private schools, 8,967 in government schools, and 2,084 in central government schools (Office of the CEO Leh 2011). These numbers do not include Ladakhi children who are studying at private schools outside of the district, a small but growing phenomenon.

Importantly, it is children from Ladakh's rural villages and non-Ladakhi children of migrant laborers who almost exclusively make up the student body of state government secondary schools. Based on the 2012 enrollment books of both secondary schools in Leh Town, I found that less than four percent of the students in Classes IX through XII were from town. The remaining 677 students were from Ladakhi villages or were non-Ladakhi. Therefore, the vast majority of children from urban Ladakhi families were attending private or central government schools. It follows that throughout the district, the population of state government schools is almost entirely comprised of rural Ladakhi and non-Ladakhi children. As I discuss below, rural Ladakhi children are consistently disadvantaged in accessing quality education, making them less likely to matriculate, to be prepared to succeed in higher education if they do matriculate, and in turn, to be able to compete for employment.

Table 2.1 Leh Government Boys Secondary School (co-educational) – Enrollment by family location, 2012

Class	Total Students Enrolled	Students from Leh	Students from Leh – % of total	Students from Villages & Outside Ladakh ²⁵	Students from Villages & Outside – % of total
IX	64	2	3.1%	62	96.9%
X	91	4	4.4%	87	95.6%
XI	169	10	5.9%	159	94.1%
XII	158	5	3.2%	153	96.8%

Table 2.2 Leh Government Girls Secondary School (girls only) – Enrollment by family location, 2012

Class	Total Students Enrolled	Students from Leh	Students from Leh – % of total	Students from Villages	Students from villages – % of total	Students from Outside Ladakh	Students from Outside – % of total
IX	63	1	1.6%	47	74.6%	15	23.8%
X	51	0	0.0%	42	82.4%	9	17.6%
XI	72	4	5.6%	66	91.7%	2	2.8%
XII	36	1	2.8%	32	88.9%	3	8.3%

Affording Education

Fees for attendance at private schools in Leh district typically range from INR 900-1500 per month, per child.²⁶ The cost is easily affordable for parents who work for the government or military (as is the case for many town families), but for many rural families it can be out of reach unless a parent has some steady, remunerated employment, such as driving a truck or bus.

Sponsorships and charities provide the main opportunities for rural students from poorer families

²⁵ At the Government Boys Secondary School, I was provided with combined totals for students from villages and from outside of Leh, whereas at the Girls Secondary School the staff provided separate totals for each of these categories.

²⁶ Equivalent to about US \$18-30 in 2012.

to attend private schools. The Moravian Mission School, the Lamdon Model School (a Buddhist institution opened in 1973), and Imamiya Mission School (a Muslim institution opened in 1982) are reputable non-profit private schools in Leh that provide sponsorships to poorer students who could not otherwise afford private school (Moravian 2009, Lamdon Model School 2011, Imamiya Mission 2012). Foreign donors commonly fund most of the sponsorships, wherein sometimes the foreigners directly support the child, while in many cases the schools act as mediators to arrange sponsorships. In addition, non-profit schools also have small funds used to support an additional handful of poor students. In those cases, it is local people who contribute, with small-scale fundraising among current students, their families, and other Ladakhis in the community. At for-profit schools, sponsorships are less-commonly arranged through the school itself, but students may attend with the assistance of a sponsorship arranged directly with an individual international donor. Such assistance relies less (if at all) upon school fundraising efforts and more likely occurs through a parent working in the tourism industry who has formed a relationship with a charitable tourist. Sponsorships vary in terms of whether or not they cover extraneous costs such as transport to and from school, uniforms, board, school supplies, or exam fees.

Children of the wealthiest families are sometimes sent outside of Ladakh for most or all of their schooling, to cities in India such as Delhi, Jammu, Chandigarh, and Dehradun, to attend private schools with reputations for being high quality. In addition to the children of elite families, I found some families of more modest means with children in a combination of private schools, such as one in a local private school in Leh and the other child attending a private boarding school in an Indian city outside Ladakh. If both parents have salaried employment, or if they can supplement one salary with a second income from running a guesthouse or other

enterprise, then this can be enough to offer at least one child the opportunity for an even higher quality education. Elder children are typically prioritized for being sent out of Ladakh to a better school, but younger siblings would be sent to those same schools as they grew older as well. An exception to that general rule is if a family gains the funds to support sending a child to a better school after elder child or children are already close to finishing secondary school, in which case younger children may receive the opportunity first.

It is common that Ladakhi children of families with means to send them to private schools will support their post-secondary education outside of Ladakh at colleges and universities in Indian cities. Schools in northern Indian cities like Jammu, Delhi, Dehradun, Chandigarh, and Srinagar are common choices for Ladakhi higher education. Most of the time, parents and sometimes other family members (such as elder siblings who have already graduated and found employment) finance education at this level. At times, foreign sponsors who have been involved in financing the education of a Ladakhi child over many years, and have developed a relationship with the child and family, will continue to pay for education when a child completes Class XII and wishes to study outside of Ladakh.

There is one degree college in Leh district, but is considered to be of lesser quality, as it is run by the government and plagued by lack of resources, both in terms of facilities as well as qualified teachers. It currently only offers students who wish to study in the “arts track,” offering the Bachelor of Arts degree, which includes subjects such as history and English, but excludes the sciences, mathematics, and commerce. Various government leaders have proposed to expand the college’s offerings, and plans have even been approved for the addition of science and pre-med tracks. However, nothing has materialized in terms of actual courses or program expansion.

For most families participating in the household survey, their greatest regular expense

was their children's education, which was also parents' stated financial priority. The cost, of course, is still burdensome for rural families who primarily subsist on agriculture and animal husbandry and thus do not have much monetary income. Thus, there is a huge barrier to these children accessing private schools that are easily affordable for the majority of the urban families. Many urban families have the benefit of an additional generation's education, setting their children today ahead of rural children, both because the higher amount of education enables parents to earn more money and because of less tangible factors such as the cultural capital associated with being educated. It is not surprising then that the level of a family's economic means, which tends to be fairly delineated in Ladakh between urban and rural populations (though increasing patterns of rural to urban migration will soon cloud this already oversimplified distinction), plays a role in children's educational opportunities. Extensive economic research on other contexts, such as the U.S., shows that children from low-income families consistently find disadvantage in learning, achievement, likelihood of graduating high school and finishing college, career outcomes, and ultimately, in their potential for class mobility (e.g. Isaacs et al. 2008, Isaacs and Magnuson 2011).

Rural families who have been able to afford private schooling often do so through the father having enlisted in the army, thus receiving the army salary which, in Ladakh, given the same stipulations of minimal housing costs and low food costs, is generally comfortable and comparable to the government salaries. Recently, more rural families have been migrating to newer housing settlements on the outskirts of Leh Town. This can be a benefit in that parents can more easily find work in the cash economic. Families in such situations reported schools being a major component to the decision to migrate and settle closer to town. It seemed typical for members of an extended family to assist one another in paying for the initial investments

necessary for the purchase of property and home construction; and, in turn, children who were nieces or nephews might live with their now town-dwelling aunts, uncles, and cousins in order to attend a private school as well. I discuss the ways these geographic and economic disparities operate to pose barriers to education and opportunities when I discuss the importance of family in Chapter Six.

Monastic Education

Monastic education still exists in Ladakh, and might be viewed as a parallel, though much less common, schooling system. Today, when families send a boy (or occasionally, a girl) to a monastery, the children also receive instruction in the secular subjects along with training for their ritual duties. Further, children and parents report that it is typically a child's personal decision to join a monastery or nunnery, rather than one made by parents out of religious and social obligations, as it was in the past.²⁷ This contrasts with reports from research in the early-1980s in Ladakh, which found that becoming a monk was entirely the decision of parents (Goldstein and Tsarong 1985). Also, today there is less (if any) social pressure on families to send a child to become a monk. Most families now do not send any child, and in addition, families are having fewer children in general. Monks are still an important part of ritual life among Buddhist families, but the number of monks continues to meet demand for their services. Also, it seems that monasteries are more commonly recruiting from the most rural, underserved areas of the district, where leaders can offer the poorest families a free education for their children while lessening the financial burden of caring for a child. Monkhood in Ladakh is a

²⁷ Recent research by Biswas (2013) confirms that present-day child-monks typically choose to become monks, and are not obligated to do so.

stable profession; families must regularly call upon monks to perform recurring rites as well as those necessary for special occasions.

For young monks, their schooling arrangements vary depending upon their specific monastery's educational arrangements. Some monasteries send their monks to nearby government schools (this is common in rural areas), others have arrangements for secular schooling within the premises of the monasteries, and still other monks attend private schools. For example, a number of monks attend the private Buddhist Lamdon Model School in Leh or on one of its satellite campuses in other parts of the district that offer primary schooling. Also, the non-profit Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, just outside of Leh, offers primary and secondary school and is a common school for monks to attend, especially because they can receive religious education there in conjunction with the secular curriculum.

Higher Education and Other Options Beyond Matriculation

With a much greater proportion of the population receiving education, the general sense is that matriculation is no longer enough in order to be competitive for desirable work. After Class X, there are an additional two years of secondary school to complete. For Classes XI-XII, students must choose a "track," as the curriculum is no longer generalized for all students. Standard tracks are arts, non-medical sciences, medical sciences, and commerce. There is another major exam at the end of Class XII that certifies completion, and the next educational step is higher education at a university, college, or a vocational training institute. If families can possibly afford it, they will provide for their children's pursuit of higher education, as a college degree is considered the ideal option. Indeed, a great majority of Ladakhi young people between ages 18 and 25 are somewhere in the process of pursuing higher education. The best alternative (in the common Ladakhi view) to higher education is military enlistment, which would provide

the young person a stable salary, though it would be less in the long term as compared to jobs that require higher education. In poorer families, pursuit of higher education can become less of a priority, and that is in situations where an elder child might be looked upon for an additional stream of income after completing the minimal secondary education. These topics—attitudes about and popularity of education, disparities in educational opportunities and experiences, and economic and social roles of children—are taken up in depth in the following chapters.

DISCUSSION

It is still sometimes noted among Ladakhis when they reflect on the history of education in the region that most of the Buddhist population resisted schooling particularly because of the popular view that “educated people make poor farmers.” This opinion has not shifted much; instead, farming is rarely if ever a component of Ladakhis’ idea of wellbeing in adulthood. This major change in educational practices and beliefs in Ladakh has occurred relatively recently, resulting from a confluence of economic and ideological factors, and means that children today experience much that their parents did not. Important influences regarding the value of education came through local voices—respected leaders such as Kushok Rinpoche Bakula as well as the movement initiated by SECMOL’s Ladakhi leadership—in combination with broader national and global pushes towards improving educational opportunities. Greater local governance and representation in wider political arenas has also played a role in the shift towards valuing education.

THE MEANING OF EDUCATION IN LADAKH: ECONOMIC EXPECTATIONS AND SOCIAL IMPORTANCE

INTRODUCTION

Institutionalized education has social and cultural implications—it can classify and validate types of knowledge and the people who do and do not possess that knowledge. Building on the previous chapter, where I contextualized the current educational situation in Ladakh within key events of recent history, I now turn to an analysis of the cultural meanings of education for Ladakhis. I explore two questions. First, what do Ladakhis believe about and expect from the process of becoming educated, in terms of economic as well as symbolic or social outcomes? And second, what does this tell us about a Ladakhi concept of wellbeing?

To explore these questions, in the first part of the chapter, I provide an overview of the literature on education uptake in less-developed regions, highlighting how researchers conceptualize the factors involved in whether or not a child attends school. This provides a backdrop for contextualizing Ladakh's widespread uptake of education. I next discuss my data on the reasoning behind Ladakhis' acceptance of education as a priority for their children's wellbeing. I analyze the explanations that parents and children put forth for the importance of education: expectations for economic betterment as well as valued social identity. I argue that even though the region's job market is poor and economic growth is slow, education continues to be unquestionably important for children because of its meanings in contemporary Ladakhi

culture—education is necessary for full adult personhood, and it defines what information constitutes valuable knowledge. Education provides students with a respected social status, one that is a crucial symbolic outcome of schooling. In doing so, it has become a powerful institution in contemporary Ladakhi society; its power is evident in the prioritization of schooling in the everyday lives of children and their families.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

In order to understand families' educational choices for their children, economic development experts look at schooling rates in terms of supply and demand, which is a helpful, if overly general, way of characterizing the various types of contextual factors that can affect children's educational opportunities. "Supply" encompasses factors such as the availability and accessibility of schools, in terms of feasibility of location and affordability of attending. If there is no school within a reasonable distance, or if families are priced out of their local schools due to direct or indirect costs, then there is a lack on the "supply side." "Demand" for schooling takes into account the socio-economic and cultural conditions, especially at the level of households and local communities; it is affected by willingness of parents, the value communities place on formal education, ideas about children's future roles, and any other attitudes and beliefs about schooling (Venkatanarayana 2005:7). In these terms, even when there is a good "supply" of education, parents may not send their children to school for other reasons, and vice versa—parents may want to send their children to school but may not be able to do so because of practical limitations related to the "supply." Government and NGO initiatives throughout India have made strides in terms of improving "supply" (e.g., opening more schools in rural areas, free mid-day meals, and subsidies for books and uniforms) as well as increasing "demand" (e.g.

informational campaigns aimed at transforming attitudes towards schooling, such as advocating for girls' schooling and disparaging child labor). But in India, as throughout much of the Global South, both economic and social constraints remain, revealing the complexity of addressing a major concern of the international development community.

A major reason that India's rural children have lower rates of schooling and literacy is that they engage in labor much more than their urban peers, and thus often do not have time to attend school (Fafchamps and Wahba 2006:375, Patkar 1995:405). Additionally, rural families may specialize in craft trades, or be fully reliant on agriculture or animal husbandry, and the education needed for these trades occurs at home during everyday activities (Fafchamps and Wahba 2006). Additionally, researchers have found that some rural families may view even *primary* schooling as worthless since it does not offer direct economic payoff, and parents do not think they could afford to support their children through higher levels of schooling (Kingdon 2007:172).

Another disparity in India's educational landscape falls along gender lines. Women's lower status as well as home-based work roles in many communities lead to a lower demand for women's literacy and thus lower schooling rates for girls (Patkar 1995:402). Kingdon blames "parents' perceived futility of educating girls" as lowering demand for girls' education, "since many families adhere to traditional gender roles and do not envisage daughters' participation in the labour market" (2007:172). In rural Rajasthan, Gold (2010), an anthropologist, found that boys more commonly attended school than girls, even though the region has seen wide promotion of gender parity in education. The reasoning was pragmatic rather than ideological: girls were important sources of household, agricultural, and herding labor, and, further, the small local employment market favors men (Gold 2010). Froerer's (2012) anthropological research on

education among an underprivileged minority group in Central India found that parents made choices about girls' education by considering its costs and benefits. Specifically, the families with whom she worked found it desirable for girls to have a primary school education, but not more; further education would make them incompatible with future marriage partners who typically also attend only primary school. Making sure daughters developed into young women who would be seen as ideal wives by prospective in-laws was the priority for girls' development; securing a good marriage situation was crucial both socially and economically (Froerer 2012). Indeed, economic concerns, especially as they relate to the local employment landscape, consistently factor into any holistic understanding of both geographic (urban-rural) and gender disparity in schooling, and often combine with ideological or social perceptions of education's benefits and expected outcomes.

Ladakhis' Educational Practices

In the typical Ladakhi narrative voiced by both the parents and children with whom I worked, becoming educated was crucial for children's wellbeing. In their portrayal, for today's young people, there seemed to be no way to have a good life without being educated. Having an "education" means, at minimum, completion of secondary school, and, ideally, achieving a higher education credential as well, such as a Bachelor's degree. The consistency of responses given by parents and children from varied geographic areas indicates that the importance of education for children has become common sense—it is not something that is questioned or debated, rather it is assumed and even taken for granted.

In Ladakh, I found various contrasts to the situations described in other parts of rural India. In terms of gender, Ladakhi parents consistently believed that education was equally important for both boys and girls, and also, the hoped-for end result was the same: good jobs

with stable salaries and pensions. In practice, these days many educated women are employed in salaried jobs, including those who are married with children. While there are gendered roles and practices, Ladakhis have no social prohibition against women's employment; in fact, it is encouraged and viewed as beneficial to families. There was also no disparity in families' reported educational expenditures on girls versus boys. Enrollment data from various private schools I visited throughout my time in Ladakh also show equal numbers of boy and girl students. Furthermore, girls were quite often ranked at the top of their classes in exam performance.

In regards to families' everyday practices and household economic priorities, I also found that Ladakhis' consistently prioritized children's formal, school-based education above any other forms of learning. Many Ladakhi parents reported that the costs of children's school attendance and other education-related expenses were budgetary priorities and were often the household's single greatest regular expense, especially for rural families. Ladakhi families also clearly considered school and education-related activities to be the priority in regards to children's time. I observed that if farming activities such as sowing or harvesting required more labor than the available adults of a given household, it was more likely that families would hire other adults to assist them rather than keep children away from their studies for any substantial length of time. Further, while there is certainly some variation in children's affinity for their studies as well as scores on exams, the norm among children is to take seriously their academic performance by completing daily homework, studying intensively for exams, and attending classes regularly. Children viewed their school performance and especially their scores on major exams as crucial components in working towards having a good life.

LADAKHI PERSPECTIVES: WHY AND HOW EDUCATION ENABLES WELLBEING

As the various examples from other parts of India cited in the previous section demonstrate, the ways individuals are valued in social, economic, and moral terms are all interwoven into families' decisions about their children's education. In the household interviews, when I asked what was necessary for children to have wellbeing or a good life, nearly all parents immediately stated that education was the priority. But when I followed up to ask why, parents often had trouble verbalizing an explanation for the importance of education. Their initial responses implied it was odd to question why children should attend school, because everyone in the community already knows and agrees. After doing many of these interviews, I imagined the general, unspoken sentiment was that the value of education should be utterly obvious, especially to a presumably well-educated foreigner who was asking the questions. I often had to encourage my interlocutors that I genuinely wanted to hear their opinions and to learn how they personally understood the value or importance of education.

In analyzing their eventual explanations, I found there were two dimensions to the reasoning, which were also evident in children's explanations. The first is that having education would allow children to achieve the hoped-for benefits of modernity and economic development, specifically through credentialing a person such that he or she will qualify for a good, secure job. Ultimately, this was a belief about an expectation of economic returns. The second explanation was that being educated endows an individual with a valued social identity that has importance in and of itself, or what educational anthropologists have termed an "educated person" (Levinson and Holland 1996). In the next section, I focus on the first of these—the economic component—

as it was nearly always the first explanation for the role of education in achieving wellbeing. The following section will explore the social component of education.

Education for Economic Betterment

Among both adults and children, research participants commonly explained that education was important because it would enable a person to get a job and to earn money. A father from a town family exemplified a common sentiment, stating that children's schooling was a priority for their wellbeing because: "With education, the children will be able to grow up to earn money. They can get a job." Similarly, when the after-school tutorial students were tasked with writing about social or economic concerns in Ladakh and India, some wrote about the importance of educational access. Two Class X boys wrote, "without education we couldn't get jobs and nowadays if we want to be in the army, we have to be well-educated." The underlying assumption was that jobs were necessary for their adult futures, and this pair emphasized the importance by pointing out that even military enlistment at the lowest rank now requires completion of Class X.

From a practical standpoint, Ladakhis consider the jobs and overall lifestyle of educated people to be highly preferable to harsh, laborious rural subsistence. Ladakh's very dry climate, high altitude, and mountainous terrain make living off the land difficult; it is easy to understand that alternatives to this lifestyle are highly preferable. Many parents, particularly those from rural households, emphasized the importance of education by describing the negative consequences they were experiencing in their own lives as subsistence farmers, having little or no education and thus few options for work. For example, a rural mother with only a Class V education said that education was important "because with it, you can earn money. Money can buy whatever you wish. In this generation, nothing happens without money. One will have no future life

without a job.” A rural mother with no education explained, “If they don’t study, they will have to do fieldwork, which is very hard.” Similarly, another rural mother explained that children “will face difficulties if they don’t have an education,” implying it would be a struggle to make a living because they would have few earning opportunities. Another said that she was advising her children to study, “otherwise be like us,” a warning to the children that if they did not continue to apply themselves to their schooling, they would end up living the same difficult, poor farmer’s life with few comforts or material goods. When I visited the home village of one of my after-school tutorial participants, we conversed about his family background, and he told me: “My father sends me to school so that I will not have to live a life of poverty, like him.”

The commonplace narrative that I heard from many Ladakhis was one that connected education to achieving a financially stable and comfortable lifestyle. Common results of having this level of financial stability and means, in my Ladakhi students’ perspectives, were nicer homes (meaning the abandonment of an old family home for a newly built structure that boasts modern amenities), automobiles (cars and SUVs are much more desirable than motorcycles or scooters, given Ladakh’s cold climate), broader food choices (as opposed to reliance on what is seasonally available through the very limited local agriculture and basic government grain subsidies), and other commodities, such as manufactured clothes, televisions, satellite dishes, and cell phones. These material goods are visible markers of financial means, but more importantly, as many Ladakhis young and old also pointed out, they make life easier, more efficient, and more comfortable in comparison to how Ladakhis lived only one or two generations back.

In the group interviews, when I asked children to describe what constituted a good life for a Ladakhi child, initial responses nearly always included money, material wealth, and specific examples of consumption that explicitly signaled purchasing power. In answers to follow-up

questions about how their depictions of wellbeing can be achieved, wealth-related responses were the most common after education and family. There were some differences in some of the ways students in private versus government schools talked about the importance of money, but in both cases, children asserted that money was a major component to having a good life or to achieving the things that comprised a good life. In the government schools children more commonly mentioned money or wealth when asked what constituted a good life for children. In the private schools, financial concerns were less prominent in the initial responses, but children always referenced money in response to follow up questions. In the group interviews, I encouraged children to discuss further why education was so important to Ladakhi children's wellbeing. Many children portrayed education as the crucial link to achieving the future life that they wanted, one with money, job security, the ability to provide a comfortable life for self, family, and sometimes community, and achieving general "happiness" (Ladakhi: *skipo*). In their ideal projections, education and earning money through a good job were the keys to wellbeing.

Youth in the after-school tutorials, especially those from poorer rural families who were living in the hostel, also saw educational credentials as especially crucial to being economically well-off when they became adults. These students emphasized, both in conversations with me and in written work, that their goal was to attain the economic capacity that would enable them to exhibit markers of conspicuous consumption. Common examples were fast cars and/or large new houses, as well as owning other forms of high technology like mobile phones, touch-screen tablets, and large televisions. Some also hoped that having a good job would help them attract a well-educated and highly employed spouse. According to my students, all of these things could eventually be achieved through education, which meant "studying hard," "getting high marks on my board exams," "getting into a good school" for higher education, and ultimately "having a

great job.”

The Social Importance of Being Educated

In addition to the economic explanations, many Ladakhis also asserted that education provides other, less-tangible outcomes. Some representative statements that parents made are:

- “Education makes the person important and have value.”
- “Without education a person is nothing”
- “Education makes everything easy.”
- “Education will get you everything.”
- “Education equals a successful life”

Children with whom I worked also put forth similar notions expressing a sense of valued identity and social respectability, as well as ease of living that they would find in becoming educated. For example, education was important, for students in the rural private school group, in order for them to “become something in life.” Children in the after-school tutorials explained that with education, they would become persons who had value, in addition to attaining the aforementioned economic benefits. They believed that someone without education in their generation would not be respected; such a person was pitiable.

Education is necessary in Ladakh; it has become status quo for being a full, respectable member of society. Being a person who is “educated,” as Ladakhis define it, through gaining credentials in the formal institutionalized school system, is a crucial component to one’s social role without which she cannot have a meaningful place in society. Educational anthropologists use the term “educated person” to point to the ways schooling provides a valued social identity or status for members of a society, as well as to highlight the social markedness of persons with an education in contexts where formal schooling is a relatively new and non-indigenous phenomenon (e.g. Levinson and Holland 1996, C. Jeffrey et al. 2008, Jeffrey and McDowell

2004, Skinner and Holland 1996). What it means to be an “educated person” is specific to cultural context, but generally, one must exhibit “particular sets of skills, knowledges, and discourses” that she receives as part of formal institutionalized schooling (Levinson and Holland 1996:2).

The concept of cultural capital is commonly used by educational anthropologists in analyses of the phenomena surrounding newer forms of education or knowledge production, especially as related to social and economic shifts. Cultural capital is the set of embodied characteristics—including behaviors and other symbolic attributes, such as ways of speaking, interacting, and dressing—that an individual develops over time through learning, experience, and socialization, and that mark a him as distinct, and as having a respected social status (Bourdieu 1984, 1986). Cultural capital is “a kind of symbolic credit that one acquires through learning to enact and embody the desired signs of social standing within a social field” (Levinson 2011:121), and, further, “because of this credit, the actions of people with higher social standing automatically achieve greater currency and legitimacy” (Levinson and Holland 1996:6). Unlike social and economic capital, cultural capital must be developed in each individual, and it cannot be directly inherited or passed from person to person. Methods of achieving cultural capital are commonly institutionalized through societies’ formal educational systems, and thus, being someone who is “educated” typically means they have some meaningful degree of cultural capital.

In Ladakh, being “educated,” and embodying the cultural capital that comes along with it, has become a requirement for full personhood—the educated person has not only gained a set of formal knowledge but, importantly, has gained a signifier of a required social status. Here, I follow anthropologist Appell-Warren’s definition of personhood, which is drawn from her

extensive review of this concept in anthropology:

Personhood is an analytical term used by anthropologists to indicate who, within any given culture, is considered to be either a fully functioning and accepted member of adult society, or, in the case of children, who is considered to be on the way to being a fully functioning and accepted member of adult society. Personhood thus entails the attainment of physiological, psychological and social competence as it is defined by a given culture. [2014:125]

Personhood is often an ongoing, life-long process, and it is also a cultural construction, meaning its definitions are embedded in local contexts (Appell-Warren 2014). For today's young Ladakhis, developing personhood requires going to school. Education is certainly not the only component necessary for full personhood, as Ladakhi adults (and children as well) have social responsibilities to their families and society that they must uphold, and they also have statuses relating to family background, social connections, and financial worth, to name just a few. While there are many Ladakhi adults today who are not "educated" and who may be recognized as having personhood, albeit at a lower status than others, for children now, entering adulthood without an education is not an option. Specifically, one must have the credential (a diploma or degree) that validates having received the education, and at minimum, a Class X matriculation. This meaning of being educated and of education's role in personhood is similar to sensibilities that have developed across South Asia, wherein schooling is commonly seen as the route towards gaining an acceptable social status and being a fully recognized member of society (e.g. C. Jeffery et al. 2004, C. Jeffrey et al. 2008, Skinner and Holland 1996).

Many of Ladakhis' non-economic explanations for the importance of education deal with cultural capital. Children in the after-school groups, for example, talked about how being educated allows one to participate within the rest of educated society, through knowing about what is going on and understanding how things operate in the modern developed world. They believed it would enable them to interact effectively with people from other places and cultures.

Various Ladakhi teachers and school administrators talked to me about the importance of “exposure” as an aspect of becoming, meaning students should gain an awareness of what goes on in the world beyond one’s locale, a particular problem in Ladakh where most people do not have the finances to take vacations or travel for holidays, and where parents can offer little in the way of their own experiences with the world outside of Ladakh. This could be done through things as simple as watching television (teachers preferred that children view the educational programming on channels like NatGeo and Discovery, as well as the news, all of which was available through satellite television in most homes, as long as the electricity was on) but ideally through attending Higher Secondary (Classes XI and XII) and college/university at institutions outside of Ladakh in other parts of India. “Exposure” was part of the unwritten curriculum required for a Ladakhi to become educated, important because it is seen as complementing book knowledge and behavior socialization in, ultimately, equipping people to negotiate modernity. In addition, many students said they believed that education provided training in good social behavior, implying that an educated person knew how to interact with society more broadly. As they portrayed it, education would provide them with a comfortable, successful, and meaningful life, not just through the material gains of having a job and salary, but also through having these symbolic attributes as well as the experiences of broader exposure that would happen as a part of gaining an education.

Ladakhis also conveyed to me that being educated means a person has better knowledge of broader socio-political and financial systems. Specifically, an example I heard from a number of adults was that with an education, one can more effectively do business, whether private or corporate, and, as a business owner, can more easily engage with bureaucratic institutions. Also, she can participate in the democratic system by understanding candidates’ campaign materials

and media reports. She can access wider spheres of knowledge and use that knowledge to make better decisions for family and business. Further, education means a person understands and can communicate with the world beyond her local region, ideas mentioned by both parents and children as important markers of an educated person living a good life. The associated knowledge, understandings, practices, and forms of access may indeed most clearly translate to economic advantage, but importantly, they are markers of what Ladakhis now consider to be necessary cultural capital for today's children as they develop into full members of society.

Another important point related to the symbolic meaning of education is evident in the way parents and children commonly used the English term “education” in our interviews, including many of the parents who otherwise completed the interview speaking Ladakhi. Thus, “education” and being “educated” reference the learning and cultural capital developed in formal, western-style schools. The closest Ladakhi term is *silches*, which translates literally as “to study.” *Silches* and its derivatives are used with the same meaning as “education,” including the concepts of getting an education and having been educated; it is not the case that there is an alternative indigenous style or mode of studying. The commonplace use of the English terminology, exemplified in its use even among those who otherwise speak very little English, signifies the importance of languages learned at school, especially English, as markers of cultural capital and what happens at school. Thus while there is, in the case of education, a Ladakhi term for speaking about going to school and being educated, education is also clearly marked and understood as being modern, advanced, and developed—ideas which are explored in depth in Chapter Five.

Being educated, or not, has social consequences, which demonstrate the importance of education in developing one's personhood. Those with education are considered to be worthy of

respect, according to parents as well as children; and a respected person would be included in important social activities with extended family and other community groups. Whether the activities are weddings and other celebrations, community rituals, or other affairs, participation is important to social membership in any Ladakhi community. Being thought of negatively, as someone who is uneducated, could result in the person being invited to fewer activities, according to some of my students. It is unclear if they knew people who experienced such discrimination or if it was a general ideological fear. In another discussion, a different group of students explained to me if a person were poor, he might not be able to attend special events because he may not have the appropriate attire. This was an example of extreme poverty, as average Ladakhis now have at minimum one outfit they could wear when attending a wedding or other event. The students saw this as a true potential problem—if you did not have something proper to wear, you should try to borrow from someone, or otherwise, you had better not show up to the event—it would be deeply embarrassing. As a symbol of poverty, then, lacking clothes to wear for formal situations was equated with a lack of education, all of which, my students had astutely concluded, would prohibit the person from important social participation. In sum, the cultural capital gained through education can help a person maintain and possibly enhance important social capital. This is vital in a society still largely reliant upon social networks for the best access to opportunities of all kinds, from jobs to deals on material commodities to bureaucratic shortcuts. Thus, cultural capital necessary for full personhood would lead to development of economic and social capital as well. Lacking an education, one would only be able to live a life of the past, and would be at an extreme disadvantage in fully participating in Ladakhi society, as well as that of the nation and world beyond.

Ladakhis, especially adults, also defined being educated in contrast to its opposite:

uneducated, illiterate, “backwards” farmers (a terminology found across South Asia [cf. C. Jeffrey et al. 2004, 2008, Parajuli 2008, Skinner and Holland 1996]). In Ladakh, education defines people in contrast to the many members of older generations who characterize themselves as uneducated “backwards” farmers who are “like donkeys” (Ladakhi: *bang buu*). Ladakhis commonly use both the English and Ladakhi terms for donkey to describe the status of a person who is uneducated and illiterate; the English terms “uneducated” and “illiterate” are often equated in Ladakhi descriptions as well. The tendency in discourse regarding those who never attended school is to denigrate and delegitimize traditional subsistence activities, because children and adults delegate full-time involvement in these tasks to “uneducated” people.

Ladakhi parents’ statements about the importance of schooling exemplify their experiences with a new paradigm where, by embracing this new ideal for their children, they admit their own lack of cultural capital (see also van Beek and Pirie 2008). Parents who had only a few years of schooling, or none at all, referred to themselves as uneducated, sometimes also as donkeys. One rural mother explained: “Without education, you can’t reach anywhere, you are like a donkey. You have a hard life of hard labor, like me.” Older generations, such as various grandparents I met throughout my research, described themselves similarly, as simple beasts of burden that did not know much about things that matter in the world today. Illiteracy and lack of schooling are equated with ignorance. These adults are defined today by the education they do not have, or, for some who attended school for a few years, have only in lesser amounts of decidedly lower quality.

In their ethnographic research in another area of northern India, Gold and Gujar (1994) found that children were aware of the distinction in types of knowledge gained at school versus that gained through traditional farming and herding practices. Children engaged in the latter type

of learning did not attend school regularly if at all, and they “regarded their learning and achievements as inferior” to that of peers who regularly attended school (Gold and Gujar 1994:88). Similarly, in Nepal, Skinner and Holland found that as schooling access increased, students “were engaged in the creation of a new form of symbolic capital—the capital associated with formal education—and in the process produced the ‘other’ of the educated world—the educated person” (1996:291). Such notions about knowledge and education are common across South Asia (e.g. C. Jeffrey 2010:83, C. Jeffrey et al. 2004, Levinson and Holland 1996, Levinson 1996, Skinner and Holland 1996). According to Patricia Jeffery (2005), ideas about knowledge formed under the influence of colonial rule continue to hold sway in contemporary India. These include the privilege and high value associated with scientific knowledge and formal education, and the denigration of heritage-based knowledge and informal learning structures. These influential narratives also extend to literacy. Patkar explains that across India, “the popular view treats non-literates as stupid and backward, thereby negating and nullifying the store of knowledge and experience that people outside ‘the educational experience’ possess” (1995:405).

In his analysis of formal institutionalized education, Bourdieu argued that as formal education becomes more important in a society, schools have a major role in defining what is considered knowledge as well as the ways in which one’s knowledge can be assessed and legitimized (1984). As a result, informal learning and the knowledge that derives from it lose legitimacy and social value (Bourdieu 1984). Similarly, the narrative in Ladakh on the importance of education promotes higher value placed on the knowledge that can be gained only through schooling, while also imbuing a higher status to the types of behavior and practices associated with educated identities (cf. C. Jeffrey et al. 2004, Parajuli 2008, Skinner and Holland 1996:275). But it is not only about the official curriculum, the book knowledge that children and

youths learn. At school, children learn modes of thinking about the world that serve to enhance the durability of this system of privilege and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1984). In Ladakh, where acquiring crucial forms of cultural capital is dependent upon schooling and educational credentials, the development of a meaningful social role—being an educated person—is entirely institutionalized in schools.

When I informed students in one of the after-school groups that some people (e.g. scholars who study indigenous or non-institutionalized forms of learning and knowledge production) would view their unschooled, illiterate grandparents as highly educated and knowledgeable, the teens were shocked, perplexed, and intrigued. I explained that some researchers study other forms of knowledge, such as that which is disseminated through informal learning processes. For a tangible example, I encouraged them to consider what their grandmothers had to know about the crops, the land, the ecology, the animals, and so forth, in order to survive and sustain their families in Ladakh's harsh climate before there were water pumps, electricity, roads, and government assistance. The teens I was talking to agreed and understood, and some even seemed heartened by the idea. They acknowledged that—certainly—their grandparents did have a great deal of expertise in these domains. However, this new perspective could not change the meaning of “education,” which is both a local Ladakhi and nation-wide construct which signifies only the knowledge disseminated through formal education in schools.

Those in a government school group explained that education was important because “without knowledge, you cannot reach anywhere.” It is important to highlight that this statement exemplifies the ways in which “knowledge” is circumscribed by the dominant educational complex. Putting formal institutionalized schooling in a global context, Levinson and Holland's

description is apt: “Relatively new to history, especially for those people situated on the margins of industrialization, institutions of mass schooling... [encourage] mastery of knowledges that have currency and ideological grounding in wider spheres” (1996:1). Ladakhis have integrated the belief that formal education creates valued persons, and therefore, education dominates children’s pathways to attaining wellbeing in adulthood and unlocks the possibilities of economic advancement. Ladakhi parents and children alike are aware and attendant to the meaning of education in producing the cultural capital that is ascribed to respectable and valued personhood in contemporary Ladakhi culture. Considering the difficult jobs situation, which I describe next, it is especially important to account for the power of social meanings of education, and the unquestionable necessity in Ladakhi society that children become educated persons.

JOBS AND ECONOMIC REALITIES IN LADAKH AND INDIA

In international development theory, education has long been closely connected to achieving economic betterment and reaching a higher standard of living (Isaacs et al. 2008, LeVine et al. 2012:15, LeVine and White 1986, Resnik 2006); a topic explored further in Chapter Five. But while education is widely believed to provide or lead to economic wellbeing through job access, in reality this equation has become much less assured in the global economy of the early 21st century. Currently, Ladakhis in their forties and older who are well-educated are doing well, with decent earnings and stable employment (mainly in government jobs). Having finished secondary school or gone on to higher education when it was uncommon to do so, these adults are reaping the benefits just as economic development models have promoted. However, the number of skilled and professional jobs in the Ladakh region is not increasing nearly as quickly as the number of educated young people. Thus, today there are many unemployed or

underemployed young adults. Underemployment is a term commonly used among contemporary scholars studying labor markets to refer to the status of workers with jobs for which they are overqualified for, commonly because there is a lack of jobs available for higher levels of skill and training. In the Ladakhi view, which is also common throughout India, only a salaried position with a pension (ideally in the government) is a real job; lacking this type of work, Ladakhis often consider themselves “unemployed” even if they have some “lesser” form of work that provides income.

Across India, many educated young adults are unemployed or underemployed, a situation also found throughout much of the Global South and beyond (Chua 2014, Greenberg 2014, C. Jeffrey et al. 2004, C. Jeffrey et al. 2008, P. Jeffery 2005, C. Jeffrey 2010, C. Jeffrey 2011, Mains 2012). These days, increasing numbers of Indian youth achieve educational credentials but find themselves unable to obtain the types of jobs for which they have been aiming (P. Jeffery 2005:35, Dawa 1999:74). A testament to the growing employment problem in Ladakh, the All Ladakh Unemployed Youth Association (ALUYA) formed and grew prominent during the first decade of the 2000s, with the goals of advocating for job growth and creating a network for young adult job seekers. Ladakh has neither major industrial production nor corporate presence that could create skilled jobs and supply the desired stable employment. Thus, the government and Indian military are the main sources of salaried employment for Ladakhis within their region. Local politicians and other leaders have publicly encouraged educated youth to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses, as the local government attempts to remind Ladakhis that it does not have the budget that would enable it to provide employment for so many highly-qualified job-seekers (e.g. Dolma 2009, State Times 2012). At the same time, Ladakhis tend to look to the government for solving problems like the lack of jobs.

In 2009, ALUYA's president estimated that only 20-25 of the 500 newly minted Ladakhi graduates of higher education (minimum Bachelor's degree) each year would gain a government job (Dolma 2009). That year, the government reportedly received over six thousand applicants for 300 orderly posts in the district (Dolma 2009). In August of 2013, I gathered similar statistics directly from the district's Government Employment Department on job offerings. That summer, there had been a recent opening for 100 teacher posts throughout the district, a job with a minimum credential of a Bachelor of Education degree. The department received around 45 hundred applicants. At a lower level, there had been a recent opening for 15 posts, in positions doing unskilled janitorial work, cooking, and errands to support office staff. This posting required a minimum qualification of secondary school matriculation, and received over three thousand applicants.

Many educated Ladakhi youth who have not secured government jobs and have chosen not to pursue a military career take up work in the tourist sector in Leh during the summers. Some make this a more permanent enterprise by opening their own businesses—typically internet shops or tour companies. While tourism-related jobs are socially acceptable,²⁸ Ladakhis do not accord them the same esteem as government jobs; they are often viewed as placeholders, and such small businesses show little innovation and may be short-lived. A relatively low population density and government food subsidies keep most Ladakhi families from poverty, and remove the pressure from many youth for regular earnings. But Ladakhis, understandably, want

²⁸ Waiting tables, paid childcare, and construction are not socially respectable forms of work. Ladakhis believe these types of jobs should be left for non-local workers or the most desperately poor Ladakhis. Of course, there are Ladakhis who do these jobs.

more than just to survive, so the typical view is that the increasing amount of un- and underemployment is unacceptable and represents a failure of the government and its policies.

Despite the low number of local job opportunities, migration for employment to other regions of India, or beyond, is currently not the norm among Ladakhis. Teenagers I worked with often informed me that, while they looked forward to their temporary migration to Indian cities to attend a university, they expected and desired to return to Ladakh afterwards, seeing it as their home—a place to which they felt they had important social, ethnic, and even geographic connections. One experienced school administrator spoke to me extensively regarding his views that Ladakhi youth were “wasting” their education because they are unwilling to move to other parts of India for the jobs for which their Bachelor’s, Master’s, and professional degrees have prepared them. He argued against the popular opinion, stating that the typical Ladakhi behavior pattern needed to change so that Ladakhis could realize their potential within India’s growing economy. His progressive views stem from his highly educated background and international travels, and ongoing attention to global economic and political trends; he is an outlier among Ladakhis in terms of these perspectives.

Between the local economic context with very low job growth, the national context that is also highly competitive for desirable employment, and the lack of willingness among most Ladakhis to migrate for better work possibilities, the economic outcomes of education are clearly not the same reality as that portrayed by parents and children when they talked about the future. Despite the widespread stated view among Ladakhis that education results in good jobs and money, it does not seem certain that today’s children will realize the positive financial outcomes that they portrayed in our conversations. Thus, the social meanings and symbolic value associated with being “educated” as Ladakhis define it plays a prominent role in perpetuating

children's schooling within Ladakhi society.

Education as Ladakhi and Non-Ladakhi

What is education “doing” to and for individuals and society in Ladakh? In the Western European contexts upon which Bourdieu's theories of educational hegemony and class reproduction were based, there had been a long history of institutional education well before it became a pursuit of non-elite classes (1984). In France, Bourdieu observed that hierarchies in educational access, due to families' existing social, economic, and cultural capital (or lack thereof), continued to reproduce class hierarchies, even while more and more people from all classes were going to school and becoming educated. Even though education gave people from previously non-educated, low earning families the opportunity to improve their own economic situations, they actually remained the same class position relative to elites who in turn accessed even better education and the associated work and economic opportunities.

In contrast, in the Ladakhi social sphere, there is not so much as a Ladakhi elite wealthy class that could be attained or reproduced through modern western education to begin with. In pre-modern Ladakh, status was ascribed through birth, with a small number of elite noble families and a large portion of the population everyday farmers and herders. Average Ladakhis had few opportunities through which any major wealth could be acquired; children grew up to take on the roles of their parents and ancestors. Only a small minority of the population were involved in trade, and many traders were outsiders. Status through attainment, specifically through cultural capital acquired at school, is a non-local concept that Ladakhis have integrated. Therefore, education is inserting people into a different status configuration, as it is also, with Ladakhis' involvement, simultaneously imposing this status system onto Ladakhi society more broadly. That new status system is evident in the ways parents and adults disparaged themselves

for being “uneducated.” For Ladakhis, there is a non-Ladakhi, pan-South Asian middle class (as well as a less tangible global educated class) which education allows Ladakhis to symbolically join—whether or not they can find the employment for which education has prepared them. This does not mean, however, that Ladakhis have the same economic or social resources, so the concept of “class” here is meant as a general status.

Craig Jeffrey and colleagues (2004) documented similar attitudes and practices regarding the value and importance of educated personhood among educated North Indian young men facing ongoing un- and underemployment. They found that such men tended to emphasize “the value of education as a form of cultural distinction” (C. Jeffrey et al. 2004:962-963), and “have responded to a crisis in employment opportunities by affirming rather than rejecting ideas of progress through education” (C. Jeffrey et al. 2004:961). However, as Ladakhis portray it, education is not about being something other than Ladakhi, but in fact it is now a vital component to being a Ladakhi person. The durability of education in defining persons, and the de facto requirement of education in order to have wellbeing in adulthood, demonstrates Ladakhis’ integration of some non-Ladakhi ideas about lifestyles and personhood.

DISCUSSION: EDUCATION AND A GOOD LIFE

In my research, education was consistently central to Ladakhis’ explanations for how a good life, or wellbeing, would be attained for today’s children. That life was imagined to be one with stable work, financial comfort, and purchasing power, along with exhibiting the cultural capital that is acquired in the educational process. Hope of financial improvement seems to be a motivator of Ladakhi children and parents’ prioritization of children’s schooling success, but the region’s limited resources, wealth, and other characteristics do not explain Ladakh’s success in

schooling enrollment. The reality—a lack of jobs and high rate of unemployment and underemployment of educated youth—apparently does not deter Ladakhi families from pursuing the best feasible educational opportunities for their children. The dominance of schooling in Ladakhi views of attaining a good life relates more directly to how preferred social identities are achieved in contemporary Ladakhi culture.

A child today needs education in order to become a full person, a meaningful member of the community, as he or she enters adulthood. While parents' and older generations grew up with a different paradigm wherein being a full person did not require nor rely upon education, today Ladakhis imagine no other route to becoming an adult. Even young monks, whose personhood prioritizes their religious role, will gain a modern secular education alongside their traditional religious training. Ladakhis (and Tibetan Buddhist religious authorities, both Ladakhi and of other ethnicities) feel that monks should also grow up gaining the cultural capital that will allow them to engage with and be recognized by modern standards that privilege secular education. The point is that education has taken on immense socio-cultural importance in Ladakh. As the previous chapter on the history of education in Ladakh demonstrates, the importance of education has significantly changed the goals and experiences of childhood for today's young Ladakhis. Now, becoming an educated person is the crucial task to be achieved during childhood; in turn, the emphasis on formal education places boundaries on what types of futures are being sought, hoped for, and expected, especially as those futures are readily contrasted with the lives of the uneducated of older generations.

MAKING THE MOST OF EDUCATION: RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

INTRODUCTION

Ladakhi parents and children both have important responsibilities in seeing to the children's education, that it is achieved in the best possible way, aiming towards good outcomes into adulthood. This chapter explores the ways Ladakhis view responsibility for children's academic achievements and eventual life trajectories. I begin by discussing a paradox, wherein parents, who were otherwise convinced of the importance of education, were hesitant to say they had specific expectations for their children's futures and uncertain of just what the outcomes of their children's education would be. They said they were hopeful, but also that they could do little outside of financial support to influence what would actually become of their children, reflecting both practical limitations as well as beliefs and cultural norms. The contextual factors contributing to parents' expressed sense of uncertainty include the karmic reality, parents' past and present experiences, Ladakh's socio-political status, and parents' lack of cultural capital. With these constraints, it is not the typical social role for parents to be educators, to be hovering over their children during their studies, or to be closely involved in children's learning. Instead, studying and getting good marks are the responsibility of children, which I discuss in the next portion of the chapter. This framework makes parents responsible for enabling children's access to education, and ultimately places a lot of expectation on children themselves to study hard so

that they can achieve the best possible outcomes. Throughout this discussion, I consider what this says about the agency of parents and especially children. On the one hand, it is evident that children exercise a good deal of agency in negotiating their educational pathways and choosing careers, but what is also important is that they are constrained by very poor sources of information about the world of employment options in modern-day India, due both to an overall structural position as well as to their parents' lack of experience and education.

PARENTS' HOPES AND UNCERTAINTY

In my interviews with parents, I asked them about their children's futures — what did they expect them to achieve and become as adults. The types of responses were consistent across both urban and rural groups. The majority of parents stated that they were uncertain about specifics, and hesitant to predict or express certainty of expectations. Some said simply that they did not know or that they did not have expectations. Typical responses involved statements such as: I/we “have good hopes for the future, but no specific expectations,” “Time will tell,” or “I hope he/she will get a job/have good earnings, but let's see.” I did not expect this vagueness, because just minutes earlier in most interviews, these parents were confident, certain, and direct in stating the unquestionable importance of education for children's future wellbeing. Parents' seeming lack of certainty when talking about the future could be partially due to the cultural inappropriateness of making such statements, whether a “superstition” or socially inappropriate boastfulness, and without other types of data could be potentially unreliable. However, the uncertainty parents expressed, and especially what they conveyed about a sense of having very limited ability to ensure outcomes, are evident in their practices as well, which I will describe later in the chapter.

About a third of parents also added narratives that gave children meaningful responsibility in determining their future adulthoods. Some representative examples are:

- “Hopefully they’ll study enough for life and for their futures, but we don’t have specific expectations. Also, it depends on children themselves.”
- “We want him to continue studying until he wishes. We will give him as much opportunity as he wants, but we don’t have any specific aims for him.”
- “Our family is not deciding for them what they should do. Whatever kids wish to do, its up to them.”

These parents described a future that was contingent on their children. Parents often described their own efforts—they would continue to provide as best they could for their children’s educational opportunities, that they hoped doing so would lead to good outcomes—but their involvement in influencing outcomes was limited to domains of financial provision. This meant paying for school fees and related costs such as school supplies, uniforms, bus fees, and/or hostel fees, as well as fees for extracurricular tutoring, particularly for older children. Since not all parents were paying for their children’s private schooling, the actual financial involvement of parents in providing these all-important educational opportunities varied. However, parents’ ideas about provisioning were consistent—when I asked each one what they would do if they had more money, they always responded that they would invest it in bettering the child’s educational opportunities. In contrast, parents did not see themselves as having much influence on how their children performed academically in school nor in ensuring their children’s achievements.

CONTEXTUALIZING UNCERTAINTY ABOUT OUTCOMES

Ladakhi parents described a situation where they had some agency but many constraints

in terms of ensuring that their children would gain what they needed to have a good life. Here, I follow Ahearn's explanation of "agency," defining it simply as "the human capacity to act" (Ahearn 2000:12). Agency can also be understood as a way of understanding or explaining "the source of causation," the extent to which people can act on and influence the world around them (Cassaniti 2012:303). Put simply, "agency is what makes change; it is the ability to make things happen" (Cassaniti 2012:303). Agency is constrained by structures, sometimes recognized, other times hidden, which restrict individuals or groups from modes of acting and influencing particular situations. As agents, people can act against or alongside dominant paradigms, can perpetuate the status quo or invoke change.

It is important to emphasize that Ladakhi parents did not express uncertainty about the future because they did not care, nor did they limit their efforts in influencing their children's life outcomes because of a resignation to fate. In the case of Ladakhi families, parents perceived they were constrained in what they could do to ensure their children's wellbeing, and this perception reflects spiritual beliefs as well as practical issues. Their vague, uncertain, and seemingly passive beliefs about the future in fact reflect the Buddhist foundations through which Ladakhis typically understand life, circumstances, and agency. Also, parents' everyday life experiences, many of them growing up in poverty, in addition to social and political disempowerment in the present day, and a broader apprehension about the future across Ladakhi society, undergird their experiences of the perceived and tangible extent of their agency. I describe how these phenomena operate to limit parents' agency in the following sections.

Karma

Tibetan Buddhism forms the foundation for Ladakhi and other Tibetan Buddhist societies' understandings of everyday life and all phenomena. In his psychological research

exploring the moral underpinnings of Ladakhi culture, Gielen found that “religious meaning was considered to exist objectively as an intrinsic aspect of all existence, not as a subjectively chosen worldview” (Gielen 2001:5). By “religious meaning,” Gielen refers to karma, rebirth, and other Tibetan Buddhist concepts. The belief in karma is particularly relevant to understanding parents’ responses about their children’s futures—karma forms the underlying framework through which Ladakhis understand events and circumstances, causality, and people’s capacity for agency. Although Ladakhis typically did not reference karma when they talked about mundane topics such as education, a karmic reality influences parents’ perspectives on their children’s futures, and on their understandings of their children’s agency, behaviors, and achievement as well.

Karma both limits one’s ultimate control of circumstances as well as places the individual (or groups of individuals) in the ultimate position of responsibility for causing those circumstances. This is because actions in a past life create negative or positive karma, and that karma will impact what happens in the present. Therefore, it might be too late to modify present circumstances, but one’s actions today will have repercussions in future lives. The Tibetan Buddhist understanding of karma implies people’s actions and choices should be carefully considered, and that people have agency despite the possibility that the present moment may be unchangeable. Thus, there is no fatalism, only a combination of acceptance of the present with continuous efforts for the future.

In the past, a fatalistic interpretation of Tibetan Buddhist cultures has often been employed by western observers, for example, in climbers’ accounts of Nepali Sherpas’ reactions to deaths that occurred during expeditions (Ortner 1999:134-140). Climbers wrote about Sherpas’ behavior in the aftermath of deaths that occurred during their expeditions—they observed what appeared to be lack of emotion among the Sherpas and interpreted it as fatalism.

According to Ortner, the Sherpas' outward responses were culturally appropriate and did not imply a lack of grief, and certainly not fatalism (Ortner 1999). Similarly, there is an older social science literature that suggests people in less developed traditional societies are fatalistic in their understanding of events and in their own abilities to impact the future, whether it is due to karma, gods, spirits, or other forces. In his study of Tibetan families and demographic change, anthropologist and Tibetologist Geoffrey Childs criticizes theories that attribute behaviors observed in less-developed societies to "peasant fatalism" or "passive agency," calling them ethnocentric and biased accounts (Childs 2008). He explains that while anthropologists have by now rejected such theories, in other fields, notably demography, the idea of fatalism remains salient in contemporary scholarly discourse. For example, when interviewed by demographers about family planning, women often explained that the number of children they want is "up to god/karma" rather than giving an actual number, and demographers interpreted the response as representational of a lack of belief or awareness of agency in reproductive matters and a signal of fatalism (Childs 2008:42-48). However, understanding cultural context negates such a view: "one who anticipates that a future outcome will be shaped by past and present actions, as reflective in the 'up to karma' answer, is not necessarily fatalistic. Such a response is a culturally appropriate, ontological statement about how things ultimately work" (Childs 2008:49).

Because karma underpins Ladakhi parents' responses and attitudes towards their children's academic success and future adult outcomes, it is an important consideration in contextualizing parents' responses to my questions about the future. Expressing uncertainty, being vague, and conveying a sense of inability to have much influence are all culturally conditioned responses within the Tibetan Buddhist perspective. Within the context of karma, parents' responses do not mean they are unconcerned and passive. In fact, parents are morally

obliged to work in this life towards producing good karma for the future. In the day-to-day in Ladakh, such positive actions include parents' hard work as well as sacrifice so that they can provide for the education of their children. Creating positive karma involves these mundane efforts in addition to ritual practices such as prayers and offerings.

Karma also gives meaning to circumstances that are beyond one's control, and it can help people make sense of negative consequences that result from one's best efforts otherwise. Examples range from specific events, such as a health problem or injury that limits one's ability to work, or broader circumstances and characteristics, such as being born in a wealthy family, children's intelligence, or how well a child's personality fits within a formal school environment. In my prior research with families with disabled children I found that karma was one way of explaining disability (Richard 2014). When Ladakhis spoke generally about disability, they often said that karma was a major cause of such scenarios, and that others should have compassion on the disabled person and his or her caretakers. In contrast, parents of disabled children were ambivalent about viewing their child's condition as the result of bad karma, because it could seem disparaging and judgmental, implying that the child or parents did something rather immoral in a past life. Instead they saw taking action—towards finding a biomedical diagnosis, seeking curative from various types of practitioners, and embracing western-model physical and occupational therapies—as important to caring for a child with special needs. Karma may be the ultimate explanation for the cause and existence of their circumstances, but does not dictate how parents deal with nor view a child's disability in the present. In the same way, with regards to their children's education, karma may mean parents cannot have ultimate control over the way things turn out, but that should not stop them from doing all that they can to provide the best possible opportunities for their children.

Parents' Everyday Experiences

In addition to the spiritual understanding of causality and agency, which transcend one's current life, parents bring their own childhood experiences with resource limitations and poverty to their perspectives on childhood and parenting. When I discussed with parents how their children's lives compared and contrasted to their own childhoods, they commonly responded: "*everything* was different." When they were young, many parents said, it was more important for children to learn household work and fieldwork. Children began helping with labor-intensive household chores around four to five years of age, whereas children today generally only help out with basic tasks (particularly washing dishes and their own laundry, and sweeping around the house) even into their teen years. As children, parents said that they spent much of their time working in the fields or pastures. I heard from both rural and urban parents that there were "no proper shoes or clothes to wear," "not enough food and money," and "no good schools." Various parents described how they made their own shoes out of used rubber, owned only one set of clothes, had to carry water far distances, that their families often ran out of vegetables in the winter months, and they remembered times of hunger. Unlike children today, they were "not happy, [and there was] no comfort." Parents are accustomed to insecurity and uncertainty, and having to make the most of situations without having much of a safety net. Growing up in such ways socialized them that they should always act in ways that make the most of current resources, and conversely, they should not waste time on lofty ambitions nor expect the future to be different.

Today, stability of some types is combined with other forms of insecurity. Ladakhis now have greatly improved economic and food security, systemic malnutrition has ended, and access to basic commodities has broadened. At the same time, many families, especially in rural areas,

still do not have much more than the essentials; thus, having just enough puts them at a major disadvantage if a problem occurs. In the household survey, the majority of the families reported not having any monetary savings upon which they could rely in the event of a disaster or health crisis. Most still have land holdings, but though those that do not, and those who have already sold, often have no other significant assets for an emergency. An event such as the death of a family's primary earner can be devastating, as one rural mother I interviewed demonstrates. Before his untimely death in a motorbike accident a few years prior to our interview, her husband had been a laborer, and through this work was able to provide for the family of four what they needed, but with little extra. Neither he nor his wife had gone to school beyond Class V, and they did not have landholdings besides their home and the small parcel of land on which it stands. After his death, his widow struggled to provide for her children, who were in primary school at the time, and their extended family was small, uneducated, and also with little means, so they could do little to support her on a long-term basis. If she sold her house, she would have to pay rent to live elsewhere since her family did not have space for them, so this was not a good solution given her small income. Most Ladakhis, however, would have somewhat more assistance from their extended families, so this particular family was in a more precarious situation than what would be the norm, but at the same time it is not that unusual either.

In addition to lacking financial and social safety nets, whether residing in a town or village, wealthier or poorer, daily experiences remind everyone living in Ladakh that basic commodities and government services are not a given, and thus some types of uncertainties are simply commonplace. For example, electricity, phone service, and the Internet sometimes go out and remain unavailable for hours or days, without explanation or any communication regarding repair status. Road closures due to weather can cause shortages of gasoline, some types of foods,

and many other household commodities that are not sourced locally. Newspapers are available daily when commercial planes can fly in and out of Ladakh—there are typically three to five daily flights scheduled. However, Ladakh's extreme weather causes cancellations throughout the year, sometimes lasting for days. Government offices may close without warning, and government workers are notorious for leaving their posts early, arriving late, and taking unscheduled leave. Thus basic bureaucratic services, purported to be available to citizens at regularly scheduled times and days, are, in reality, irregular. An educated Ladakhi young man I knew needed to get a certain official's signature in order for him to obtain a duplicate birth certificate, because his was lost, and he needed it for another set of paperwork. He ended up having to approach the office almost daily for nearly three weeks, because the relevant official was supposedly out of town and had left no information regarding when he would return, with no one left filling his role. While frustrating, Ladakhis approach these occurrences with little surprise. Indeed, such problems are pervasive throughout India, making life particularly difficult for poorer rural citizens and contributing to their ongoing disenfranchisement (Gupta 2012).

Most parents' experiences as adults in a rapidly changing Ladakh give them a sense of political and economic disempowerment as well. Those who did not go to school know they lack the cultural capital that is meaningful in the new economy that privileges formal, credentialed knowledge. In interviews, some parents expressed regret about not having gained an education; they felt they could not fully participate in all aspects of contemporary society, and this included being able to actively assist with their children's education. In particular, illiterate parents felt a lack of power in dealing with the government and politics, which could have implications for their children. For example, one rural mother told me that a teacher at the village's government school, where her children attended, had unfairly punished her daughter. However, the mother

did not voice a grievance because she believed her complaint would result in unfair treatment of her child by that teacher. She thought that even if her complaint effectively led to a disciplining of the teacher, it would still ultimately incite the teacher to further mistreat her child. Given that many rural parents have significantly lower levels of education compared to government employees such as teachers, it is understandable that parents lacking this meaningful cultural capital would fear being unable to successfully and confidently engage with those running the local branches of the institutions that are supposed to be serving them.

In terms of broader politics, Ladakhis are an ethnic minority on India's northernmost borders; their region is marginal to India's urban economic and power centers. Geopolitically, Ladakh is important mainly because the region lies along India's disputed borders with both China and Pakistan. A lack of meaningful representation and influence in regional and national politics strengthens a general notion among Ladakhis of disempowerment. Even after the formation of the LAHDC, which gave Leh and Kargil Districts more power in local governance, there remains a pervasive sense of marginality. In their state, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakhis feel they are a minority, particularly those who are Buddhist, because the majority population and government are Kashmiri and Muslim (see also van Beek 2000a, Aggarwal 2004). Being within Jammu & Kashmir state also means budget priorities often focus on ongoing conflict on the Kashmir side of the region. Thus even at the state level, the concerns and needs of Ladakhis are not priorities. Some Ladakhis have taken to political activism, and have been campaigning since the 1990s for Ladakh to be granted the status of a Union Territory, which would remove its governance from Jammu & Kashmir and allow administration directly from the national government. Ladakhis believe this would allow them more efficient and fair representation and budget allocations. While the movement for UT status has not succeeded, it has brought a greater

awareness among Ladakhis of their own low levels of influence.

In her research on Buddhist and Muslim communal tensions in Ladakh, Aengst (2013a) found that Ladakhi adults talked about youth with apprehension and a sense of powerlessness, and had particular concerns about their greater mobility, as many study outside of Ladakh in their late teens and early twenties. Adults worry they cannot counter the negative influences youth encounter in India's cosmopolitan cities, nor control their choices. Drugs and alcohol are worrisome vices, and Ladakhi adults have a particular concern about the formation of romantic relationships between Buddhists and Muslims—a major taboo in present-day Ladakh due to political tensions (Aengst 2013a, Smith 2009, 2012). However, in my research adults and children were very consistent in their opinions that studying “outside” of Ladakh for higher education was highly preferable to the limited offerings and perceived lower quality of Leh's government college, currently the only option for higher education in Ladakh. Thus Aengst's research demonstrates specific types of societal apprehensions about negative influences and threats to Ladakhi society related to uncertainty about the future (Aengst 2013a, see also Smith 2012, Smith and Gergan 2015). However, in practice the prioritization of providing children with the best possible education trumps the worries attached to the greater mobility of Ladakhi young people.

LAYERING RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Parents' Involvement: Financial, Not Pedagogical

When I asked parents what they would do if they had more money, they consistently told me they would use it to improve their children's educational opportunities, relative to their

current situation. Parents often declared they were determined to provide for their children's education "as much as possible, and as far as possible." Finances were parents' main way of showing effort and involvement in helping their children succeed. In contrast, parents rarely talked about being personally involved in academics at school or home, and few said that they were involved in children's studies or thought they could motivate children academically. In particular, parents with little or no education cannot relate to children's experiences at school, so they tend to be mostly passive observers of their children's educational practices. Indeed, many parents, and especially those with little or no education, said they only had a general sense of how the child was doing in school based on scores and class rank, but could not really tell on their own how the child was performing as a student. They could not understand the homework assignments or texts, nor answer questions about the lessons. These deficiencies exemplify why parents were so certain that if they had more money, they would apply it to their improving their children's schooling, as it was one of the only ways they saw they could act to improve the children's lives. Parents who had matriculated (finished Class X) and who held jobs also had similar feelings about their children's education. They saw their own education as inadequate in comparison to the improved quality of today's schools; they may have passed completion exams but they did not feel confident in most of the subjects. It was a small minority of parents who indicated that they were involved in carefully overseeing the child's studying practices and completion of assignments.

When I volunteered at a private school in Leh periodically over a few months, as well as during numerous visits to schools throughout the district during my research, I never saw parents visiting schools to meet with teachers or to participate in student learning. I observed parents dropping off and picking up younger children before and after school, as well as occasionally

visiting the administrative offices of the school to take care of things such registration, purchasing uniforms, and paying fees. Otherwise, there was little in the way of parent-teacher collaboration at school, and parents often said that teachers held the responsibility for students' learning. School was the domain of teachers and students, and while the schools may not prefer it, the general belief among parents is that they are not directly responsible for student learning, their responsibility is for making sure their children have access to education provided by qualified teachers.

Conversely, teachers to whom I spoke put forth the hypothesis that if a child is doing poorly in school, it is the result of inept parents. Thus, parents who participated in my research who were also teachers present an interesting situation in regards to attitudes about responsibility for children's academics. Of the families who participated in the household interview, twelve families (three rural and nine urban) had one parent who was a state government teacher (eight mothers, four fathers) and one additional rural family had a father who was a private school teacher. In all of these cases, their children attended private schools. These parents' responses to my questions did not diverge significantly from what other parents said in terms of overall responsibility for achievement. That is, parents were crucially responsible for providing children with access to a good school. Since they sent their own children to private schools rather than the state government system in which they taught, these parents had to reconcile the perceived low quality of government schools. These parents often stated that the poor performance of government schools was the result of the students' parents and not because the teachers were ineffective, also noting that many students in the government system these days are not Ladakhi, but are children of very poor migrant laborers. These parent-teachers are right about this point at least—for these children, their structural position makes academic success much more difficult

than for children from the majority of Ladakhi families. Nonetheless, evidence from my research with Ladakhi families points to an overall low direct parent involvement in children's studies, especially as compared to parents' efforts in financially providing for children's educational opportunities. A structured observational study might reveal differences in practices at home between more and less educated parents, and perhaps more difference particularly for parents who are also teachers. Further, it may also be the case that these patterns of generally low involvement will change within the next generation, as future parents are better educated.

Just one student in my after school tutorial groups had a parent who was also a teacher. The father of Dawa, a Class VIII girl at the time of the 2012 research, taught at a state government school, and her mother was a nurse's assistant for a government health clinic; both had parents had completed secondary school, and her father had a bachelor's degree. It was clear from the first time we met that Dawa was very precocious and highly motivated. After spending more time with her, I would argue that, while it helps to have the additional resources her educated parents could provide, both financially as well as in terms of their own cultural capital, Dawa's academic achievements should be primarily attributed to her own personality and inherent intellect. In fact, her younger brother was just an average student, who had made it clear to his parents as well as to me that he was not highly motivated to study and preferred watching cartoons and hanging out with his friends. Dawa explained that her parents were caring and concerned, yet rather permissive, and they were not closely involved in either of their children's academics unless the children specifically requested it. Mostly, she studied and completed her assignments independently. In the family context, her parents were like most others in that they were providers, not educators.

Intrinsic Traits of Children

In my interviews, parents portrayed the achievement of educational success as children's domain of responsibility—doing well required that children remain motivated and work hard in school. While continuing to follow the theme of representing their own uncertainty, 15 parents responded to this line of questioning by mentioning their children's stated desires, nearly always describing their support. For example, parents said about their children: "She wants to be an eye doctor," or "an IAS [Indian Administrative Service²⁹] officer," and even "an artist." Parents who stated they were proud of their children's aspirations, the majority of which were professional careers such as doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, or officers. The one mother whose daughter wanted to be an artist was thoroughly supportive, but, notably, they were a wealthier urban family, which probably made them more conducive to supporting a less-lucrative career goal. Most parents explained that they hoped their children would simply do well enough in their education to be able to find a job and have financial stability. Only a few parents said they had higher expectations for their children's futures, saying they had "high hopes" or "big expectations." Some of these parents singled out a particular child to whom the optimism was directed, so these high expectations were not directed towards all of their children. In these cases, they explained that the son or daughter was a high achieving student, intelligent, and motivated—clearly exhibiting above-average potential to succeed. Thus, it could be argued that these particular parents' high hopes were rationalized as sensible, in that they were attuned to the children's characteristics and actions.

Indeed, some parents explained that children's inherent characteristics such as personality

²⁹ The Indian Administrative Service, or IAS, is the Indian government's highly selective domestic civil service branch.

traits and/or intelligence were factors that shaped their expectations for their children. The clearest examples came from parents who had unusually low expectations or were otherwise worried about their children's future success. For example, one urban mother said she did not expect much for her teenage daughter, because, according to the mother, she was "lazy" and doing poorly in school. That mother explained that she expected the girl to help run a small shop that the family owned when she became an adult. Her tone was one of concession to the realities of the situation; representing her view that while low school achievement was nothing to be proud of, this arrangement was a realistic compromise. Unlike many of the town families, this one was relatively poorer, and their economic position likely played a role in these parents "giving up" on influencing the daughter's schooling. In another family, a rural mother said she was concerned that her two daughters' performance in school had recently dropped off and thought that the girls were bad influences on one another as they spent too much time playing together, which distracted them from studying. She saw this as a negative combination of personalities that was preventing otherwise capable students from achieving their potential. In response, she and her husband were planning to send one the elder daughter to live in a hostel in Leh in order to attend a private school there at the start of the next school year. The family had income through the father's military service and the cost of this school arrangement was now feasible for them.

Finally, in another rural family, the mother spoke of her son's future negatively, and she made it clear that she and the father were greatly concerned. The boy, who was in class VIII at the time, wanted to become a professional cricket player, and he had little motivation for his studies which was reflected in his poor academic performance. The mother was worried because she thought he was not studying enough and was not being obedient to his parents. In contrast,

this boy's younger sister was a good student and aspired to be a doctor and "look after the poor people of Ladakh" when she grew up. The mother's view of her son and daughter, and the contrast between them, highlighted her view of character traits as being due mostly to the child rather than due to parenting practices (or failures therein). There were character traits that made some children studious, obedient, and morally virtuous and others less so.

At the same time, ideas about inherent traits linked to gender may play a role in this situation as well, in that the mother presented a stark distinction in contrasting her son and daughter. Ladakhi adult friends of mine, and on a few occasions parent research participants, had conversations with me about how boys were more likely to struggle academically and be rebellious, whereas girls were easier to trust with responsibilities as they typically were studious, obedient, and less likely to act out against societal norms. Two of the rural mothers along with one father I interviewed told me that they would prefer sending their daughters as opposed to their sons to a boarding school because they could trust the girls to obey the rules of the hostel. This meant staying on grounds, studying, following rules, and generally behaving in such a way as to take full advantage of the educational opportunity. In contrast, they worried that if they sent their sons away, they would sneak out and "roam" around town (meaning spending time out with friends, possibly getting into trouble or at minimum not doing anything productive or educational at times when they should be studying). On the other hand, some parents felt worried about sending girls away from home due to inherent dangers, so there was certainly no consensus on the issue, and in reality both boys and girls alike are commonly sent away from home (often outside of Ladakh) to study, especially as they become older teens. These expressed ideologies, however, also resonate with the opinions of my students.

The boys in the second of my after school groups, who lived in the hostel, told me with

certainty that girls were the best students in school. As they described it, girls got along well with teachers, they did their work properly, paid attention in class, were much more studious than the boys, and even seemed to be smarter as well. When we had this conversation, which was prompted by a much more general question I posed about what makes a good and successful student, about a dozen boys were present and they were all actively interjecting into the conversation, one after the other, to agree and add a confirmatory perspective on the issue. They were very convinced and sincere, even though I initially thought they were joking with me. I found it unexpected that they had this view because a number of these boys were particularly good in their studies and showed sincere initiative in wanting to achieve at a high level. I checked this point with other Ladakhi students at various times throughout the remainder of my research, and found similar views among both all of my students. Overall, they believed that in general, there was something about typical girls that made them good at school. At the same time, students also admitted variation and that not all girls were so successful and smart, nor were all boys actually struggling with their studies.

The idea of inherent characteristics in children made sense to many parents, as when I asked about how they made decisions if there were differences in schooling situations for their children. These cases were usually explained as resulting from some specific need or interest of the child. Some sample situations demonstrate the mundane explanations—one mother explained that one child did not like living in the hostel so they let him return home to a local private school after one year away, whereas the brother of that boy had done well so he remained there at the boarding school. Various other families sent children to different private schools because new options became available for younger children that had not been available when an elder sibling began school. For example, one mother explained that her youngest child was in a

different private school than that of the older two children, because she and her husband had determined that the youngest would benefit from the small class sizes offered by the school, as it was new to Leh. In their view, the well-regarded private school the older children attended was not a good choice because of its large class sizes—the newer private school may not be well known but they thought it was still advantageous for an overly energetic boy.

These parents' responses to the traits of their children demonstrate their perceptions regarding the extent to which they can take action to influence their children's successes in school, and in turn their future life outcomes. The family without much extra money had decided they could help their daughter by planning to have her work at their small store, while the family with somewhat greater means hoped to improve their children's grades by changing their school situation, which was now affordable. In another case, the mother of the would-be cricket player had essentially thrown up her hands in frustration, partially justifying her inability to influence her son's behavior in terms of both her children's inherent characteristics. Parents saw their responsibility as lying in the provision of educational access, and when feasible, in changing school situations to respond to a problem—always within the context of some aspects of the situation being outside of their realm of influence.

A Studios Environment

Staying motivated for school and keeping up with their studies was not always easy, as many students told me that even though they believed their education was very important, schoolwork was sometimes boring or difficult and their focus was tested. Home environments were often not places where there was much felt pressure or motivation for studying because there was not a lot of oversight in how children spent their time. Both children and parents highlighted this issue in various ways. Some of the students with whom I worked and who lived

in the hostel (most had only lived in the hostel for two to three years) strongly believed that one of the major benefits of residing there was that they had a “timetable.” A timetable is the term used for a daily schedule that all students living at the hostel must follow, and it includes strict guidelines on when the students could turn on the television in the common area or engage in other recreational activities. These students said that it was very helpful to them in keeping up with their studies and doing well in school, because they believed that without this type of accountability they would not be working as hard. At home, in their earlier experience, it was difficult to study because there was no strict schedule, and they did not feel the same sense of accountability because no one was enforcing study time. In village homes, even when electricity is working, the lighting in homes is very low, often just one low-watt bulb per room, so another advantage to the hostels are better lighting with which students can study and complete their homework at night (even though there can still be outages, as anywhere in the region). Many of the hostellers felt that other aspects of staying in the hostel were difficult; it did not always feel like “home,” the stricter environment was not necessarily enjoyable, and the food was not as good as home. The fact that these teenagers were able to see this kind of practical benefit speaks to their awareness that their educational practices would have long-term consequences, and demonstrates their agency and engagement with their present situation.

Seeing a similar problem in their own homes, a few rural parents said that their child in tenth class had switched from living at home to boarding in the nearby village where the nearest government secondary school is located. The school bus was available daily to take these teens to and from their home village to the school, and the trip was just half an hour. However, these parents believed that it was better if their children lived at the school’s hostel during this crucial academic year. Passing the Class X exam, offered once each year, was already difficult for

government school students, exemplified in the low rates of passing. In the view of these poorer and less-educated parents, the modest cost of spending just one year at a government-run hostel was feasible and would be the best way these parents could improve their children's chances. Staying in the hostel meant they would have a structured environment where the focus would be on studying alongside peers with the same goal, and potential distractions due to unallocated time would be diminished. These particular parents had nothing negative to say about their children's academic performances thus far, but the move to the hostel was an acknowledgement that the parents wanted to do as much as they could to support their children's responsibilities for academic achievement.

For the family with whom I resided for much of my time in Leh, both parents had finished secondary school and worked in government jobs, and they certainly wanted their two sons to excel in their studies. They had made a decision about the boys' educational opportunities based on the dynamics of their household environment. About three years apart in age, both boys' marks in primary private school in Leh had been average. The parents observed that the brothers seemed to be distracting each other; they were "having a lot of fun together," and not taking school seriously. Because of their concern about academic performance, they sent the elder son away to a boarding school outside of Ladakh when he began Class VII, an event that had occurred a few years before I met them. As other parents had suggested to me in interviews, these parents saw separating the children, thus promoting studious environments for both, as the best way to help them excel. They chose the elder boy to send away for practical reasons; they thought he was mature enough to live away from home, whereas the younger one was just starting Class IV (about age nine) and simply seemed to them to be too young to live away from home. They left it as a possibility that the younger son would also be sent away when

he was older if they felt it was necessary to ensure his success in school. In fact, the younger son was still living at home (in Class VIII) when I initially lived with them in 2011. His parents said that he was doing very well in the local private school, and therefore they did not see any reason to send him elsewhere for the time being. In fact the younger son said he liked his school in Leh and had many friends there, and wanted to finish his studies there through Class X. That kept him motivated, because he knew that if he did poorly, his parents would move him away to another school (something he did look forward to happening *after* Class X, when most of his classmates would also move away to schools outside of Ladakh). Indeed, he continued to be a good student, remained motivated for his studies, and was obedient to his parents, so he remained in Leh through Class X. After that, he went away to attend Classes XI and XII at the same higher secondary school that his brother had recently finished. These schooling decisions were seen as having ensured both boys' success in school, especially through helping them stay focused and establish good study habits.

Even though not all parents have the means to send a child away from Ladakh to a boarding school in India, this pattern of parental involvement at the level of provision of educational access is one that seems consistent across most Ladakhi parents. The provision of school and living environments believed to promote studious practices is a common way that parents get involved in their children's schooling, and shows a widespread belief among Ladakhis that a child's milieu is important for educational success. Home environments, of course, vary greatly, with dynamics such as parents' educational levels, parents' occupations that affect daily routines, relational dynamics with siblings and other family members, as well as the availability of technologies such as consistent electricity for lighting and distractions like television. Thus it is not that Ladakhi homes necessarily make studying difficult, but that

Ladakhis often showed a close awareness of how a living environment can influence children's study habits and ultimate success academically.

Good Parents

These data on parents' involvement, as well as their uncertainty and beliefs about the limits of their ability to influence children's educational outcomes clearly show that while Ladakhi parents may not be involved in ways that other cultures believe are important (e.g. reading out loud or homework help), they are following a moral set of expectations for parenting. Further, children are aware of the responsibilities their society expects of parents. While it was not a direct question that I posed during my research, commentary about the qualities and actions of a good parent arose naturally in conversations I had with both children and parents in my study. Children mentioned this issue when I asked them about what Ladakhi children need in order to have a good life, and in interviews, some parents brought up moralistic concerns about other parents' troubling practices. According to these accounts, a good parent was someone who prioritized the provision of educational opportunities for his or her children, was not controlling of the children's career trajectories, and was not boastful to others of the children's successes.

Specifically, for example, the students in the after school groups told me that in order to have a good life, children needed "good parents" who would "spend money wisely on education." Children were aware that families have resources that could be allocated in more or less responsible ways, and also that financial means and parents' financial practices can limit or extend opportunity. One private school group in particular emphasized moralistic components to living a good life and the wealth associated with it. When this group was asked what things would make it possible for a person to have a good life, they explained that children needed parents to spend money on a quality education, and further emphasized

this point by saying that children needed parents to spend their money responsibly—“in a good way” that prioritized their children’s education. Another child followed up by emphasizing that it was the family (not just parents) who provided the money for the child to have a good education, thus enabling her to achieve a good life.

The fact that children responded by pointing to the importance of parents’ financial provisioning provides insight into Ladakhi ideas about parenting, and especially parents’ roles in relation to children’s education and their future success. It shows they understand that financial priorities require choices, and while education is a common-sense need for children, this does not mean that it is a given that parents will spend money on it. It also points to an unmentioned contrast, that is, an idea that there are parents who do not do so, and that this is a moral transgression. One boy, Norboo, was aware his father paid for his tuition, and was grateful for that, but also privately told me his father spent most of the rest of his earnings on alcohol, so there seemed no hope that his father would be able to assist in paying for college which was a much greater cost than local primary and secondary private schools. However, children in my study, who were a fairly diverse representation of their district’s variation, never mentioned knowing of or themselves experiencing parents actually depriving a child of an education (through the level of secondary school) because they allocated their money elsewhere.

Problem Parenting

In addition to general consensus of what parents should do in order to promote their children’s educational success, Ladakhi parents and children often cited two types parental behavior that were problematic: being competitive with other parents in using children’s academic performance as a proxy, and being overbearing and controlling of children’s academics. These ideas typically arose when participants wanted to explain to me some of the

downsides to life in contemporary Ladakh, especially related to the immense importance of education. In addition, one of my students was dealing with a particularly difficult father, which provided a clear example of the second type of problem parenting that my interlocutors sometimes disparaged.

Parents and children explained to me that the great importance of education for Ladakhi children in contemporary times could be problematic if it became overly competitive, a situation that parents were responsible for. Numerous parents I interviewed as well as other adults I knew in the community informed me that when parents get together they sometimes become competitive about their children's school performance on exams and in terms of their class rankings. They conveyed it as a common though detestable practice. When people talked about this, they employed a tone that conveyed they were highly critical of such behavior. Schools typically rank the students in each Class level, based on their overall academic scores. Parents with younger students not yet taking state and national exams can use this rank to boast about their children; older children and teens have easily comparable scores on the standardized exams, which are even published in regional newspapers. Parents who told me about this competitive and boastful practice were complaining about other parents and asserted that they themselves were not involved in such behaviors. I did not ever observe such a conversation, nor did I get a sense that parents' competitiveness carried over to children's experiences with one another. At the same time, some parents in the household survey were quick to inform me of their children's rankings when I asked about how they were doing in school.

A second problem was parents who were overbearing or controlling of their children's educational pathways. An example of this among my students was Dorjey, in Class X in 2012 and living at the hostel. He tried his best in school as he did not want to fail, but he was an

average student who struggled with math and science, and he was not nearly as interested in his studies as he was in sports. Dorje carried himself with confidence; he was popular with his peers and one of the best players of numerous sports at the school. His father, however, was apparently very tough on him, and this was a sore point that he only told me about towards the end of my intensive period of research with the students in 2012. As Dorje explained it, his father wanted him to excel on his upcoming exams, and eventually earn an advanced degree in a lucrative scientific field, ideally engineering or medicine. However, Dorje was unable to live up to his father's academic expectations. His father harshly scolded him when he got poor scores, which was often, and intensely pressured him to improve on his study habits when they spoke over the phone. Dorje was frustrated with his father and unhappy with their competing visions of his future, but also told me he did wish he could be a better student, as he knew that ultimately his education was important. And, while he was unhappy with his father's pressures, he was not doing poorly out of rebellion, either. Dorje would have much preferred to just do enough in secondary school to get by and then focus on athletics, although earning opportunities for athletes in India are very limited.

The tensions in his relationship with his father are the result of Ladakhi children's socialization, which emphasizes respect and deference to parents and others in positions of power (e.g. teachers). Ladakhi children grow up with expectations of continued connection to families, thus obligating them to honor and respect parents' decisions. When I returned to Ladakh in 2013, I found that Dorje had entered the Medical Science track, and heard later that he successfully completed Class XI at that same private school in Leh, with many of his former classmates also attending. Despite passing, he struggled to meet his father's expectations for high marks, so the next year, Class XII, his father moved Dorje to a private school outside of

Ladakh. According to his friends and former classmates who remained in Leh in 2014, the move was because his father believed he would learn more being away from his friends and at a (purportedly) better school.

Overbearing pressure and attempts to control a child's school performance the way Dorje's father had were not part of most parents' practices, according to their self-reports during interviews as well as the experiences of children in my study. Aside from Dorje, the majority of the students with whom I worked said that their parents did not tell them which "track" (i.e. major) to choose for their studies. In general, the students varied in terms of feeling some degree of pressure from their parents to do well academically and to achieve a particular career or professional credential. The students felt they should do well, but their motivation to keep up with their studies was the result of a balance of parents' wishes, personal pressure, and classroom/school atmosphere, topics I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter. The general sense among my students was that most Ladakhi parents had realistic expectations; few students felt they would truly struggle to fulfill their parents' expectations. However, they also believed that greater pressures or attempts to control children's academic trajectories did occur to some extent among some of their peers who were from Leh town families.

More commonly, however, hypothetical parents similar to Dorje's father sometimes were put forth as explanations for unusual and tragic circumstances. For example, during the Spring of 2012, a suicide occurred at one of the schools in which I worked. The student was a girl in Class VII, and was not personally known by any of my students. They informed me that the general theory being discussed was that she had a bad relationship with her parents, and that she was struggling academically, presumably a component of the problems she had with her parents. Whatever the actual scenario which led to her suicide, an overarching moral narrative

about parents' roles in children's studies permeated the gossip that surrounded this tragedy: children needed supportive, understanding parents, and too much competitive academic pressure from parents could drive a child to take her own life.

After spending more time in Ladakh with a variety of children and families, I would argue that much of the talk about overbearing parents is actually drawing on a broader narrative of criticism about India's middle class parents, rather than closely reflective of commonplace Ladakhi parent-child relationships. Looking at the typical daily lives of children and teens, it is clear that most have a comfortable amount of free time to play, watch television, do extracurricular activities of various types ranging from sports to theater, and help out around the house. Such practices call into question popular concerns about extreme parental pressures, because there is little indication of these practices being a part of most Ladakhi families, especially to the extent as what one hears about some middle class Indian parents who send children to so much extra tutoring and classes that they spend 10-12 hour days in classrooms studying and memorizing. These examples represent extremes which are used as moralistic codes in general, and in the specific context of Ladakh, represent aspects of concern about what might become of Ladakhi society if these behaviors go unchecked.

Student Motivation

As typical parents were not directly involved in the day-to-day activities of their children's schoolwork and studying, I observed that children did take responsibility for their studies, and did not need parents to hover over them in order to get their work done. Self-direction is necessary for both those with uneducated parents as well as those with more education, if they are to stay motivated and succeed in school. The pattern of self-motivation is socialized through parents' lack of direct involvement due to not feeling knowledgeable enough

to assist students and the cultural notion that schoolwork and learning are the responsibility of children, a mutually reinforcing system which delineates the ways that the different parties should be held responsible for children's education. However, as discussed above, Ladakhis also explained motivated, studious behavior as the result of a child's inherent characteristics and inclinations, because the reality is that some students study more effectively, are more attentive in class, and ultimately score better than others.

While there is variation in extent to which they struggle with different subjects, how well they perform on exams, and in their learning styles, all of the students I worked with were motivated enough to want to at minimum pass their exams well enough to be able to go on to higher education. Some of the younger students I worked with, the handful in Classes VI and VIII, were certainly less serious about the future implications of their studies, reflecting general attitudes I observed over the course of my research that after Class VIII, academics begin to feel much more serious and consequential. I found that much of the pressure to succeed among my students was self-imposed and reinforced through socialization at school. I noticed students put expectations on themselves, and sometimes they also talked about feeling pressure from their teachers. For the vast majority, when it came to students' experiences with actual repercussions to not doing well academically, they spoke specifically about punishment from teachers and other authoritative figures at school, but rarely about that of parents. Students' moral systems helped to motivate them through their studies by layering the beliefs about respecting their parents and thus not squandering educational opportunities, with in-school socialization towards being a good student, the Ladakhi importance of education as prerequisite to being a meaningful member of society, and individual concerns about needing to have a job as an adult so that they could support their families and society.

Ladakhi moral conceptions of parents' and children's responsibilities and practices can be summed as follows. Parents' financial provisioning for children's education was a moral imperative; parents putting too much pressure on their children and using their performance to compete with other parents were behaviors seen as a moral ill. In the ideal framework, good parents were those who were able to provide education and work in conjunction with their children—who have their own inclinations towards career paths as well as strengths and weaknesses in their studies. Good children were obedient, cooperative, and motivated; they made the most of their academic opportunities. And of course, both parents and children should also know that at a spiritual level, there would always be experiences and events outside of anyone's control.

CONSTRAINTS ON ACADEMIC AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Among most of the students with whom I worked in the after-school groups, their parents' lack of cultural capital negatively impacted their understandings of higher education and the job market they planned to enter in the not-too-distant future. Parents with even high school educations sometimes did not seem to be able to advise their children in meaningful ways about their future educational and career trajectories. I came to understand that many parents chose their children's higher education institutions based on word-of-mouth, and often followed the decisions of relatives or trusted family friends who had children of similar age or slightly older. If other Ladakhi students commonly attended a college or university, and particularly if it was a place where a child's siblings or cousins currently attend or recently finished, it was likely to be the choice of parents, who otherwise knew little more about how to appraise the quality of a higher education institution.

Because of their parents' limited knowledge and exposure, there was a dearth in teens' knowledge of the processes through which educational pathways result in certain types of jobs, and, as would be expected, this was a particular issue among students who were the first generations in their families to regularly attend school. Without prior socialization through family experiences, youth were not certain about all of their options for higher education, how to think about education in terms of a strategic investment, or how certain educational choices might improve their ability to secure a job when they entered the highly competitive labor market. The Indian higher education system makes higher education choices particularly problematic for Ladakhi teenagers who do not have clear advice and guidance, because students need to choose their focus at the very beginning of entrance to a college or university. Choosing pathways at this point, that will track them into particular careers, is quite difficult for students who have uneducated parents, and very little socialization towards professions and the contemporary job market.

Because they cannot get such information from their parents or other adult relatives—all of whom would normally be sought out in situations where guidance for major life decisions is needed—numerous students who were in Classes IX and X during my initial research have asked me for advice about higher education choices and careers during my return visits to Ladakh when they were in Classes XI and XII. These conversations demonstrated that there was a lack of information about how to enter the professional world, what college or university would be like, as well as alternative forms of education such as vocational training. For example, one boy, Tsering, asked me for advice during my research visit in 2013, when he was in Class XI and studying in the non-medical science track. He wanted to know if I thought he should study computer engineering for his bachelor's degree, because he heard it was a growing field, and

therefore might give him better job prospects. Up until this point, Tsering had been aiming to study mechanical engineering, something he had been exposed to in his science classes and had greatly interested him. Knowing this, I asked him what he knew about computer engineering. He said he knew very little—Ladakhi students learn basic computer literacy (mostly from textbooks) as part of a general technology curriculum in secondary school. Tsering did not know what computer engineers actually do in their work, the industry more broadly, or how he could learn about these things before selecting an area of study for higher education. He was trying to make a decision without having resources to access more complete information about these possible career paths, and was not even sure who might be able to give him advice because such industries are so small in Ladakh.

Similarly, some of the older teenage students from less educated families also did not know about the feasibility of their goals and plans, because their parents had little knowledge of higher education systems and there was no other socialization method for this kind of information. One boy from a rather poor rural family, Nawang, wanted to attend an Indian military university and become an officer (similar to the process of education and officer training followed by service at the U.S. Universities like West Point and the Naval Academy) seemed, in Classes X and XI, to be certain he would pursue that pathway. It would be ideal for him because the military would pay for all aspects of the higher education; otherwise it seemed his family would not be able to afford a university. However, when I met him in 2014 and he was in Class XII, he had learned that his scores on the military university's entrance exams would have to be extremely high, because the school is extraordinarily competitive. An elite and highly respected institution, applicants from wealthy Indian families spend additional time and money during their secondary school years attending tutoring to keep their grades up and to be coached specifically

for this school's entry exam. His parents did not have the means to pay for these exam preparation classes, which in fact are not even offered in Leh district. After learning this information, he had become very uncertain of what his plan would be after completing Class XII. He thought that perhaps he would be able to work as a laborer during school holidays and combine his earnings with his parents' meager resources to afford a non-military college education, but that was his only idea at the time.

In the Spring of 2015, Nawang sent me a message through Facebook, asking for my help. We had been in touch the previous year and I had supplied a small amount of funds to help him pay for "tuition" classes during the winter break, so that he could perform well in his final Class XII exams, despite not knowing what he would or could do next. By the time he wrote me, he had found out he passed the exams, and decided to try for a level of direct military recruitment that was higher than basic enlistment since he now had two additional years of education beyond the minimum requirement. But there were so many applicants, all with his same credentials, that he needed connections if he were to have any hope of getting past the first phase of the application process. So, he wrote to be requesting that I talk to Ladakhis who I knew and who were better connected, in hopes of getting a good word put in.

Since Nawang was from a rather poor family who lived a quite far from Leh, I had decided the previous year to introduce him to my "family" with whom I often lived during my research and return visits to Leh, and whom I trusted. I explained to the father of this family that this boy was the most needy of all my students, but I wanted to encourage him and give him a "leg up" if possible, because he was an honest and hard worker who ultimately wanted to do what he could to eventually be able to help his family. I asked my Leh family to be a contact for him, simply if he needed advice or a trustworthy adult to help out if he had any problems. It was

understood not to be a financial arrangement, but just one to give him a social connection, as that was what was feasible (my Leh family was of average means and also currently supporting their own children's education). My family occasionally gave him vegetables from their garden, and at my request checked on his studies and made sure he was attending the tuition classes that I had helped pay for. I essentially tried to help him have a little more social capital along with a connection of local adult accountability, though I knew that it was still minimal. When he contacted me this year, he begged me to ask the father of that family to try to put in a good word for him with his contact in the military (a cousin of some sort who was a mid-range officer). The father has neither close political ties nor finances to have significant influence, but he is known as a respectable and trustworthy member of the local community. The father said he would talk to someone he knew, and see if he could help, but he did not have the kind of clout that could guarantee a favor. In the end, Nawang did get through to the next round and was very grateful to both of us. Whether it was enough to make a difference in his life is yet to be seen.

DISCUSSION

With the reality being that there is no complete or total control of outcomes, and that parents are disempowered from social fields that could help children succeed, children learn that they have responsibilities for their own success within a framework of what is feasible given karmic and mundane barriers. In the Ladakhi ideal view, children should do all they can to personally work towards the goal of academic success that will lead them to a lucrative career. Though limited, parents do have roles and responsibilities as well, particularly in terms of providing their children access to education. Both parties are aware of the expectations and limitations of parents, and that even with the best efforts, nothing is certain. The students with

whom I worked had developed their own motivational practices. They had learned fairly early on that they needed to be responsible for doing homework and studying the material they would be tested on, and that exam scores were an important part of the pathway to the success they hoped for and to making the most of their parents' efforts in providing education. They showed they knew they had agency in terms of motivation and studying though also saw limitations in their experience of inherent traits, which seemed to make academics easier for some students than others.

Ultimately, the biggest constraints on children are those passed on directly by their family situation as well as ethnic marginality—such as lack of access to elite Indian institutions making it near impossible for them to compete at the highest levels of Indian careers. Also, they are additionally constrained in that they can not get the advice, guidance, and socialization needed to know how to pursue a successful pathway, because their parents and many Ladakhi adults have little relevant experience and knowledge. Such constraints prevent both parents and children limits their ability to make well-informed decisions and fully take action in influencing their future careers because they must make educational and professional decisions based on incomplete and unavailable information.

With regards to agency, we see parents act on an experience of distinct limits to their ability to take influential actions in regards to their children's educational outcomes. Due to both spiritual and mundane constraints, they stick to financial provisioning, leaving teaching to professionals in the classroom and learning to children's efforts. Some aspects of the situation are ascribed to karma and the inability to control things like financial situation and a child's traits. Others constraints are easier to quantify—parents with little or no education cannot help with schoolwork and can do little in the way of advisement in career paths. In fact, these parents

do not (nor their children) control the fundamental economic levers that could make education pay off in the ways that they hope for; average parents and children can do little if anything to affect the job market in their region, nor to bring lucrative industries to Ladakh. Like others who are poor or excluded in India, Ladakhi parents share a sense of weakness or powerlessness vis-à-vis the wider socio-political contexts they encounter in everyday life. Thus, they shift responsibility for school success towards their children, continuing to socialize the next generation to understand both the importance of actions as well as the ways that agency is constrained for all Ladakhis, and more so for those with less education, money, and experience with education and jobs. The issues of these constraints, and the ways in which they act to reproduce social and economic inequalities, will be considered in future depth in Chapter Six.

TRADITION AND DEVELOPMENT: THE PARADOXES OF BEING A 21ST CENTURY LADAKHI

INTRODUCTION

Through my research, I found that children grow up seeking to embody the markers of developed, modern persons through gaining an education, while also striving to honor “tradition” and to identify wholeheartedly as Ladakhis. In order to analyze how children manage such seemingly divergent commitments, this chapter explores what “development” and “tradition”—ideas in common use among both Ladakhis and others—mean in Ladakh, and how these ideas and their associated narratives shape everyday practices. The chapter is divided into three parts. First, I detail economic development perspectives and their relevance to Ladakh, with particular attention to views on education. I emphasize the non-Ladakhi foundations first and then begin to unpack local Ladakhi configurations of development narratives. The second part of the chapter focuses on critiques of development, beginning with broad scholarship and then focusing on particular iterations that concern Ladakh. I discuss how self-described “anti-development” proponents who are not Ladakhi have shaped an alternative narrative of Ladakhi culture and heritage that advocates for a higher valuation of “tradition,” and then discuss the ways in which such ideas have also become present in local views. Throughout these sections, I present data from children and adults on their usage or integration of narratives of both development and tradition.

In the final part of the chapter, I analyze how these perspectives take on meaning and importance for children, and how they are practiced as well as negotiated in children's everyday lives. Development and tradition provide an important layer of ideological and practical experience to Ladakhi children's everyday lives, as they negotiate the need for academic achievement in order to become educated persons while also shaping their cultural identities as Ladakhis. Such negotiation happens within recently changed social context, one that their parents may not be able to relate to because they did not spend so much of their childhoods in academic pursuits. Just as many parents do not have a great deal of influence in seeing to their children's educational success, thereby leaving the responsibility for learning to children, when it comes to developing a Ladakhi identity, children are the ones active in determining what it means to be Ladakhi and to become an educated person.

THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Scholars generally consider the modern global project of "economic development" to have begun after the end of the Second World War, in a context of rebuilding, but also one of reasserting power within a greatly changed geopolitical landscape. Truman's inaugural speech is often cited as foundational to the shaping of the Western global development enterprise (Truman 1949). In it, he called for American efforts to be directed towards development of the "primitive" peoples of the world, characterizing them as poor, suffering, and victims in need of democracy and industrialization. Truman asserted that more advanced nations should be involved in international development efforts because such development would in turn have positive repercussions on other nations' peace and prosperity. He stated: "All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world's human

and natural resources. Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically” (Truman 1949). Using terms with positive connotations in the West—democracy, prosperity, and peace—Truman’s speech established the framework for justifying U.S. and other Western nations’ involvement in and molding of newly emerging nations through supporting their “development.” While the specific goals and priorities of development policies have shifted over the decades, efforts at development today still rely on these assumptions for the overarching logic of involvement in other nation’s affairs. The founding of the World Bank after WWII also contributed to shaping the global development agenda, with its broad goal of raising the standard of living through loans to “developing” countries.

Development in practice meant building and enlarging transportation and technological infrastructures, expanding populations’ access to medical facilities, schools, and basic necessities, and broadening the industrial and productive capabilities of nations, often in their infancy after the end of colonial rule. Following this global push for development, from the beginning of India’s establishment as an independent nation in 1947, development was a major concern of the new government and its leaders. Raising the standard of living in India meant improving the nation’s economic potential, abolishing discriminatory traditions, provisioning the population with adequate food and medical care, raising the literacy rate, and creating democratic systems of representation and governance.

Education and Development

The worldwide development project has encouraged formal institutionalized education as a marker of progress and modernization, a project that is portrayed as crucially connected to enabling economic advancement as well as to improving the health of populations. Policy-

makers and development advocates emphasize schooling as critical to economic development, and there is much research presenting the potential of mass education to lead to positive economic outcomes both for individuals and for society (e.g. Dréze and Sen 2002, Hanushek and Wößmann 2007, LeVine et al. 2012:15). The frameworks for studying these problems have typically involved a top-down, macro-level approach, with much less attention to everyday experiences of those who are recipients of interventions and those whose lives are engulfed by the associated social changes. Encouraged by the research of economists, a resolution, adopted in 1960 by the UN, prioritized education for the international development agenda (Resnik 2006). At the time, the importance of education in realizing economic development and diminishing poverty was an unproven theory, but the regular reiteration that education's crucial role in improving economies led to acceptance of this theory as fact. An influential World Bank report from 1980 reported evidence of a connection between education and improvement of major health concerns—especially related to infants and women's reproductive health—and the findings resulted in higher policy prioritization of mass schooling, and with a particular emphasis on girls' and women's education (LeVine et al. 2012:15). According to LeVine et al., that general pattern of priorities still dominates economic development policy, with “UNICEF, the World Bank, and many other international organizations and governmental donor agencies giving priority to the expansion of women's educational opportunities in the poorer developing countries as they continue the initiatives called Education for All and Millennium Development Goals” (2012:15).

Assumptions about the positive economic outcomes of education remain prominent in many spheres of development policy and work, despite a dearth of evidence. Recent research has described the education-development link as a “black box” in dire need of exploration if not

thorough re-thinking (Resnik 2006, McGrath 2010). According to McGrath (2010), a specialist in international education and development, economists continue to utilize the assumption of a causative link of education and economic development in their work. Encouraging an alternative approach that would consider more variables and not assume a causative relationship, he writes, most scholars of international and comparative education “would probably be fairly comfortable with the argument that there is a relationship between education and development, although they would disagree about its tightness and directionality” (McGrath 2010:248). Despite concerns about increasing unemployment and the problem that many developing economies have not added the jobs necessary to match their increasingly educated populations (discussed in detail in the next section), the idea that education is central to development remains a pervasive common-sense assumption in much development policy and investment:

The belief that education is important in development is most visibly symbolized at present by the focus of two Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on education. It is undergirded theoretically by the continued power of human capital theory and its adaptations to the era of the ‘global knowledge economy’. Education (or often lifelong learning) has been ascribed policy importance north and south as a tool for promoting international competitiveness and social inclusion. [McGrath 2010:237]

Backwards Ladakh in Need of Development

Ladakh is just one many regions of the world today in “need” of development. In the development perspective, Ladakh fits within the description of a pre-modern, needy place with problems such as illiteracy, poverty, limited access to amenities such as plumbing and electricity, and lack of infrastructure needed for expanding economic outputs. The majority of Ladakhis are members of “Scheduled Tribes,” an official minority category. India’s government has a type of “affirmative action” system that provides certain groups with access to institutions, jobs, welfare provisions, and political representation; such minorities are classified as “Scheduled Tribes,”

“Scheduled Castes,” and “Other Backward Classes.”³⁰ Such a status marks members as far behind on the scale of progress and thus justifies their need for government assistance and special accommodations. From the perspective of development, “Ladakh must be seen as backward, poor, and marginal” (van Beek 2000b:257).

The use of the English term “backward” to describe communities or regions that lack development markers, especially education and modern understandings of the world, is common in India and comes from British modes of characterizing India’s varied populations (van Beek 2000a). The term, which Ladakhis commonly use in English, denotes a complex of ideas—I have heard it used to describe people who lack education, ways of living that are unhygienic or otherwise ill-informed, practices and beliefs that are seen in modern perspectives as unethical, immoral, or injurious, as well as places that lack development infrastructures like roads, electricity, or telephone service. Of relevance here is the common knowledge and usage of the term “backward” to denote people, practices, ideas, or places as having primitive characteristics, in opposition to the traits of the developed world.

While development as a national project has been a central concern for India’s rural regions since the 1950s, the Ladakh region and its people became more engulfed by direct development interventions in the 1970s. During that decade, the military established a permanent presence, and the region was opened to tourism. Military logistical needs due to border disputes with China and Pakistan, and, by the late 1970s, a growing tourism industry, lead to a greater

³⁰ India’s constitution outlines provisions and protections for people of these categories, in article 46, “Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections,” and articles 330-342, “Part XVI: Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes” (The Constitution of India).

prioritization of development of Ladakh's transportation and communications infrastructures. By the 1980s, tourism and the military bases were meaningful sources of cash flow within Ladakh. Increasing numbers of Ladakhis gained the means to purchase goods; more generally, the economic and infrastructural impacts improved various aspects of everyday life and thus framed "development" in a positive light for Ladakhis.

Ongoing government development efforts in Ladakh include the building of schools, roads, hydroelectric plants, communications infrastructure, health centers, immunization campaigns, water pumps, and food subsidies. In addition, the state and national governments sponsor awareness and promotional campaigns that are targeted to the social welfare concerns of India's many rural areas, including Ladakh. For example, there was a campaign under way in 2011 that sought to increase gender parity in schooling (although it has not been a problem in Ladakh for many years). The government has also promoted the benefits of seeking pre- and post-natal biomedical healthcare in its hospitals, as well as having sought to disseminate methods to improve agricultural, horticultural, and animal husbandry practices. As India's economy has liberalized, technological access has improved greatly in Ladakh thanks to private businesses expanding their offerings to the region—in everyday life this means choice in mobile phone and satellite television service providers, with government support making the cost surprisingly accessible.

Starting in the 1970s, the tourists (mainly from Western nations, until the 2000s when domestic tourism rose significantly) who enjoyed their time in Ladakh met local people who lived very simply, and therefore appeared to have great needs from the perspectives of outsiders. Foreign tourists sometimes turned into donors of all kinds, as they still do today. Some became individual patrons of families, sponsoring children's schooling. Others founded NGOs, which

brought their international development organizations to the region to improve on the lives of Ladakhis. Such social welfare organizations implemented programs or provided short-term interventions aiming to help out Ladakhis through various forms of “assistance.”³¹ By the late 1990s, NGOs from abroad as well as from wealthier regions of India were commonplace in Ladakh, spanning a wide variety of social welfare foci; some have been ephemeral, while a handful have had sustained involvement. NGOs that steadily operate in Ladakh today often have some degree of local involvement, or have turned over their local administration entirely to Ladakhis; many have become locally run but remain internationally funded. Further, the 2000s saw an increase in non-Ladakhi Indian NGO involvement, particularly because the welfare of poorer minorities and the ecological concerns of the regions in which they live have become greater concerns among middle-class Indians.

The efforts of the government in promoting development have combined with a constant international presence of well-meaning actors from the developed world. Thus, by the second decade of the 21st century, economic development and associated ideas about progress and needs are thoroughly woven into Ladakhis’ everyday lives. In this section, I have focused on external, non-indigenous perspectives on Ladakh’s needs and problems, and summarized the development interventions that have stemmed from these perspectives. However, Ladakhis are also active in imagining what development means, in desiring and initiating development projects, as well as

³¹ A few examples of recent projects that I have encountered or heard about from participants: an ice hockey camp for youth, a special education school for children with cognitive disabilities, rural health education, emergency medical training for trekking guides, dental clinics among nomad communities, training in mental health screening for rural health workers, renovation of schools and boarding hostels, anti-rabies and sterilization programs for street dogs, restoration of heritage sites, and provision of more efficient technologies for agricultural tasks.

in questioning or rejecting ideas associated with development. I begin to address these perspectives in the next two sections, focusing on what development means to and for children.

Education for Ladakh's Development

Among Ladakhis, education is considered a central social feature of development, and a perspective that is enforced by the government as well as other concerned parties. The view is that development cannot occur without education; a developed economy requires educated citizens who can work in modern sectors, and the occupants of a developed region are mainly educated people. Slogans about the importance of education for society can be found in government schools, as these examples from the boarding school in Changtang region demonstrate.

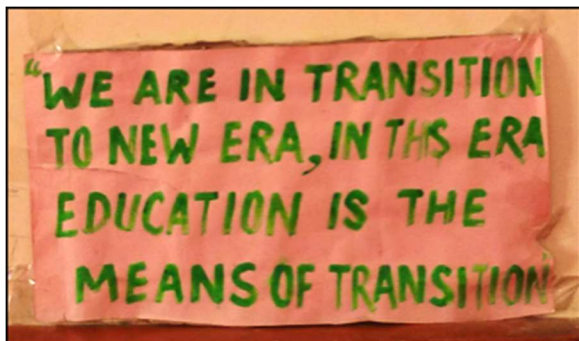


FIGURE 5-1: Hand-painted sign in Changtang area government school.
"We are in transition to new era, in this era education is the means of transition."

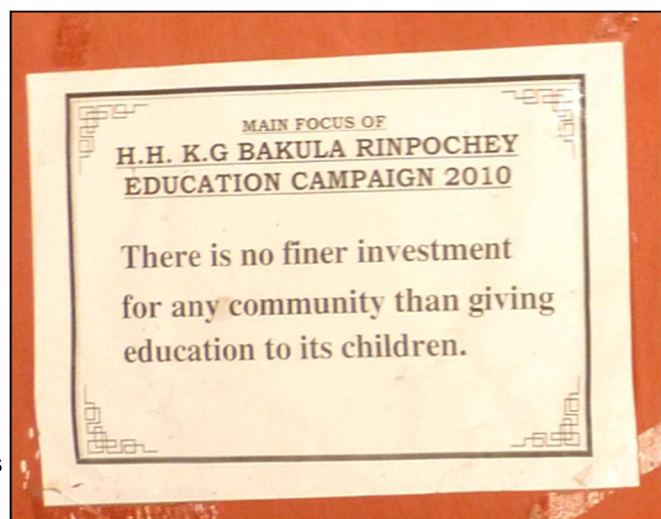


FIGURE 5-2: Sign in Changtang area government school from education campaign.
"There is no finer investment for any community than giving education to its children."

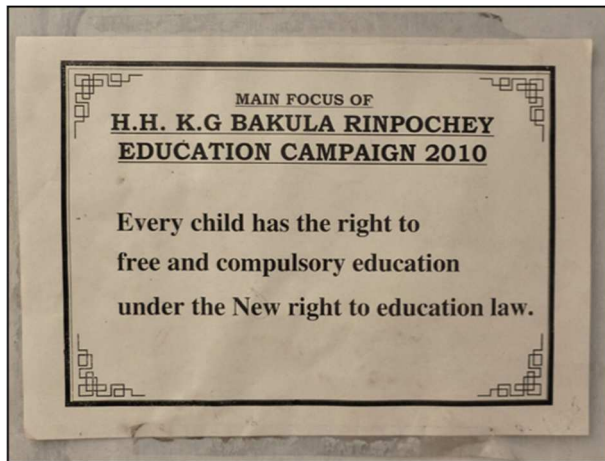


FIGURE 5-3: Sign in Changtang area government school from education campaign. "Every child has the right to free and compulsory education under the New right to education law."



FIGURE 5-4: Handmade sign in Changtang area government school, above hallway window. "Education is the Back Bone of Society."

Changtang is an area of the eastern portion of Leh district, and the majority of inhabitants are nomad groups that herd pashmina goats and yaks. It is the least developed area of the district, roads in and out of the Changtang are unpaved and very rough, and life is quite difficult given

the higher altitude at which people reside here (usually around 14-15 thousand feet above sea level) in contrast to other parts of Leh district (e.g. Leh town is around 11 thousand feet).

Though this school had a particularly high frequency of display of these messages compared to other schools I visited, I found that children from all types of schools in both town and village areas to be well aware of these ideas and attitudes, and often used similar themes in their explanations and understandings. Developmentalist ideas are prevalent in explanations of education, and vice versa. The quick association with economic betterment in narratives about the importance of education demonstrates that these ideas are widespread.

The local government utilizes the revered legacy of Kushok Rinpoche Bakula to reinforce the importance of education for the development of Ladakhi society. Each November, the government-sponsored Kushok Bakula Rinpoche Memorial Education Campaign holds special events throughout the district, which stress the importance of education for all of Ladakh's people and for the advancement of their society. As discussed previously, Kushok Bakula Rinpoche was a highly respected Ladakhi of noble birth, a reincarnated lama, and later a statesman. Despite only having been educated in Tibetan Buddhism, he saw secular education as vital to the future of Ladakhi society. As both a venerated religious practitioner and a representative to the government for Ladakh, he bridged what may have otherwise been a paradoxical split between the religious and modern world. He did not view the two as opposed and instead saw the maintenance of Ladakhi heritage as requiring future generations to be educated, so that they would be equipped to make decisions and engage with the rest of the country and world in ways that would improve their society.³²

³² Kushok Bakula Rinpoche is certainly not the only Tibetan Buddhist leader to embrace the “modern” and non-

Ladakhis do not view such involvement of the spiritual world in the secular as problematic. In fact, the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA), initially founded in the 1930s, has as its overarching goal the support and preservation of Ladakh's Buddhist heritage and institutions. One of the LBA's major successes in the 20th century was getting the Ladakhi language included in the standard government curriculum of schools. The written form of the language, which uses the Tibetan alphabet, was typically only taught to monks; thus this is not a revitalization but actually a substantial broadening of access to literacy in the indigenous language (The 33rd Kalachakra Organising Committee 2014). Thus, education as a component of development has been promoted through both spiritual and secular perspectives, giving Ladakhis a solid foundation upon which to pursue it.

Ladakhi Children's Views of "Development"

Ladakhis themselves are readily aware of development and how the developmentalist paradigm constructs their lifestyles. "Development" is a social fact through which Ladakhis view themselves and their progress towards modern ways of living and being, and through which children set aspirations. Ladakhis are also aware that others view them through the lens of development, and often consider how Westerners or other developed societies would view Ladakhi homes, schools, and society. I follow Klenk's suggestion that:

[by] examining how people constituted as the supposed 'targets' of development

indigenous. The Dalai Lama is well known for his combined political and spiritual leadership after his exile, and for building a government that offers resources to its Tibetan refugees that seek to preserve tradition and also address the needs of modern life. Also, in my previous research on disability, I found that reincarnated Ladakhi lamas had given parents advice that included, for example, use of modern western biomedicine.

creatively receive, negotiate, and re-present development's categories to make sense of their day-to-day experiences, it is possible to learn something new about what the micro processes of development and the desire to become developed mean in a specific context. [2003:101]

With so much talk about development swirling around, Ladakhi young people have formed their ideas of what it means, often in terms of things they see and criticize. "What does development mean?" I often inquired of youth throughout the project, after they had used the term with the assumption of a common definition. These children typically used the English term "development," but then had trouble defining it. When pressed, a meaning of development I heard frequently from students was the single term "facilities," or a slightly more elaborate "good facilities." This term is in common use in Indian English. What they meant, as I came to learn, was that "facilities" are structures, spaces, access, and comforts that enable modern pursuits. For example, some students in one of the after-school tutorial groups informed me that their school needed more and better facilities. Specifically, they saw need for more computers and science laboratory equipment, along with the infrastructure to utilize the technologies, such as regular electricity, internet connectivity, running water, and qualified teachers.

Children in focus groups also often brought up the lack of good "facilities" in their schools. When I asked them to expand, they explained there was a need for two types of improvements. First, they wanted to see improvements to physical buildings, such as better insulation against cold, electrical lighting in classrooms, and more comfortable desks and chairs. Second, they wanted expansion or addition to spaces in which they learned, such as new buildings with science lab rooms, computer access, and larger classrooms. These ideas related in some cases simply to lack of student comfort, and in other cases to a feeling of having low-quality school spaces in comparison to some unspoken ideal. The prevalence of narratives of wanting better facilities is likely derived in comparison to accounts from others who had studied

outside of Ladakh as well as what they children often saw on TV and in movies. It is also likely they are aware of the narrative through local political campaigns, as better educational facilities for the region are undoubtedly a part of every politician's platform.

Schools were also more comfortable subjects of specific critique by students as opposed to their own homes. They did not speak in front of groups or in written work I assigned about their homes lacking facilities, though I know many of them did believe this was a problem. When I visited individual homes of the students, they apologized readily and for lacking plumbing, old-style buildings, and generally for things perceived to be dirty or uncomfortable to someone presumably accustomed to modern comforts of the developed world. Students commonly wrote and spoke about aspirations for adulthood that included nice homes, a subtler way in which they addressed the perceived current lack of facilities in many of their homes. Schools, however, were social goods provisioned either by the government as a right to citizens, or by private organizations for which they paid tuition. Either way, children knew it was thoroughly acceptable to criticize them publicly in ways that referenced the lack of development and modern amenities.

Children also sometimes talked about development as a need throughout the region and in society more broadly. In many of the focus groups, as well as during our conversations after school, I asked them to tell me about what they believed were problems in Ladakh. A very common answer was that Ladakh lacked development or needed more development. As I stated previously, they had trouble defining it, but many gave examples in lieu of a definition. Examples of development needs often included things related to transportation infrastructure (better roads, and solutions to the problem of mountain roads to and from the Ladakh that are impassible during the winter), broader concerns about education (such as the need for a

university in the region that offered science and medical tracks for bachelor's degrees), and technological needs (especially electricity and internet connectivity). Ultimately, the comparison of Ladakhi spaces to those of developed, modern, advanced spaces (whether in terms of learning, living, moving around, or making a living) was common in these discussions. Students were clearly socialized to know how their spaces (especially those, like schools, that were crucial to the development of modern identity and personhood) stacked up (or mainly, did not stack up) in light of the ideals of development.

An influence from development perspectives is also seen in the use of the English term “education,” which means education in school, not the imparting of traditional knowledge. Grandparents are uneducated and illiterate; the fact that they know so much about their animals and their farms doesn't amount to “education” as it is called in Ladakh. Throughout India, similar narratives are widespread and common in everyday life, and they bolster the importance of schooling and becoming educated, and reinforce the negative views of those who do not go to school (C. Jeffrey et al. 2008). Craig Jeffrey and colleagues explain:

In the post-colonial era, narratives of upward mobility through formal education have proliferated. The media have often been at the forefront of this process, depicting educated people as confident, well mannered and adept and the uneducated as the opposite. The state, educational entrepreneurs and development agencies have been no less bold in their ideological work. [2008:68]

I noticed that, unlike parents who were willing to disparage themselves in terms of their lack of education as discussed in Chapter Three, children followed with that same general line of thinking but never used such insulting phrases when talking about people (commonly their elders) who were uneducated.

Children demonstrated to me that they were aware of the idea that certain practices were backwards, and that they wanted to distinguish themselves and their people from such

associations and instead project that they were developed. For example, in one writing assignment, I asked the students to choose from a variety of images that I had cut out from a stack of old popular and news magazines. I separated the images from any text that had initially accompanied them, and asked the students to pick one image to write a fictional story about in pairs. One set of Class X girls selected a picture of a village scene, presumably from another part of India. The image portrayed a small outdoor event where acrobats were performing for a group of people, in front of some hut-like structures. The people were dressed simply and the locale appeared to be low-income and rural. The girls wrote a narrative about a village, introducing it as a place where “people are narrow minded,” and where there are no “education facilities, medical facilities, food facilities.” They titled their essay “Rules Against Women” and detailed the locale:

In this village womens does not have any rights. The villagers get their girl child marriage at young age. This is also called child marriage. Mans are much older than the women. At the young age they born babies it makes them responsible and weak at young age. The girl parents thought that should marry their girl as soon as possible. If the girl husband died the women should suffer a widow life or she has to jump into the fire, which is a tradition called Sati. In this way they suffer a lot.

We had never discussed social issues like this during our after-school sessions, and the issues these girls wrote about are not part of present-day Ladakhi society. These views were derived from narratives presented in schools, on television, and other media outlets that promoted developed views of equality in schooling and of individual human rights. The girls not only showed that they had been paying attention, but that they agreed with the mainstream view of practices such as child marriage as unethical and medically risky, and showed themselves to be set apart from such cultures and ways of life.

At the end of my stay in 2012, I asked one of the groups of students what they wanted the world to know about Ladakh. One boy raised his hand and said, “Ma’am, tell them we are not backward. Tell them Ladakhis are going outside [of Ladakh] to get educated and going on to do

great things, in Ladakh especially. Ladakhis are becoming very educated and doing a lot to help their society.” The other teens agreed that this was a good representation. In this statement, the boy cited criteria that fit within broader discourses on progress and social advancement. He was aware of what people might think of Ladakhis and their rural “traditional” society, living in a place that seems very cut-off, remote, even stuck in the past. The teens wanted to counter views of Ladakhis as backward, illiterate, unknowing, simple people, but not to the point of apologizing for their own ethnic identity or the limitations of the place in which they grew up. In doing so, they also acknowledged a sense of critique of modernity as well, showing they did not simply believe everything in Ladakh needed to change or modernize but rather that Ladakhis were as capable as any peoples of being an educated and developed society.

DEVELOPMENT AS THE PROBLEM

Of course, development is not a neutral concept or practice, and critiques of development abound. Within anthropology, critical perspectives have focused on “all that Development conceals—especially strategies of power” (Mosse 2013:229). Sachs summarizes the critique: “From the start, development’s hidden agenda was nothing else than the Westernization of the world” (Sachs 2010:xvii). In this view, the ideological roots of development are in the past projects of Colonialism and its portrayal of subject populations as backward while progress and civilization were defined by Western standards. In turn, the perceived needs of these societies helped to justify the expansion of Western European empires. While the colonial period has ended, many argue that the development project of the latter twentieth century and beyond is the latest form of empire (Escobar 2011).

Gronemeyer characterizes the modern practice of “helping”—a justification of

international development interventions—as an exercise in “elegant power”: a type of power that is “unrecognizable, concealed, supremely inconspicuous” (2010:55). In this view, international aid is a carefully calculated mode of control, because nations’ trajectories become increasingly bound up with global economic and political projects of power and wealth generation. Thus, help is “an instrument through which one can impose upon others the obligation of good conduct” (Gronemeyer 2010:56). Development maintains its dominance and easily spreads “because it connotes the best of intentions” and “allows any intervention to be sanctioned in the name of a higher goal” (Sachs 2010:xix).

Importantly, development shapes how people see themselves, especially those who are its subjects. Some two-thirds of the global population falls within this category of needing development. For these groups, “to think of development...requires first the perception of themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries” (Esteva 2010:3). Development “is a reminder of what they are not. It is a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition” (Esteva 2010:6). Through development, Euro-American norms have shaped the hegemonic frames through which cultural practices can be judged as positive and productive or lacking and backward. Even those most basic and taken-for-granted aspects of life such as what one needs to survive are defined according to mainstream Western standards. Development thus makes it into a fact that there are standard needs for living that should be sought after and prioritized. Indeed, economists have quantified the “standard of living” through a set of measures of material variables. One result of this standardization is that different “modes of living” become equated with “differences in levels of living” (Latouche 2010:280). Standard of living typically measures consumption and production of material goods on the market, so it does not take into account other, perhaps experiential, culturally specific, aspects of living that

might actually be very important for wellbeing (Latouche 2010:287).

Critiques of Education for Development

There is substantial scholarship that critiques western institutionalized education, arguing, for example, that schools reproduce socioeconomic hierarchy, denigrate local cultures, or act as a powerful arm of the state in controlling minorities (e.g. Bainton 2007, Kumasi 2011, Rival 1996, Willis 1977). Scholars from comparative and international education, anthropology, and cultural geography have focused on the everyday effects and implications of schooling on children and communities, and have provided ethnographic evidence that problematizes the development narrative that equates education with jobs, wealth, and better lives.

Anthropologists Levinson and Holland (1996) summarize some of the concerns raised by scholars regarding modern institutionalized schooling as it has spread throughout much of the world. Attending school, for example, can mean children from rural areas must leave their families and local communities, and which presents them from having opportunities to acquire local knowledge. Further, institutionalized schooling stresses the importance of knowledge and disciplines “that have currency and ideological grounding in wider spheres,” which often results in the denigration of local and traditional forms of knowledge and learning (Levinson and Holland 1996:1). Another concern is that schooling sets students on a pathway towards participation in formal economies, moving children, especially those from marginal indigenous groups, further away from their heritage. Schooling can “draw students into dominant projects of nationalism and capitalist labor formation, or bind them even more tightly to systems of class, gender, and race inequality” (Levinson and Holland 1996:1).

A concise example of these various critiques is found in Rival’s ethnographic research on children’s schooling among Huaorani hunter-gatherers in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Rival 1996).

The Ecuadorian government sought to increase education as part of a national project of economic development; a major goal of schooling was to “modernize its citizens’ views and ways” (Rival 1996:153). Rival found that in school, Huaorani children not only “learn to be modern,” but also that their local society is “deprived” and “backward” (Rival 1996:156). Rival argues that schools spurred substantial, and possibly negative, social change in encouraging sedentarization through valorizing agriculture and horticulture and denigrating subsistence through hunting and gathering, as well as requiring students to live in permanent settlements. In turn, Huaorani groups who embraced schooling became more reliant upon the state for goods and services, and less self-sufficient (Rival 1996).

Other angles of critique of mass education focus on educational inflation (also known as academic inflation), which describes the phenomenon of increases in the educated population in a society that lacks the matching jobs and economic opportunities for which education has prepared them (Dore 1976, see also LeVine and White 1986). For decades, social scientists attuned to culture and the complexities developing contexts have written about this worsening problem. For example, in their 1986 publication, LeVine and White described how the premise that education would lead to jobs and economic advancement “introduced grounds for hope” that any person could move up in this new kind of hierarchy, which contrasted to prior social systems where status was ascribed from birth (1986:193). They further explain:

The facts were (and are), however, that the chances of anyone from the bottom rising to the top through academic achievement are necessarily slight because the hierarchy is a pyramid with fewer places at the top, and the chances decrease over time as the supply of people educated to any particular level increases over successive birth cohorts in a society mobilizing for education. [LeVine and White 1986:193]

More recent research has added further evidence of the everyday consequences of educational inflation. Despite hopes, there is a troubling reality:

Education has failed to open up expanded employment and other substantive freedoms for young people across large swathes of the world. ...The global spread of images of success based on prolonged participation in schooling and subsequent entry into professional or white-collar work has encouraged parents and young men to invest time, money and effort in extended formal schooling. [C. Jeffrey et al. 2008:8]

The push for economic betterment and progress in post-colonial nations through education of children has resulted in widespread un- and under-employment among educated young adults.

Due to the lack of jobs, the meaning of educational credentials and the great deal of time they had spent at school must be re-interpreted by young people who became educated under a premise of economic betterment and opportunity. Craig Jeffrey and colleagues have conducted longitudinal research in rural northern India, focused on young men who are educated yet unemployed or underemployed (C. Jeffrey et al. 2004, C. Jeffrey et al. 2008, C. Jeffrey 2010). Instead of giving up on education, and viewing it as a bad investment, they found that young men crafted their social identities through their status of being educated, rather than by being employed professionals. They write that the young men they worked with had a strong “capacity to maintain images of themselves as ‘educated people’” through narratives that bolstered the value of education “as a form of cultural distinction” (C. Jeffrey et al. 2004:962-963). Further, men’s “strategies expose the extraordinary durability of local ideas of development (*vikas*) in the face of poor occupational outcomes” (C. Jeffrey et al. 2004:962). From cultural anthropology, Daniel Mains’ (2012) recent ethnography about educated unemployed young people in Ethiopia expands on some of these same themes, ultimately providing yet another locally-situated account of an increasingly common phenomenon wherein young adults must actively develop identities in the face of finding the promises of development and education unmet.

The great increase in schooling worldwide is the result of effective propagation of ideas about education’s potential to bring about economic advancement, combined with international

investment in mass education, which has greatly increased children's ability to readily access schools. The lack of economic opportunity that meets young people after completion of their education demonstrates the mismatch in economic policy shifts that took place over the period when global schooling was increasing rapidly. These ethnographies result in another type of critique, not of development per se, but of its failure to produce the desired and promised outcomes, due to foundational assumptions that put too much stock in the power of educational access to produce economic outcomes.

“Traditional” Ladakh – The Anti-development Narrative

On the other end of the spectrum, advocates have criticized education for the purpose of anti-development agendas. In addition to being framed by the national government and NGOs as the subjects of development, traditionalist and romantic narratives about their society—stemming from Western “anti-development” advocates—also play a role in Ladakhis' identity construction, politics, and economy. Anti-developmentalists position themselves in direct opposition to the ideologies and projects of development. In their view, Ladakh's contemporary “problems”—from pollution to moral decay—are the result of the outside world initiating unnecessary changes to a functional society. These negative influences on Ladakhi culture, ideas, and practices come through outsiders (tourists as well as media portrayals). Anti-development proponents have drafted Ladakhi involvement, and they have influenced popular Ladakhi ideas about being Ladakhi, being modern, and what is good for society and its people.

Romanticization of pre-modern Ladakh contributes to anti-developmentalists' critique of Ladakh's development. In literature and travel writing, the Himalayas and Tibet have been portrayed as other-worldly regions, decidedly cut-off from the “outside”; their societies characterized as living in peaceful harmony with nature and one another, exemplifying Buddhist

ideals. They are places where westerners become lost—for a while—only to depart as changed beings with deep insight into life and existence (see ch. 3, n. 2 for specific sources). In Ladakh as well as other tourist destinations across the Himalayas, it is common to find hotels, travel agencies, or restaurants named for “Shangri-La,” the mythical place in Hilton’s *Lost Horizon* where a lost (both geographically and spiritually) protagonist finds himself and meaning in life through Buddhist doctrine and practices, with the assistance of a retreat-like separation from the busy Western world (Hilton 1933).

Beyond the tourist industry and popular literature, more powerful in the everyday lives and regional politics of the contemporary Ladakh are the (what I term) “traditionalist” genre of non-fiction writings on Ladakh, by Europeans and North Americans, which have proliferated in the latter twentieth century. These works often lie on the borders of the scholarly and the popular, and incorporate pieces of fairly reliable knowledge about Ladakhi culture to support an anti-development polemic. Non-fiction anti-development writings praise a reified “traditional” Ladakh; they contrast a nostalgic portrayal of the pre-development/pre-modern past with a present society that has been damaged or destroyed by the agendas and projects of development. The “traditional” Ladakhi ways of life were functional, adaptive, and sustainable and therefore did not need to be “improved” upon, according to anti-development advocates. This perspective partially follows the critique of development presented by social science scholars including anthropologists, but diverges in that it idealizes the patterns and practices of traditional life that development has replaced or modified, and leaves little room for local perspectives on development and its complex realities.

Helena Norberg-Hodge, a long-time advocate of counter-development and localization, has been involved in promoting these ideas in Ladakh since the 1980s. The NGO she helped to

found, Local Futures/International Society for Ecology and Culture (ISEC), operates internationally to promote development alternatives that counter the perceived negative consequences of globalization, bolster local self-sufficiency, and preserve indigenous knowledge. Her popular book, *Ancient Futures: Lessons from Ladakh*, has been translated into nearly 40 languages and is still in print (Norberg-Hodge 1991). *Ancient Futures* uses Ladakh as a case to present the anti-development argument—that development promotes only certain ways of thinking and living, and results in a loss of local knowledge and subsistence patterns that are in fact highly efficient and sustainable. Norberg-Hodge is known to Ladakhi leaders for her advocacy in preservation of both traditional culture and the environment, and through her work, she has been influential in framing local debates about development as well as views of Ladakhi culture. ISEC has produced documentary films, the first, titled “Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh,” is based on the book of the same title, and a local branch of the NGO in Leh screens the film free of charge throughout the summer months in Leh, mainly marketed to tourists.

In the first part of the book *Ancient Futures*, Norberg-Hodge paints an idyllic portrait of “traditional” Ladakh; the information comes from her own experience in Ladakh beginning in the 1970s when the region was opened to foreign tourism (1991:94). In contrast to the western perspective [“the tourists...think Ladakhis are backward...To Western eyes, Ladakhis look poor” (1991:95)], Norberg-Hodge seeks to show the merits of Ladakhi society as it existed before outsiders intervened in the region in the 1970s. In her portrayal, “traditional” Ladakh was both ecological and socially sound and self-sustaining, with no significant problems or needs. Further, there was no waste, Ladakhis were self-reliant, and their subsistence methods were ecologically sustainable. She states that the people of traditional Ladakh had good physical and mental health, and they lived by positive social norms as well—communities had systems of

mutual aid and there was minimal inequality (Norberg-Hodge 1991).

In the second half of *Ancient Futures*, Norberg-Hodge takes on the Western hegemony of development and associated notions of progress as she has observed in Ladakh. She asserts, “The impact of tourism on the material culture has been wide-ranging and disturbing. Still more significant, however, has been its impact on people’s minds” (Norberg-Hodge 1991:93).

Norberg-Hodge characterizes Ladakh as undergoing a “cultural breakdown,” due to the influence of development and modernity (1991:139). She describes a variety of sources of negative change and cultural degradation. One is modern education, which “ignores local resources” and “makes Ladakhi children think of themselves and their culture as inferior” (Norberg-Hodge 1991:113). The projects of development lead to social ills such as greed, materialism, and malcontent, which, according to Norberg-Hodge, were not present in Ladakh before western involvement (1991).

Adult Ladakhis, many of whom (especially if they live in Leh and have been involved in the tourist industry and/or had dealings with NGOs and related outlets) have heard of or even met Norberg-Hodge, and are generally unlikely to directly criticize her as she has many local contacts, can speak Ladakhi, and holds Ladakhi culture and society in high regard. For children, Norberg-Hodge’s influence is still relevant in their socialization into a particular understanding of Ladakhi culture and the importance of its preservation, though to my knowledge they do not typically know her specifically, but simply know the ideas, which I further describe below.

Education as a Problem in Ladakh

From the field of international education studies, David Bainton, a scholar of international education, does not attempt to disguise his generally negative views of the impact of education on Ladakhi society. His dissertation critiques education in Ladakh and the

development paradigm (Bainton 2007). His work fits with some of the critiques of non-local education that have come from anthropologists and comparative/international education scholars, but goes further in that it also follows the anti-development perspective on Ladakh. Bainton describes a Ladakh that would be better off without development interventions—particularly schools—arguing that schools remove children from their homes, taking them away from the influence of their parents and home village community for much of the year (Bainton 2007). This is of course the case for rural families more so than town families, as rural families have more limited access to quality schools (most villages only have government schools). He cites young children’s sadness and loneliness in leaving their parents, and argues that on the larger scale, these arrangements are problematic because schools do not provide instruction in indigenous knowledge, nor are children encouraged to learn traditional ways of life and practices (Bainton 2007). Bainton’s analysis seems accurate because it appeals to a western sensibility, particularly concerns about global homogenization and the need to preserve unique, supposedly unadulterated, places and peoples.

Bainton’s (2007) research relies on too little information, making the data presented appear incomplete in light of my own findings. Considering his description of methods, this is perhaps the result of a lack of systematic data collection, a lack of representative sample population, and/or not enough time in the field to ensure validity. At any rate, Bainton also uses his data to make a political point: that schooling in Ladakh is bad for children and their families, and is ultimately de-stabilizing Ladakhi society. His portrayal fits neatly into anti-development narratives and aids their case against modernization and development of Ladakh. It is not that he is wrong on all fronts, but that he often only has a portion of the story. As I show later in this chapter, Ladakhi children (and adults) do have ambivalent views about some aspects of

schooling, and are indeed concerned with loss of tradition, but they also are even more concerned with gaining all they can through an educational system that they acknowledge is imperfect. Further, Ladakhis are also interested in finding ways to pass on and to learn “tradition” in conjunction with becoming modern educated persons, so in practice, “tradition” and the “modern” are not opposed.

A recent documentary film, “Schooling the World: The White Man’s Last Burden” was made by a group devoted to activism and raising awareness about the negative aspects of modern institutionalized schooling (Black 2010). While intended to address the issue as a global concern, the film focuses on Ladakh as a case to illustrate the point. The film provides an emotional account of how western education has trampled Ladakhi culture, language, and traditions; experts’ narratives (including that of Norberg-Hodge) interspersed throughout the film heighten the effect. For example, the film repeatedly shows footage of Ladakhi school children practicing for the annual national Independence Day festivities where they will compete in a “March Past.” But that context is never acknowledged. Instead, the footage shows children in their school uniforms, lined up in formation, performing coordinated marching, and thus gives the appearance of militarization. The filmmakers provide no explanation for these images, instead the footage is repeated throughout the film and used as a backdrop to the portrayal of how schooling has negatively impacted children from an otherwise peaceful and bucolic mountain society. In fact, the March Past is just one of a number of competitions held during Independence Day, others of which include Ladakhi songs, dances, and other performances that highlight children’s learning of “traditional” culture—none of which the film acknowledges.

These examples demonstrate how Ladakh has been continually subject to being romanticized by outsiders as a place that was once unconnected and separate, unique, and so

much better than the developed world, that any changes that signify something modern or new are brought to light within this discourse of loss and transformation to homogenization. These are not just westerners' discourses, unconnected to the experiences of Ladakhis. In fact Ladakhis engage with such idealistic perspectives regularly, making an understanding of the reality and nuance of the transformation that is occurring (and that which is not) that much more complicated. This is part of the reason why both Bainton (2007) as well as the makers of "Schooling the World" claim their evidence supports their assertions. In both cases, a handful of selective interviews with Ladakhis show locals agreeing with them: a child at a school's boarding hostel tells Bainton he misses his family, a young man tells the film makers that Ladakhis no longer speak "pure" Ladakhi.

In my own research, I also found that if I ask people about the loss of traditional culture, they would willingly tell me that it is indeed happening, that it is a problem, and that we should be concerned that children learn their culture, and so forth. But such strong perspectives were much less common when I engaged Ladakhis in discussions about children, family, society, and education without explicitly mentioning tradition and culture. Parents were sometimes concerned about their children having perhaps too much comfort or material goods, and how they have greater access to potentially negative influences through media. Some parents stressed that they chose a particular school because it was known to be strong in teaching the Ladakhi language. After much more time in Ladakh searching for Ladakhi voices and experiences with these prevalent narratives, it seems that anti-development views of schooling are of limited value to Ladakhis themselves, who, even if they might agree with the sentiments of negative change through schooling and associated practices such as students living away from home for education, still unquestionably prioritize their children's education.

MAKING SENSE OF DEVELOPMENT AND TRADITION IN LADAKH

Ladakhis find meaning and purpose in both the developmentalist and traditionalist perspectives of their society. The two perspectives may be ideologically opposed, but in Ladakhis' everyday lives that does not seem to be the case. In fact, both narratives can be readily found throughout Ladakhi society, and have certainly been influential in shaping how Ladakhis view themselves as well as their needs and priorities. I found that most Ladakhis I met would, paradoxically, agree with both perspectives. Anthropologist Martijn van Beek summarizes the reality he found in his research undertaken in Ladakh during the 1990s: the urban elite “have mixed feelings about the blessings of development, refuse to romanticize the past, and wish to see Ladakhis take control of development planning and implementation” (van Beek 2000b:256). Since that period of research, there is now widespread awareness among Ladakhis of all walks of life regarding the criticisms of development and the traditionalist narrative about their society. And, over the past two decades, Ladakhis have also succeeded in becoming increasingly involved in the oversight of what happens in their region in terms of development, major changes, and interventions. Greater local involvement in important decisions helps Ladakhi leaders to better manage and attempt to find compromises with the dual concerns regarding the region's future: on the one hand, “loss” of “tradition,” and on the other, a need for development, both of which are widely recognized as important by Ladakhis.

During my research, I asked leaders at the district's education department—all of who were Ladakhis—how they felt about the issues presented in “Schooling the World.” I described the film's main argument to them, that education is a negative influence on Ladakhi society because it removes children from their homes and families, decreases children's learning of “traditions,” and influences them to want to be modern and oriented towards the global rather

than local. They had not seen the film but the ideas were not surprising; they were well aware of such critiques. The main administrator's response was immediate and certain: he explained to me that, in his opinion, education required "sacrificing culture." Schooling must be a priority for children if they are to succeed in the future given the ways that society and the economy are inevitably changing. He further asserted that this is the predominant view among Ladakhis: that education is more important than any other learning (such as that which happened in villages, on farms, with families), and it is in some ways opposed to the preservation of culture, but that is "inevitable."

Despite what Norbert-Hodge has written about Ladakh, much evidence confirms that life is decidedly better now than it was before "development," despite the fact that most Ladakhis agree there are problems and trade-offs. When I asked parents (and extended the question to grandparents when they were in attendance at some interviews) about how they would compare their children's lives today to their own experiences growing up, they described without fail, whether rural or urban, how "easy" life is for today's children, in contrast to how difficult it had been for them. Many talked about food shortages, having only one set of old, worn-out, often second-hand clothing to wear, having to wear old or even makeshift shoes, not being able to afford school uniforms (for those who went to school), having to use slates and homemade chalk for school lessons because they did not have notebooks and pens (for those who went to school, especially younger parents), and having to do many chores and help substantially with labor around the house and farm. They talked about how today's children are "happy" and have better lives due to school access, enough family money to buy them multiple sets of clothes and all sorts of school supplies, and not needing to work on the farms or do much in the way of laborious daily chores.

In addition to parents' (and other elders') reminiscences, which might rely on fading memories and have the potential to be read as exaggerated accounts, historians verify that life truly was much more difficult than it is now in many ways in Ladakh. Sheikh writes that before the British gained control of the region in the mid-nineteenth century, Ladakhis had been under the rule of neighboring Dogra kingdom, which imposed a system of severe taxation that forced many Ladakhis into heavy debt (2010:56). Even while the British governance ameliorated this exploitative taxation system and somewhat improved Ladakhis' lives, food shortages and general lack of basic commodities were common, and the precariousness of life in Ladakh was not stabilized until well after India's independence (Sheikh 2010:56-58). Sheikh views the changes since the 1970s as positive for the lives of Ladakhis: these days, "people are well-off economically. Their needs have increased considerably, and the increase in consumption has been matched by their purchasing capacity" (2010:52-53).

It is important to understand that Ladakhi people do not typically argue against anti-development perspective. Criticizing Norberg-Hodge, in particular, can be unpopular in Ladakh (among Ladakhis, western aid workers, and even some social scientists), as her work portrays Ladakhi traditional culture and society as superior and praiseworthy. Questioning the facts of her portrayal of traditional and modern Ladakh can be equated with criticisms of Ladakhi culture in general. In fact, these external influences from the anti-development perspective are now readily (and creatively) integrated into the dynamic local landscape of identity politics. Norberg-Hodge's (1991) account of "traditional" Ladakh may be factually inaccurate, but the longevity of its influence on Westerners who remain a vital economic influence in Ladakh, as well as the creative integration of the narrative into Ladakhi beliefs about themselves, demonstrates that facts are not always as important as local meanings and implications. Indeed, in many ways,

Norberg-Hodge's account and her organization's involvement in Ladakh have helped to instill in Ladakhis a sense of pride in their cultural heritage and identity. For children specifically, such pride likely assists them in navigating the realities of precarious modernity, rather than feeling they have a backward minority identity that might need to be hidden or whitewashed in order to succeed within the broader Indian society.

What is “Tradition”?

The promotion of tradition and nostalgic perspectives are common rhetoric among Ladakhis – but what exactly constitutes “tradition” or “traditional Ladakhi culture”? It is politically correct in Ladakh today to lament the ways that the broader project of economic development and modernization has changed society, and to phrase the current situation as one of a society under threat due to the loss of tradition. While Ladakhis act in such a way as to try to modernize, make their lives more comfortable, send their children to good schools, and hope that this will bring more money and comforts, they will also readily explain that a major problem in Ladakh today stems from the evils of modernity and the goods of the nostalgic past. This stems partly from the influence of NGOs concerned with various forms of preservation, and is reinforced by tourists who come to Ladakh seeking authentic representations of Himalayan culture. In fact, students' geography textbooks inform students that Ladakh's main economic resource lies in its ability to attract tourists to experience its unique local culture. Unlike other regions of India, Ladakh does not have much in the way of natural resources or agricultural potential, so “culture” is emphasized instead. The immense tourist presence and associated economics certainly enforces the idea that maintaining traditional culture is important for Ladakh. But the anti-development view that puts Ladakhi culture on a pedestal also informs Ladakhis' self-perception, which is especially important for children growing up with

experiences and forms of knowledge that their parents cannot relate to. As school—a modern pursuit—is such a major part of childhood and growing up, young people seem to accept contradictory ideas about the importance of tradition as well as its discursive foil, modernity. This implicates youth as the crux of the symbolic and everyday struggle over a future Ladakh.

Youth participants in my research often included “tradition” as something that is important to their wellbeing. When asked to explain what tradition means, they listed specific examples, which I have summarized in the following list, in no particular order:

- Singing Ladakhi songs
- Buddhism (as identity, practice of rituals, and exercising respect for religious practitioners)
- Ladakhi clothing
- Performing Ladakhi dances
- Involvement in “cultural activities”
- Knowing Ladakhi language
- Family closeness and mutual support
- Knowing Ladakhi “culture”

Most of these are fairly specific domains of practice in daily life, into which many children are socialized in everyday experiences with their families and communities, but others are taught explicitly through extracurricular programs and opportunities at school. Not only are these traditions considered important for Ladakhi sense of identity, but also, they are important to the economic vitality of their region, as exposure to tourism and the influx of tourists every summer is something children have grown up with. For Ladakhi young people, “tradition” includes circumscribed practices and venues that are both unique to Ladakh and marketable to outsiders; song and dance performances, Buddhist festivals, and centuries-old monasteries and temples are common examples. Many of the examples and definitions of tradition were things that can be consumed by tourists, which points to an economically driven conceptualization of the meaning of “tradition” on the forefront of how teenagers think about their own ethnic identities.

In the after-school groups, I engaged the students in discussing what they meant about “tradition” that, as they had asserted, Ladakhis should preserve. Traditional clothes were a clear example that was mentioned by both groups. Children explained that this meant the *goncha*, a thick woolen overcoat that covers the body from neck to ankles. “People should still wear gonchas,” some older boys explained in one group, instead of wearing the western clothes that most young people wear today. In response, I asked them (somewhat in jest, as I already knew the answer) if they wore gonchas when they were not in school (where both boys and girls are required to wear uniforms consisting of slacks, a collared shirt, tie, and pullover sweater). They laughed, responding “no, of course not!” As it turns out, only a small few in the group even had their own gonchas. Of course, if they did really want to wear one or had a reason to do so (such as a performance), they could usually borrow a goncha from a parent or other adult relative.

The group of students at the hostel found this conversation particularly amusing, so I playfully highlighted the apparent contradictions in their voiced ideas about preserving traditional culture and their own practices. I probed further: but, I asked hypothetically, “if you did have regular access to a goncha, would you wear it? Why don’t you try, especially in the winter when the weather is so bitterly cold?” I put forth what I saw as a sensible argument (though I knew it would not convince them) that, essentially, the wool version of these garments work like wearable blankets, and that they are truly well suited to the harsh climate. It was springtime in Ladakh—still rather cold—and we were sitting indoors in the late afternoon wearing our layers of sweaters, jackets, and hats. Their laughter and giggles, which had subsided enough for me to pose this line of inquiry, became louder than ever. They eventually explained that they were amused both at the contradiction I had pinpointed in their ideology and practices, as well as at the idea itself of trying to imagine themselves wearing gonchas for daily life. When

laughter calmed down, I requested a serious explanation for why they would not want to wear gonchas, and the collective answer was that gonchas are just not practical. Various students jumped in to explain that, as a floor-length coat, gonchas get dirty easily, and that are very difficult to clean. Further, they said they are rather expensive to purchase, signaling the reality that there are other modern solutions to keeping warm that fit better with contemporary lifestyles and just happen to fit with their western-leaning aesthetic preferences for attire.

The students' attitudes towards gonchas represent their inclination to narrate an account of Ladakhi traditions and preservation according the anti-development views. It signals the social correctness of these views when discussing Ladakhi culture, and further, the reality that discussing Ladakhi culture is something that children are readily exposed to, enough so that they have pre-formed answers when questioned about it. For an ethnographic account of Ladakhi children, this means that answers to initial questions about culture, even about “problems” or concerns in Ladakhi society today, may follow “official accounts” (see Garro 2010, Herzfeld 1987) rather than reflect everyday practice, but should not be assumed as simply meaningless for everyday lives, either. Ladakhi students' views of tradition and importance of its preservation must thus be understood as situated within a local politics of culture and representation.

Performing Tradition for Consumption

In fact, children and teens do wear gonchas and other “traditional” apparel on certain occasions. Mainly, they do so when they participate in performances of traditional dances and songs for special events with school groups. Participation in performance of dances and songs—these highly consumable aspects of “traditional” Ladakhi culture—is encouraged in and by Ladakhi schools, though not required nor counted towards students' grades. Schools, public and private, all participate in various government-sponsored festivals held in Leh throughout the

academic year, including the well-attended Independence Day celebrations and the Ladakh festival. Schools often enter student groups in competitions for traditional dancing and singing performances. Many schools also hold their own festivals and events at some point during the year, such as a “Parent’s Day” at one school and an “Autumn Fair” at another, and these events usually include a variety of traditional Ladakhi group dance performances.



FIGURE 5-5: Students wearing traditional Ladakhi clothing pose for a photo before their performance at a school event.

At all such events, participation is entirely optional and it is an extracurricular activity, but most children and youth participate at some point in their schooling, and many seem to do it fairly often. While performance types and genres at any single event vary (often including some modern forms, such as a group performing the latest popular Bollywood dance), Ladakhi “traditional” songs and dances are always a major part of the programs. In these, the students will wear “traditional” clothing and do group dancing, and sometimes singing along, to recorded



FIGURE 5-6: Students performing a traditional Ladakhi dance during a school event.

(and occasionally live) music of folk songs. Students meet with teachers to practice during free periods, recess, and after school, carefully learning the choreography. When students wear gonchas, they are often borrowed from their parents and other adult relatives, or occasionally from shops in Leh that sell antiques to tourists. Gonchas these days range in material type—adults with moderate means often have more than one, so that a more traditional wool material may be worn in the winter and one made out of lighter, sometimes synthetic fabrics for formal events during the summer months. I have seen children wear both types of gonchas for their special event performances.

While the details of specific song and dance types are now explicitly learned as extracurricular activities, children still typically learn some basic Ladakhi dances and techniques from family and local communities as well. For example, *dartse* festivals (or sometimes *dartses*), centuries-old annual events, are held locally to begin the planting season in the springtime in

most villages (and even now among urban communities of recently migrated families who have coalesced to form new local community groupings, despite no longer farming). Dartse is the general Ladakhi term for an archery competition, but is commonly used to indicate the entire festival, complete with spiritual and social components in addition to archery.



FIGURE 5-7:
Students
wearing
gonchas, during
preparations for
a theatrical
performance
using Ladakhi
traditional dress.

In the Spring of 2012, I visited one village's dartse, accompanying two of my students to their homes to which they had returned from their hostel in Leh for a portion of the two days of the festivities (we left on a Saturday afternoon and returned early Monday morning, on the bus which took just under three hours). The daytime activities involved meals and snacks under a large tent set up for the event, an ongoing archery contest set up adjacent to the tent (only men could participate), and live traditional Ladakhi music performed by a group of three musicians. Boys and young men took turns at archery, but did not spend entire days competing, whereas the middle-aged and older men spent a great deal of the day taking turns attempting to hit the target—an old CD attached to a large mound of dirt and hay. Children of all ages played together throughout the day, and older ones sporadically lent a hand to the adults, mostly women, who were preparing large quantities of food. For pre-teens and teenagers that mainly lived away from

the village in school hostels, it was a time to hang out with old friends around the village and appreciate the comforts of being home. Considering the previous discussion of gonchas, I should note that most, but not all, adults (mainly those in their thirties and older, but a few in their late-twenties) wore gonchas, while the younger people wore their typical non-school clothes: jeans, sweatshirts, jackets/coats, with some girls and young women in *salwar kameez* “suits” (a pan-South Asian women’s outfit of loose cotton pants under a coordinating long tunic, and, in Ladakh, worn with a sweater or jacket over it).

In the evenings and into the night at this dartse, everyone came together to dine, drink, and dance late into the night. Kids and young adults seemed to enjoy both watching and participating in the dancing; all of which was “traditional.” The steps to the typical dances at such events are quite simple, and easy to pick up and learn by doing, but of course knowing when and where to dance, as well as other implicit rules and appropriate behaviors for these events, are other crucial aspects of child socialization that occurs through these ongoing practices. Since dartse is not a tourist festival (people were confused as to why I was there, but were welcoming nonetheless) and is held throughout Ladakhi villages and communities at a time in the year that precedes the tourist season by one to two months, it provides evidence that children and youth are also learning their “traditions” the classic way through learning by doing while being a part of a local community. It also signals that Ladakhi children do not simply “lose” their traditions because they go away to school.

This brings up the question of whether children are truly concerned about the loss of tradition. When I asked the child participants to explain what they believed were problems in Ladakh today (whether in focus groups or in tutorials), tradition also came up. When framed in terms of a problem (tradition is being lost and should be preserved), children defined tradition

much more generally than when I asked about what is good for Ladakhi children and important to their well-being. Pursuing this line of inquiry, when I asked them to tell me what they meant by tradition, they said culture, heritage, and religious institutions (specifically monasteries). Children said with certainty that people should “know,” “respect,” and “preserve” Ladakhi traditions, but that they (people in general) often do not do so, hence the problem. This represents the ways in which children know the overarching narrative of anti-development—about the problems of modern development and threats to traditional cultures—but that it is not so relevant in their everyday lives that children have specific examples or experiences.

Another interesting phenomenon, the annual “Ladakh Festival” is a contemporary event designed for explicitly for the tourist audience. It provides a specific space where aspects of traditional Ladakhi culture are readily on display. The festival takes place in September, helping to extend the tourist season somewhat and thus increase revenue, since June through August are by far the busiest months, but the weather usually remains temperate and the roads passable through the end of September. The format for the festival seems to change from year to year, but it typically involves a series of events over the course of a one or two week period. It begins with a parade through the city that culminates in festivities at the polo ground in Leh, where onlookers can sit in bleachers and watch dances, speeches, and other performances. The parade and performances at the polo ground involve

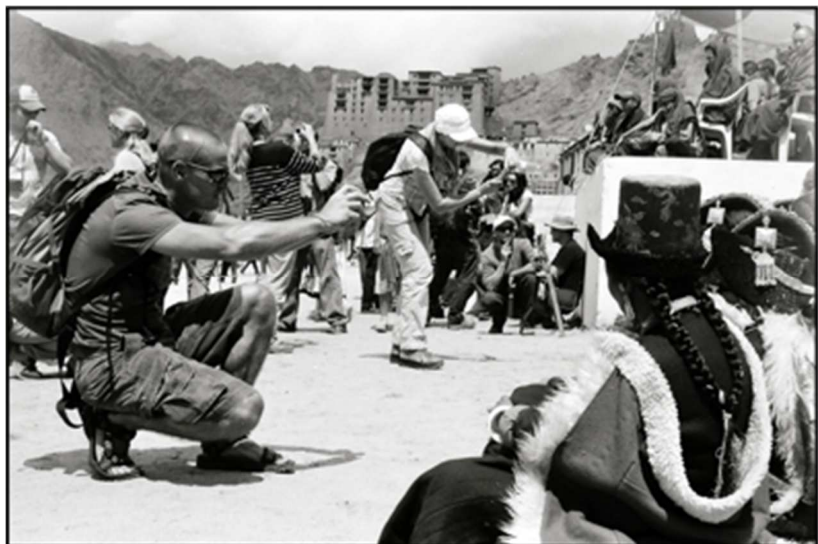


FIGURE 5-8: Tourists photographing traditionally dressed Ladakhis before a performance at the 2006 Ladakh Festival.

representatives from the different locales of Ladakh in their traditional dress, and performances of local songs and dance.

Children participate as well, as musicians and singers, dancers, and sometimes actors in short plays. Schools are commonly involved in organizing children’s performances for the event. Throughout the festival, other events are staged including polo matches almost daily and various “culture shows” held at different locations throughout the town. Culture shows are typically performed by adult troupes that work during the summer as part of the tourist industry and perform traditional Ladakhi songs and dances at larger hotels for guests. Unlike other festivals, the Ladakh Festival has fewer religious overtones and focuses on an idea of “culture” as organized performances that are planned for audience consumption. Festivals that have pre-tourist origins are more common in the colder months and thus not conducive to marketing to tourists; they remain religious and for Ladakhi people primarily.



FIGURE 5-9: Children performing as a traditional drum ensemble during the opening parade of the 2006 Ladakh Festival.

Pride in Ladakhi Culture

In a focus group, when asked what students wanted to be as adults, one student told me he wanted to be a trekking guide. Since this was not a typical response (most children wanted to

work in fields such as medicine or engineering), I asked him why. He explained that as a guide he would work to preserve Ladakhi traditions through sharing knowledge about Ladakhi culture. The vast majority of students I worked with wanted to have professional careers such as doctors and engineers, but I found when I visited some of their homes and villages that they were also ready to be informal tour guides for their new foreign acquaintance (me). There was an implicit awareness of the consumable aspects of culture, and of what foreigners like myself would probably be interested in learning about.

Specifically, when I visited some of the youth I worked with after school in their home villages on various weekend trips, they always wanted to tell me about the important places in their villages (always including monasteries) and to show me what they thought was traditional Ladakhi heritage through these tours. They know from tourist involvement that westerners are commonly interested in Buddhist heritage and in visiting Buddhist institutions, and these students had a sense of pride in telling me about these places, about their involvement with them (family members who were monks, festivals that occurred there, how often they participated in rituals), and the extent of their knowledge of them. For example, when I visited the two students' village for the darstes festival, I found them both to be excited about explaining the purpose and meanings of the festival to me, and in showing me around their village. Aside from the festival and their family homes, it was very important and a source of pride for them to show me their village temple and monastery. They also appeared to be closely observant of my reactions, and in hearing my feedback by frequently asking me what I thought of the festival as well as of the places they showed me in the village (including, of course, the monastery and temples). They wanted to demonstrate their knowledge of historical information about the village and its monastery, and encouraged me to take notes on their explanations of religion, local history and

geography, as well as the dartse festival, helping me write down the correct terms in both English and Tibetan scripts. They evidenced a pride in knowing their local area and some key points about it, especially those relating to “traditional culture.”

In another village, I spent the day with a group of four 16-year-old girls, accompanying them to the local monastery where they volunteered one Sunday a month to assist with chores. They had begun volunteering there earlier that same year, so it was a fairly recent practice for them, and had just decided to do so because “it was a good thing to do.” We spent a couple of hours cleaning oil lamps and smoke stained walls in a room where lamps are regularly lit; one middle-aged monk, also a relative of one of the girls, guided us in our tasks. Afterwards, we joined him in the monastery kitchen and made an easy lunch of instant noodles and cookies we had brought from the nearby store. The girls, all close friends, seemed to be enjoying their time together, and also joking around with the monk. While I had been getting to know these students, along with the others, over the previous two months, I had no idea they did any volunteer work, as they had never mentioned it. This was not something that had to do with a display of tradition, but instead was something that was morally and spiritually good for them and for society, and that was why they wanted to do it. They were otherwise very typical teenage girls—they watched Bollywood television serials, loved the “Twilight” series of movies, giggled about boys, passed notes, and critiqued on their teachers’ fashion choices. They conveyed to me that they were realizing that they were entering a more difficult and complicated period of their lives—currently in Class X, much would change next year and their decisions would become increasingly consequential. They would likely leave Ladakh for different schools, and as they progressed, would have difficult exams to study for, and would soon need to choose higher educational pathways. Plus, on the horizon they saw the coming need for more serious, adult roles—securing

jobs and finding suitable marriage partners. Now was a time to think about producing good karma and offering service and prayers at the temple to hope for good outcomes.

One afternoon during my research, I asked my students to tell me how they reflect on their lives when they think about what they see on television and in movies that present information from mainstream India and other parts of the world. One boy asserted, “We believe we are lucky to be born in Ladakh and to be Ladakhis.” He explained he thought that other kids had it much more difficult in other places because of negative things they see portrayed on television, whether it is violence or crime in the news, or questionable morals and dysfunctional relationships portrayed in Bollywood dramas on popular networks. He said that Ladakhis were better off because they grew up with less in a harsh climate, so now they were ready to handle any difficult situations that life might bring. In addition, there were so many benefits to Ladakh over other places with massive pollution, crime, and poverty—or the opposite, spoiled children and wealth that divides kin and community, for example. I did not expect to hear a response that viewed growing up in Ladakh in such a positive light, given that they had often emphasized that Ladakh needed development and lacked facilities.

What and How to Be: Implicit Traditional Practices

There is another type of tradition that children and adults do not explicitly talk about, and that is those typical Ladakhi cultural practices and beliefs that still permeate everyday life interactions, relationship development, and future orientations. As an anthropologist, I want to call these things tradition, but since the term has already been usurped to mean the consumable and performative practices of dances, songs, and rituals, it is probably best to label them as ongoing indigenous cultural practices. Some typical practices that seem traditional to me but are just normal “Ladakhi” for the youth I worked with are:

- Desiring to care for and support parents when one becomes a successful adult
- Prioritizing family concerns
- Honoring parents' wishes
- Adhering to traditional kinship roles, especially in that eldest sons have responsibility to family/house
- Participating in religious activities at home and in local community
- Speaking Ladakhi

Teenagers, whatever their birth order or gender, will defer to parents' wishes for important decisions, such as which school to attend, and will contribute to younger children's wellbeing if and when need be, including financially when they begin working as adults. For both girls and boys, when I asked them questions like, "where will you go to school for higher secondary?" and "where will you go to university?" they always interpreted the questions as regarding actual plans rather than their ideals, saying that it would depend on their parents. Some hoped to study in particular cities, but told me that they had to defer to their parents' wishes and were also restricted by their budgets. Some were even more limited in funding and thus could not study outside of Ladakh for higher secondary school and college despite wishing otherwise; others had the means but knew that the decision of where and what school was at their parents' discretion so they might be sent to one city rather than the place they had desired to be.

Ladakhi youth also both talk about and practice, and express genuine belief in the importance of, reverence for religion-related activities and leaders. Religion was also mentioned as a part of "tradition" that should be maintained and not lost, so it might be seen to fit in both categories of consumable tradition and implicit culture. This is because monasteries and rituals do attract tourists, and Ladakhis know that outsiders hold their Tibetan Buddhist heritage in high regard. In addition, however, there are daily and other regularly occurring religious practices that take place in all Ladakhi Buddhist homes and have nothing to do with others' consumption, nor are they practiced simply for the maintenance of heritage. Ladakhis daily make offerings to their

household gods, and have monthly and other regularly occurring rituals at their homes to appease gods and maintain karmic favor. In these cases, monks are employed to spend half a day or more, depending upon the particular ritual called for, conducting prayers and rites. Children are involved in these activities in that they assist their parents in preparation, may be responsible for doing morning offerings, and generally see these activities as of unquestionable importance for their households.

Ladakhi young people also are not, as has been feared by the anti-development movement, losing their language or religious beliefs. Ladakhi is the language of youth and children when they hang out in their hostels, when they go home to families, when they play sports with friends, games on playgrounds during recess, during lunch, and during group projects at school. One of the reasons that school administrators were readily accepting of my proposal to teach these after-school tutorial classes was precisely because, despite the majority of subjects being taught and tested in English starting in Class I, most students in secondary school still could not use English well. They had trouble with conversational English, found it difficult to understand it when spoken outside of established curricular content, and struggled to use it in written work to express their original thoughts or to paraphrase ideas. In these tutorials, I very quickly picked up the informal Ladakhi phrases for things like “what’s that?” and “what did she say?” because the students were so often asking this of one another when I gave oral instructions or asked questions. Since school exams rely extensively on memorization, students can do well even without the ability to converse in English. When I informally observed classrooms on a handful of occasions, even with my presence, teachers did not hesitate to switch to Ladakhi (even though they were not supposed to) when they saw students could not understand new material they had presented in English.

I also found, when I returned to Ladakh in 2013, that Ladakhi had been teenagers' language with peers in and out of school to such an extent that they struggled to communicate with peers when they moved to schools outside of Ladakh for higher secondary. These schools used the same or similar English medium curriculum to that of the Ladakhi schools. I heard stories about this from the students still living in Leh for higher secondary classes in 2013, about their former classmates who had gone on to study in other parts of India. The local friends in Leh helped me to get in touch with some of these teenagers on their mobile phones, and they confirmed to me that they were very lonely and homesick particularly because they could not speak English or Hindi fluently with the other students, so they had trouble making friends and fitting in. Further, they also said that their teachers were difficult to understand and moved very fast through lessons, so the students from Ladakh had a great deal of trouble understanding what they were supposed to be learning. In 2014, the same students reported doing better, and reflected on how hard the initial transition in their first year away had been. Some had wanted to quit and go home; one said he had for weeks seriously entertained the idea of becoming a monk. Being an outsider to a new school was already tough, especially as some of the other students had attended for years prior, but the language problem made it exceedingly difficult and stressful both socially and academically.

DISCUSSION: BEING LADAKHI

Growing up in Ladakh today, young people utilize seemingly contradictory ideas about the importance of tradition as well as its discursive foil, modernity. Instead of trying to portray Ladakhi children as developed and modern, or as traditional, or backwards, it seems more productive to look at what they do in day-to-day life. Clearly education is crucial, and Ladakhi

children are not questioning its importance in their lives, nor are adults. Thus, part of being a young Ladakhi is choosing what “traditions” should be upheld, and defining “tradition” in such a way that separates it from “backwardness.” In practice, such negotiations of tradition involve reworking some aspects of what it means to be Ladakhi, particularly in terms of replacing subsistence farming with formal employment, living with modern technological amenities, and valuing formal western-style education. The anti-development view that puts Ladakhi culture on a pedestal also informs Ladakhis’ self-perception, which is especially important for children growing up with new experiences and knowledge that their parents cannot relate to. Children readily told me about how they wanted to leave Ladakh for college or university, but they also wanted to return to Ladakh after finishing their college degree to reside permanently. Ladakh was “home,” and it was important to be close to family, they explained. They feel a strong connection, which connotes a responsibility as well, to the place and their people.

While not always explicit, Ladakhi children are involved in the politics of culture—in perpetuating as well as negotiating with a dominant narrative of what it means to be Ladakhi, in narrating their identity with references both modern and “traditional,” and through just being Ladakhi in their daily lives. Contrary to what others have said, Ladakhi culture may be changing in some ways, as all cultures do, but it is certainly not going away. Both local and external voices shape ideas of development and in turn, a construction of the Ladakh region, Ladakhi people, and particularly the needs and problems of both the place and its population. Young Ladakhis manage to assert and embody their appreciation for both the progress of development as well as the traditions of their ethnic heritage. In addition, many implicit Ladakhi practices remain, such as the common use of Ladakhi language, the ongoing practice of annual festivals and daily household rituals that date back centuries, and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the

continuing primacy of family in children's development of social roles and responsibilities.

PRIORITIZING FAMILY: LINKING MODERN LIVES TO TRADITIONAL INTERDEPENDENCE

INTRODUCTION

Among the students I worked with, I found that while education was clearly a priority, the needs of family were, in practice, even more important. In this chapter, I discuss how Ladakhis view education as enabling them to take on the practices ascribed to modern lifestyles, but in ways that bolster family needs first before individual ambitions. The continuity of family roles and responsibilities therein also means that family background can pose problems for a child or young person's ability to achieve the preferred amount of education. In the first part, I provide an overview of Ladakhi cultural norms regarding family relationships, roles, and obligations. I then present data from Ladakhi teenagers and young people that demonstrate an orientation towards the needs of the family as prioritized over individual educational aspirations and desires.

In order to consider how the practices of family prioritization make sense with the overarching importance of education, I next discuss the major themes in the aspirational benefits that Ladakhis attributed to education. Some of these themes—choices, opportunities, and independence—could be seen as reflecting individual orientations rather than being rooted in the preeminence of family collectivism. Another theme in these aspirational benefits, however, was about being a provider, someone who could be depended upon by others, especially family. Interestingly, foreign tourists in Ladakh are models for all of these attributes, those associated

with freedoms as well as with being providers, which adds an additional layer of meaning. These aspirations and the practice of family oriented priorities are interesting in light of theories about how formal schooling socializes children towards individual economic and social achievements. The case of Ladakh shows that while schools do socialize their students to aim for individual achievements and goals, it is not a given that schooling creates people who are socially or economically separate from family.

However, the effect that families' economic resources have on family-oriented young people also results in a troubling perpetuation of economic inequality. Thus, as I discuss in the final portion of the chapter, it is not the collectivist orientation that creates a problem for Ladakhi teenagers' educational achievement and opportunities, but rather the component of economic class. It is clear that those with less financial resources, with less educated parents, and from rural households are most likely to be prevented from taking full advantage of the potential for economic transformation through education. These phenomena show that, first, "traditional" Ladakhi values such as primacy of family, are not diminishing, and second, that education is not alone an equalizer but remains complexly woven into systems of inequality.

LADAKHI FAMILY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Family-oriented cultural norms and expectations were consistent among rural and urban Ladakhis. However, family roles, and the obligations associated with them, can have a detrimental effect on children's educational opportunities, and that is more common among children from poorer rural families. Because urban families are more financially stable, typically with at least one parent having steady, remunerated work, they are much less likely to run into problems that they cannot afford. In turn, this means that children's responsibilities to their

families often do not pose conflicts that prevent them from spending their childhood through their early twenties in school. However, those from rural backgrounds may need to help their families if they are poor and a problem occurs, due to deeply held cultural values that privilege one's responsibility to family.

Among rural families, where income is lower and parents generally have less education, the children with whom I worked demonstrated that they would prioritize their families' needs over their own individual attainment. There is a tension found in schooling and economic situations that tend to focus on individual potential and achievement, and in the salience of family units in Ladakhi culture. And while all children in Ladakh deal with this ongoing tension, my data show children from rural households experience it more acutely than their peers from towns, because those families are more likely to be struggling financially. In addition to the reproduction of economic inequality, this situation also demonstrates that family roles and responsibilities can remain salient despite prioritization of modern western education as well as its associated economic outcomes. Teenagers' actions and explanations reveal that families are still foundational to children's understandings of themselves. And further, the common moral sentiment among Ladakhis is that such family roles must always be one's foremost priority. Thus, it is important to understand some basic aspects and practices of Ladakhi kinship, which I review next, before presenting the relevant data.

Ladakhi Kinship Organization

Ladakhi traditional family organization remains socially meaningful in organizing relationships, identity, and responsibilities. The rule of primogeniture, where the eldest son inherits responsibility for his family's wellbeing, is considered normative, but as in other

Himalayan and Tibetan societies, there has been and continues to be space for modification due to circumstances, such as in families with only daughters. Also, while Indian and state laws require equal distribution of land amongst offspring, Ladakhi practices allow for cultural continuity, as seen in the continuance of eldest sons' inheritance of the main family home and responsibility for the homestead and family group. Once a married adult, the eldest son is considered the primary decision-maker for his family, including his parents, younger siblings, and his children. If his siblings have married out or nucleated to form an independent home with their own families (as is becoming more common today), he is mainly responsible for the family that is still part of the homestead. Of the families I met throughout my research, I found this standard pattern in addition to variations, usually the result of pragmatic needs. The arrangements I describe here to illustrate typical family patterns are based upon the generation of married adults in their mid-thirties to mid-fifties during my research, essentially, the parents of school aged-children and young people.

Families, of course, may only have daughters. In such cases, traditional custom allows the eldest daughter to inherit the homestead and family name, and her husband joins her family so that he becomes the head. In practice, it is not always the eldest daughter, but families work out the best scenario, based on practicality and consideration of adult children's wishes when relevant. One Leh family I know had four sisters in the parent-aged generation (aged in their forties during the research). The eldest sister married out, for reasons I was unable to clearly ascertain, but I suspect that an acceptable match was found for her in a family in a good family. The second sister became the inheritor of the main house and homestead, although the land was divided and each sister received a fair portion. All three of these younger sisters married men into the family (the Ladakhi term for such men is *makpa*) rather than marrying out to other

families. While only one of the men is married into the main home and has the homestead and family responsibility with the inheritor daughter, the other two also are married into the sisters' family, and their children are part of the mother's lineage. These three makpas all had elder brothers who inherited the responsibility for their family, thus they could marry into other families without problem.

I also know a family in a village not far from Leh where initially there were first two daughters. Nearly ten years later, a third child, a boy, was born. The eldest daughter (now an adult with teenage children) is the inheritor of the family and homestead, with her husband taking over the head of household role. Apparently, their parents decided that the boy was too young when they were ready for the next generation to take over responsibility, whereas the eldest daughter was ready to marry and an appropriate arrangement for a husband could be made in which the man would be her makpa. Further, the eldest daughter was quite responsible, so the parents were confident that she her soon-to-be husband could responsibly take over the family responsibilities.

In addition, whether wives marry into their husband's families, or husbands do the opposite, neither situation results in a severance of ties from the natal families. For those of older generations who married into families far away, it may have meant being cut off due to practicality, as travel was difficult before there were roads and vehicles. But these days, travel is much more feasible throughout the region and phone lines have greatly expanded, so the spouse who has married into a family often also remains in connection with their parents and other kin. In spiritual terms, their allegiance to "house gods" has shifted, meaning they have a ritual connection to the new family. But I saw that commonly, the mundane connections to family on either side remain meaningful and those relationships were commonly maintained. For example,

when couples begin having children, I observed that grandparents from either the mother or father's side might be called upon to help with caretaking. When I conducted the household survey in villages, I met a number of grandparents with toddlers under their care; some were the son's offspring, others the daughter's (though they had married into their husband's families).

In families I knew well over my time in Leh, I observed that kin relationships beyond the immediate family and main home are also maintained, but these ties seemed to rely more on willingness, ease of relationship (personalities, commonalities, etc.), and practicality. Some family groups I knew were clearly more involved in support and sharing with their extended family than others were. Children and teens I knew sometimes reported they were close to certain aunts and uncles, and not to others, and these relationships were not restricted to only their father's siblings, especially if their mother's family resided in the vicinity as well.

In sum, kinship in Ladakhi culture implicates certain roles that have crucial obligations, such as eldest son's responsibility for the homestead and family (or another son or daughter as determined by the family). Firm beliefs about kinship also mean that relations who are beyond direct lineage (such as cousins, uncles, aunts, etc.) remain within the realm of family and are afforded hospitality and assistance that non-kin would not expect, to the extent that it is feasible. Families remain central social organizing units in Ladakhi society, and thus they define a person's most basic roles within society. This remains true despite the fact that Ladakhis also are comfortable with making adjustments as necessary when family situations do not conform to ideals. However, adjustments are made within the widely understood relationship frameworks, so that continuity and role understanding is maintained. These concepts and practices will become clear in examples below.

Teens from Rural Families

One of the students in my after school tutorials, Tsering, a 16-year-old student in Class X during my initial research in 2012, confided in me that he wanted to continue on to higher education after completing secondary school, and aspired to become an applied physicist. Tsering had developed goals in the context of the educational milieu where he spent much of his childhood years. Through his childhood at school, he had learned to think of himself in terms of potential for social and economic mobility, which he could attain by becoming a highly trained professional. However, being the eldest son from a poor rural family, he also felt a strong sense of responsibility to begin earning money to help his family as soon as he finished Class X. He explained his reasoning: enlisting in the military seemed to be the best option because it would provide him with stable earnings and enough money to make a real difference for his family's financial situation. They were struggling to get by, and he felt compelled to help out as soon as possible. I asked him if someone had influenced his plan to join the military, but he was adamant that no one told him to do so. It was a burden he felt—in addition to being a student and aspiring scientist, he was first and foremost a member of a family with the role of eldest son. While school led him to take responsibility for himself and to set goals that would result in a high-level profession after years of higher education, his ties to his family and his understanding of personal sacrifice for the betterment of the group were pulling him away from those other ideals that are inculcated at school. Tsering felt conflicted; he said to me, "I want to study, but I feel like I am being pulled." We talked about this for a while, and he made it clear he felt very disappointed about the unlikelihood of going on to college or university, but knew with certainty that he needed to help his family. The looming sense that he would not be able to do both made him sad about his personal situation, but also resigned to do what was necessary as a Ladakhi eldest son.

Another teenage boy, Nawang, comes from a poor family in Zanskar, and attends school in Leh with the assistance of a foreign sponsor who provides for the costs of attendance as well as room and board at the hostel. He was the same age and in the same Class as Tsering, and also a part of my after-school tutorials. In his family, Nawang is the second-eldest son, and his elder brother was studying at a university when I first met Nawang in 2012. When I returned to conduct follow-up research in Ladakh the next year, Nawang was still in school (studying in Class XI in Leh, thanks to his foreign sponsor's continued support of his schooling) but was also much more worried about his family's economic situation. His father had a health problem (possibly a stroke, in my understanding) that left him with partial paralysis. Nawang's elder brother left his university and returned home in order to oversee family farming and take over for his father's responsibilities. The family had told Nawang to stay and finish secondary school since the costs were covered, and that they could manage at home now that his brother was there to help. But given the precariousness of their financial situation and the fact that Nawang's elder brother may not be able to finish his university degree which would allow him to (hopefully) secure a better job and support the family, there is a definite possibility that in a couple of years, Nawang will need to forgo further education and instead enlist the military or become a truck driver in order to provide assistance to his parents and help support younger siblings who are still in school.

Complications in Urban Families

Town families generally had better financial means than village families, and parents and other adults in the households also had higher overall levels of education. These attributes mean that, on the whole, children from town families have better financial stability and thus would be

less likely to need to make the difficult choices that those from poorer rural families might. While youth with town families were very clearly much less likely to be in such a situation as Tsering and Nawang's, tensions between kinship obligations and individual goals or desires came to light over time as I became better acquainted with families in my neighborhood in Leh.

For example, I know a town family with two daughters and no sons; the daughters were ages 19 and 22 during the 2011-12 period of field research. The parents had the means to send both of the daughters to universities outside of Ladakh, as is common and preferred, but the eldest daughter instead went to the Leh Government College in town. The college only offers the Bachelor of Arts degree; it does not have offer any coursework towards the Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Commerce degrees, which are considered to have greater potential for higher earnings and better career outcomes. The matter was somewhat sensitive and not something I could ask about directly, but since I had known the family for a number of years, by the time I was conducting this study we were friendly enough that I was able to learn more about the particulars of the situation over the course of my research. I eventually unraveled that the eldest daughter's higher education close to home was seen as a sacrifice necessary in order for her to help at home, the result of having a large property to maintain and a father who worked long hours as a higher-end taxi driver, and so, she needed to learn how to manage the homestead because she would be the inheritor. Also, her mother was getting to an age where all of the work was very exhausting without another adult assisting. The poorer quality of education she is perceived to have obtained, however, is a minor embarrassment to the family because it is less than ideal, and it represents not having a more solid economic foundation that could have helped sustain the homestead without her living at home during her higher education years.

For another example, among a family I have known now for nearly a decade in Leh, there

had been some ongoing tension, over the period of my dissertation research, between widely acknowledged family responsibilities and individual desires. In this nuclear family, the three children are now all young adults, in 2012 the eldest daughter was in her early thirties, and two sons were around 30 and 26. As is standard, the assumption had always been that the eldest son, Stanzin, would take over the family home, business, and homestead. In 2010, the daughter, Lhamo, married a man with whom she had fallen in love, as is now fairly common as long as both families approve. She married into her husband's family since he is the eldest son, following the normative practice. Stanzin and Lhamo's father had passed away before I knew them, and their mother maintained the home and a small business—a guesthouse for tourists. It was a lot of work for the mother, and her children all felt she was aging and saw things becoming more difficult for her. In 2011 and 2012, the youngest son was away from Ladakh attending a university. The eldest son had finished college, and then had joined the military. However, he met a German woman who had been working for an NGO in Ladakh in 2009 and they had fallen in love. In general, Ladakhis might discourage such relationships for the sake of practicality, but if the foreigner demonstrates respect for Ladakh, has a good reputation, and shows willingness to learn Ladakhi customs, Ladakhis are not opposed. She fit these expectations and so the relationship was generally accepted, although questions remained about whether it would truly work out. Problems began when the son and his foreign love began discussing leaving Ladakh to live in Europe. Both wanted to move away.

Had he not been the eldest son, it would not have been such a conflict, or for some might not have been a problem at all, as it might eventually bring him good financial opportunities. But because Stanzin was the eldest son, there was much concern about who would care for their mother when she got older, take responsibility for the family's home and land, and, especially,

run their guesthouse, which was their main source of income. During the months of concern over his desire to move far away, their mother became sick and was eventually diagnosed with cancer. The eldest daughter confided in me that her family's situation worried her terribly. She was helping to care for the sick mother as well as host tourists in the guesthouse, which for the time was workable, but in the long run this would become difficult given her responsibilities to her husband's family and his aging parents. She said that if she had known that her eldest brother was going to want to leave the country, she would have considered taking a makpa so that she and she could take over for her mother and have her primary responsibility be the homestead. Now her decision to marry into her husband's family was already made, and her eldest brother was prioritizing his future life with his girlfriend (they became engaged in this process) and at her homeland. The youngest son had been expected to go to more school to get a better education than what his sister and brother had been able to do, and the whole family wanted him to focus on doing so. Thus, he was not prepared to take over responsibility for the family.

Other members of the extended family were worried as well. After numerous discussions I had with various uncles and aunts at different times shared their private feelings about the situation, since she did not want to stay in Ladakh. All made it clear that they did not like that the young man was getting increasingly serious about his relationship with the German woman. One uncle explained that this is why many Ladakhis think negatively of any romantic involvement with foreigners; it has the potential to remove people far from their families, which can make it difficult to maintain important responsibilities to family. Of course, living abroad is also seen as an aspirational achievement, but it is the context of kinship roles and obligations to family that can make it complicated. Stanzin's relationship was problematic because it was threatening to lead to a precarious situation in terms of family stability.

These urban family scenarios speak to the prioritization of family continuity—through maintenance of home, property, and business by an eldest child who takes over these responsibilities in adulthood. The first shows how it can negatively effect education, while the second shows how not following the normative expectations causes great concern, potential instability, and has repercussions for the other members of the family. With these family responsibilities and patterns continuing to be normative, it is important to consider how the context of socialization in schools might conflict with such values, and how educational aspirations and goals fit into the lives of family-oriented students.

EDUCATION AND MODERN ASPIRATIONS

Alongside the financial benefits of having a good job and the social necessity of education in order to be a full adult person, education, according to Ladakhis, also allows people to participate in practices associated with modern lifestyles. These ideas are, broadly, about types of having the ability to make choices and consider a variety of opportunities and about being more independent through greater control over one's means of subsistence. Further, Ladakhis implicitly cast these aspirational benefits of education against two important aspects of their local cultural and historical context. These are, first, Ladakh's recent past wherein a predominantly uneducated population meant that most people were structurally restricted to the small sphere of village life, with subsistence living as their only option. Second is the regularity with which tourists are a part of the Ladakhi social landscape, and therefore an important aspect of the Ladakhi imaginary of modernity, access, and spending power.

Choices, Opportunities, and Independence

Ladakhis viewed the ability to choose how and where one lives as a major benefit to being educated; these are a result of the ability to have a job with good earnings. Just as children and parents portrayed rural agricultural subsistence as a low-status way of life that was not to be aspired to—a back-up plan at best—they in turn associated village life with people who lacked education and therefore had very restricted choices. In their view, not having an education meant there would be only one way to live, and that life would be difficult, laborious, and have few returns beyond basic sustenance. In contrast, having an education meant that there would be realizable options in terms of work and residence location. While many youth I worked with felt a connection to the Ladakh region—they made it clear that Ladakh was a unique and special geographical space to which they were connected through a rich heritage—they also did not want to have a future restricted to one small corner of it. Most children said they expected or preferred that they would live in Ladakh as an adult, after finishing college education in other parts of India. They also knew that, with education, living in Ladakh was more of a choice than an economic necessity. Their view, as well as of various parents, was that without education there is no real choice; farming would be the only option or, for those with little land, unskilled and extremely low wage labor, perhaps on others' farms or construction projects. Thus, the idea of having “choices” via education meant being able to earn a salary doing a preferable type of work, and earning more than just the minimum necessary for survival.

Another benefit that many parents mentioned was that education would enable children to “talk to all people,” an idea that recognizes the cultural capital gained at school that is both symbolic of modern life as much as it is increasingly a practical necessity. Talking to others here means other languages, particularly English, in addition to practices of engagement and interaction that are appropriate with other types of people and institutions. In addition being able

to “talk to anyone,” many parents and children also asserted that education allows a person to “go anywhere,” and “travel.” Many of the children looked forward to the years after finishing Class X, when they would study at schools located outside of Ladakh. In sum, education is beneficial because it can allow Ladakhis to enter into meaningful dialog with modern others, and to gain exposure and understanding of non-Ladakhi places and things. These benefits are also about being a part of society beyond Ladakh, both symbolically, through possessing the relevant cultural capital, as well as physically, through enabling opportunities to practice these abilities and draw on their skills gained at school.

Such communicative cultural capital was a benefit viewed as particularly important for children of nomadic families, who are known to be one of the poorest and least educated groups of Ladakhis. During my visit to the government-run “nomadic residential school,” the principal, who had worked previously as a teacher for a number of years with nomad groups, explained that these days, nomad families were no longer keeping any of their children from school, as had been common only a decade prior. He explained that the parents were now convinced of the value of the practical benefits their children would gain through having a modern education, and considered it important whether or not the children would continue with the family trade. In their view education—and the skills learned therein, both academic and cultural—is necessary for nomads to do business when they come to town, and when they must deal with the government and its institutions. Education was seen as a tool necessary for nomad families’ ongoing subsistence with and within a modernizing world. When I spoke to some of the older students at this school—around a dozen in total between ages 12-15—they agreed with what I had heard from their teachers that having an education was important even for future nomads. There was a sense that the ability to communicate with the people and institutions of the rest of their society

was absolutely necessary. A few, who were certain that they would continue in the herding business, saw their families' ongoing wellbeing as mediated by future generations being educated in school.

Having the means to choose a life in which farming or herding are not crucial to subsistence also relates to a sense of independence. To be specific, parents sometimes said that education would allow their children to “stand on their own feet.”³³ The idiom seems well known in Ladakh, so it is unclear where it originates, since similar phrases occur in India and other parts of the world. The Ladakhi meaning is about having a certain kind of independence, specifically, independence from the difficulties of subsistence lifestyles in which people experience extreme dependence on weather, land, and family members. Also, in contrast to what is common in many (especially rural) Ladakhi families today, a person who is educated and employed does not need to rely on government provisions or private charity. With education, instead, an educated man or woman can be well employed and in turn can be one upon whom others depend.

Such abilities—communication, travelling, choosing a lifestyle—are traits of modern people, and can be observed in the behaviors of foreigners visiting Ladakh (see also Gillespie 2006). The ways that children form their aspirations are framed at least partly by what they observe and hear about non-Ladakhis doing in Ladakh (coming, going, consuming, enjoying), as well as what they know of others characteristics and practices more abstractly (as seen through media portrayals). Today's children never knew a Ladakh without the important economic role of the foreign tourists every summer, and thus tourists hold a place in the Ladakhi imaginary of what modern people are like. For example, tourists (appear to) have the ability to come and go as

³³ In Ladakhi: “*Rang nae kampaeka lang ches*” (or variations).

they please; they choose to come to Ladakh to “rough it” for a period of time and then return home to relatively luxurious lifestyles. Ladakhis know that tourists are not necessarily rich or upper class in their own societies, but even budget travellers display means that most Ladakhis do not have—just the cost of an international plane ticket would be prohibitive for most Ladakhis.

Further, tourists can communicate with a variety of people from other places and cultures, as most have some knowledge of English, a language of privilege in Ladakh, India, and beyond. They also seem to be well educated, which gives them a respected social position among Ladakhis. Tourists appear to have confidence in approaching strangers of other cultures, they also seem brave and adventurous—all traits that particularly appeal to many of the teens I worked with. In addition, tourists seem to be able to consume as needed. They have high-quality outdoor clothing, boots, and other gear for dealing with the difficult weather in Ladakh, and they can hire assistance as needed. Tourists do not seem to have much that is dragging them down, or preventing them from traveling and consuming at their own discretion. They have power in their interactions with Ladakhis in that they have money to spend on food, housing, tour and trekking services, and souvenirs—all aspects of the tourism industry with which many Ladakhis are involved (Gillespie 2006, Ozer 2015). In contrast, the fact that few Ladakhis can also be tourists to other lands, consuming culture, religion, food, and society, as they like, results in an inevitable power differential.

Being Depended Upon

Foreign visitors’ actions in charitable giving and ongoing assistance in Ladakh also frame young Ladakhis’ visions of the forms of status that their education will one day provide. Over

the past few decades, and continuing in contemporary times, many tourists have become long-term sponsors of children's education, have made charitable contributions both to Ladakhi individuals as well as to organizations, and have spent time and energy volunteering their service in Ladakh. Sponsorships provide some of the only opportunities for rural students from poorer families to attend better quality private schools. Foreign donors commonly fund sponsorships so that students may attend private schools. Some students maintain relationships with their sponsors, writing letters and emails, and sometimes sponsors returning to Ladakh and then will visit the child and his or her family. Because this form of charity is so prevalent in the region and common in children's lives, it impacts how children comprise their aspirations. To one day have financial means to live modern lives, marked by consumption, choices, and independence also means one can now support and help others. Thus, as I discuss next, it is not only modern consumption, and being able to choose how and where one lives and works, that mark children's goals for future modern lives—in fact being able to provide for others was also an important aim of my students.

While Ladakhis may portray education as beneficial at the level of individual advancement in terms of money, choices, and independence, in practice, family relationships and kinship-based role responsibilities remain a central aspect of children's sense of social identity and thus their ideas about educated adulthood. In a series of written assignments, I asked the students to write about what they hoped for their future lives. In addition to the very common ideas about jobs and wealth, as discussed in previous chapters, students from both groups often wrote about using the wealth they would obtain to care for others. Some referenced these desires generally, saying they would use their projected future wealth to “help my family,” “take care of my parents,” or “be helpful to society.” Many went further declaring that they would earn wealth

and acquire advanced education to be able to: “help the sick people,” “make a home for poor people who have no house and no money,” become a doctor and “open my own clinic where medicine were free,” “have a big car” and give rides to others “free of cost,” “live in the world’s richest villa and help all the poor people,” and “for any poor man, I give him many gifts.” Students said that having good jobs would allow them to develop Ladakh’s villages, improve its roads, and provide for the happiness of their families. Providing for others was a type of Ladakhis’ aspirational forms of conspicuous consumption among the Ladakhi youth I worked with.

When teens expressed these things, it was specific to their personal ambitions and interests, which signals that caring for others was not just a singular message being promoted that kids were simply echoing back. Their plans for giving and providing were integrated into their imaginings of their futures. Therefore, I argue that these statements are not just about giving lip service to moral codes, but that it demonstrates that there is local nuance to Ladakhi imaginings of aspirational lifestyles. Of course there are Buddhist underpinnings that give foundation to and, more importantly, provide support for such goals and actions. While education and many aspects of modern life in Ladakh are secular, Buddhism continues to be important both as an aspect of identity as well as in understanding the world and morality. Foreign visitors—who often play roles of both consumer (as tourist) and giver (as charitable donor/sponsor or occasionally volunteer)—exemplify a moral modern way of life, marked by ideals of consumption, choice, independence, opportunity, and all the practices associated with education and its cultural capital as well as one of doing good for others or being responsible to others, not just thinking about only the needs of oneself. That there is a moral, giving component that makes up an imaginary of how children conceive of the benefits of education helps to make

sense of the ways children in my research prioritized their families' needs, even, when necessary, before their all-important education.

SCHOOLS, SOCIALIZATION, AND INDIVIDUALS

Ladakhi children spend much of their time in school and in education-related activities, and many children, especially when they get older, are living away from home in boarding facilities at their schools. Many of the benefits of education, as reported by both children and adults, seem to suggest an individual oriented view of the child-student and his endeavors. Being able to consume freely, to choose a profession and have earnings that make it possible to live comfortably, to have financial stability (especially in comparison to the precariousness of subsistence agriculture in the Himalayas), to choose where one lives, to be able to travel, and to not need welfare and the charity of others. Of course, child socialization takes place in many contexts, not just schools, and it seems less clear how consistently schools can socialize shifts in deeply held cultural ideas of individuals' roles in social group, especially family. At the same time, it is clear from the data presented in previous chapters that schools hold a powerful place in Ladakhi society due to the profound importance of education.

Modern western schooling, and its intended outcome of employment in a formal economy, tends to socialize students towards individual roles and ambitions. LeVine and White describe how the broadening of mass schooling means that an occupational career becomes the focal point for the process of growing up and developing into an adult, and that requires a more individualistic focus (1986:196). They explain, "The cost factor in this structure of the life course is the lack of ligatures. Children are encouraged to focus on their own interests rather than the needs of others, and 'bread-winners' to put their careers ahead of their families" (LeVine and

White 1986:196). Further, focusing on individual achievements is a practicality in the formal educational system. Schools typically place emphasis “on students taking *individual* responsibility, on earning *their* grade, on paying attention to the teacher and not their peers” which is in contrast to local cultures that emphasize collectivism at either community or household level (Lancy 2008:325, see also Anderson-Levitt 2005).

Sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) argues that education is a major component in individualization—the process in which new economic structures and the global scale of socioeconomic relations “disembed” (or remove) people from traditional social structures (meaning people lose the “traditional security” of religious and cultural institutions, such as family collectivism), and re-embeds them within a new socioeconomic structure where individuals are the primary units of social and economic reproduction (Beck 1992:128, see also Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, Giddens 1991, Yan 2010). According to Beck, institutionalized education plays an important role in this process of social transformation:

Schooling means choosing and planning one’s own educational life course. The educated person becomes the producer of his or her own labor situation, and in this way, of his or her social biography. As schooling increases in duration, traditional orientations, ways of thinking, and lifestyles are recast and displaced by universalistic forms of knowledge and language. . . . For it is after all only possible to pass through formal education by individually succeeding by way of assignments, examinations, and tests. Formal education in schools and universities, in turn, provides individual credentials leading to individualized career opportunities in the labor market. [1992:93-94]

Individualization is, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), necessary for survival in today’s increasingly globalized world, wherein each person must constantly strive to define (and re-define) herself as an economically viable individual. In the process, the collective of the extended family becomes irrelevant in this economy that requires quick adaptation and the ability to be self-sufficient. Theory on individualization reflects Euro-American responses to late twentieth century economic shifts, within cultural contexts that historically place value on the

ability to be individually responsible and unconstrained by socioeconomic background (e.g. “the American dream” and similar narratives).

Despite being increasingly involved in the global economy where western perspectives dominate, it cannot be assumed that other societies will respond to these economic conditions in the same way as Europeans or Americans, nor that schools, however similar, will socialize the same kinds of individual orientations that they do in other cultures (see Yan 2010). On the one hand, Ladakhi children want to be able to work and earn so that they are in one sense self-dependent, but they do not envision lives as non-attached individuals, especially when it comes to their finances. It may be argued that they will participate in an individualized economy as adults, and that they are learning to be individual academic achievers, but that perhaps does not require them to actually be “individualized” as Beck and others have defined it. Indeed, whatever Ladakhi schools are teaching (explicitly and implicitly), these lessons do not result in socialization of children to be independent from family, nor do they lessen children’s socioeconomic responsibilities to the family collective as dictated by culture.

Anthropologist Susan Seymour (2010, 1999) has been conducting ethnographic research on families since the 1960s in a growing town in eastern India. Among her findings, Seymour explains that despite many changes in this urbanizing economy by the 2000s, all of the families she had followed continued to socialize children towards the traditional values that, in particular, stress family interdependence, the individual’s emotional connection to kin, and each member’s foremost responsibilities to the group. While children were being sent to school with the expectation that they would grow up to work jobs in the formal economy, parents viewed as “an economic investment for the family, not as an opportunity for children to pursue their own dreams and to enhance their individuality” (Seymour 2010:583). Despite spending their time in

school, children still grew up understanding themselves and their responsibilities in light of the moral preeminence of the family group.

THE POWER OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

While practically all children in Ladakh are able to attend school full-time through the completion of Class X without having to choose between working and studying, this does not mean that all are able to attend enough schooling to become equally competitive on the labor market. As examples in the following section will demonstrate, children from poorer families, especially those with uneducated parents and households in rural areas, are more likely to struggle to attain the same educational credentials as those from better-off families. Of course, this is not surprising—it is a common pattern throughout the world. Recent research on education and economic opportunities in other parts of India reveals that families' economic and social backgrounds continue to influence children's educational pathways and in turn, their opportunities for work as adults (Bhat and Rather 2013, Froerer 2012). Anthropologist Peggy Froerer explains: “to assume that education is invariably accompanied by social mobility is to ignore the important constraints that current economic and social conditions and practices continue to have upon the lives of those for whom schooling is meant to be a liberating force” (2012:355). Simply put, families' economic and social resources influence children's educational trajectories, which results in adulthoods that reproduce the same economic class structures.

In their research in Srinagar, a large city west of Ladakh in the same state, social scientists Bhat and Rather (2013) found that families' socioeconomic backgrounds continued to be reproduced in children despite the broadening of schooling among poorer families. In recent years, more families have been sending their children to school, hoping their children will be

able to leverage their education to eventually move out of poverty. However, in Srinagar, wealthier and well-connected elite families send their children to private schools, whereas children from poorer families attend the government schools (Bhat and Rather 2013). While the private schools prepare students to succeed in higher education and compete for good jobs, the government schools do not meet these standards (Bhat and Rather 2013). Bhat and Rather conclude that despite the hope that education will allow people to move up socioeconomically, the reality is that, “continuing class or habitus-based transmission of advantages or disadvantages cannot simply be ignored,” because social class “is a stubborn and persistent factor affecting educational attainments and occupational destinations of young people” (2013:200). Poorer students end up with a low quality education and in the same relative position of economic disadvantage as that of their uneducated parents.

Ladakh contrasts in that the economic or class divide in access to quality schools is much less pronounced. Certainly it is only poorer families who send their children to the government schools, but at the same time, many poorer Ladakhi children attend private schools through charity assistance. Thus, in this sense, poorer children are potentially less disadvantaged if they are attending the same schools as the families who can pay for them. But even so, as my ethnographic data show, family background does still play a role in the reproduction of inequality in Ladakh, even when children attend private schools.

DISCUSSION: FAMILY AND CLASS

Teenagers I worked with had aspirations that were about using money for things they saw modern westerners doing – travelling, communicating with others, navigating the bureaucracy, consuming things based on choice rather than necessity, choosing where and how to live and

work, and ultimately being able to be independent from the fickle environment and uncertainties of living off the harsh Ladakhi land. In addition, service, sharing, and sacrifice for the benefit of the groups within which one is closely embedded (particularly families) are important values in Ladakhi culture, and such morals continue to be a component of children's socialization at home and in school. Thus, children aspire to be wealthy and to have the benefits of education that index individual opportunities and freedoms, but they include the aspiration of using one's success, wealth, and/or opportunities in ways that will help their communities. Young people's actions in putting family needs ahead of their personal aims—goals that are otherwise highly lauded in Ladakhi culture—shows that this is more than just a statement of principles. Indeed, it can mean, for some, that even the all important goal of a good education must be put aside or lessened in importance for the sake of immediate needs of one's family.

Those abilities are respected, especially those that exemplify a higher moral code: providing is something to aspire to when one is educated and employed. In practice, however, these things require sacrifice, as the examples from my research show, where teens and young people did not gain their first choice of a quality higher education, like that achieved by many of their peers, because of family needs and obligations. The reproduction of social class combined with the continuity of family-oriented roles shows that education and the goals of becoming a modern professional does not create unattached individuals. Instead, while the benefits of education seem attainable—having choices and opportunities, being independent from difficult lifestyles, providing for others—these can, in practice, only be attained with certainty when one's family already has reaped some of these benefits to begin with.

AFTERWORD

How can research focused on children in this small corner of the Himalayas be meaningful for addressing problems faced by large groups of people throughout the world? In fact, the case of Ladakh provides meaningful insights that could be applied usefully in rethinking policy and programs seeking to improve the economic outcomes of poor children in Europe and the U.S. as well as nations with more similar economic circumstances as that of India. As I have argued, family orientations in Ladakh can mean that the priority of education is surpassed by more immediate needs—it is likely that poorer children in many other parts of the world encounter barriers for very similar reasons. Therefore, a basic understanding of children’s relationships and roles as part of their families—in particular the responsibilities that come along with those roles—is crucial to elucidating the full picture of why children, young adults, and parents make the educational and economic decisions they do. Policy that intervenes at the level of the individual student misses the needs of the family, though those needs continue to affect the child. As Ladakhi children demonstrate, children do not act as unconnected individuals, even while schools focus on rewarding individual efforts and achievements. Thus, if policymakers’ goals are to lessen student dropout rates, and increase completion of secondary school and higher education, then addressing the needs of *children as member of families* could make a difference where retention efforts have thus far been unsuccessful. The role of family should not be underestimated when considering what poorer children need in order to achieve meaningful social mobility.

Another lesson from Ladakh is that if policy makers and development organizations want education and schooling to be meaningful to people in local context, it takes local grassroots

efforts as well as widely respected leadership to influence and change attitudes. In Ladakh, those leaders were perceived to be genuinely devoted to their people, they showed sustained efforts, and importantly they linked Ladakhis' political, moral, and spiritual needs to the cause of increasing Ladakhis' educational levels. Due to the local leadership involved in promoting education in Ladakh, the result is that western institutionalized education is simultaneously a Ladakhi institution. In turn, schooling has become Ladakhi a rite of passage as well as a vital force in Ladakhis' ethnic and regional self-determination. Ladakhis lament that education and the many other "modern" or "western" interventions of the contemporary world bring change that can have negative attributes as well. However, they also know that it is empowering for their children and for the future of their society. And through that empowerment, they seek to leverage education to their advantage to lessen the negative and increase their own ability to decide what changes should be promoted and what is important for Ladakh and its people. These are important lessons for the promotion of education and its possibilities for local empowerment.

In terms of policy-making at a local level in Ladakh, this research as has highlighted a significant problem in Ladakhi education, both government and private: Ladakhi children may pass exams, but they are unprepared to compete with many of their Indian counterparts. The most esteemed private schools in Ladakh still matriculate students who cannot understand and communicate with their teachers and classmates whom they join in other parts of India for Higher Secondary or college/university. An applied educational study of curriculum, teaching, assessments, and school environment, ideally using a mix of structured instruments and ethnographic methods, could be of great benefit to Ladakh's schools as they seek to prepare their students for futures that will be increasingly competitive. At this point, Ladakhi school administrators, parents, bureaucrats, and children all have opinions about why their schools

struggle in these ways, but efforts at improvement are haphazard; it is clear that an evidence-based approach could be immensely productive and widely beneficial.

Finally, given that Ladakhi children are on the cusp of a society in transition, longitudinal research has the potential to yield valuable insights for scholarship in the anthropological sub-fields of childhood, education, and development, as well as for policy makers and development professionals concerned with education and economic advancement of poorer minorities like Ladakhis. What kind of parents will today's teenagers become in terms of orienting their children towards educational, professional, moral, and traditional goals and expectations? Where there are tensions currently for children from low-income or low-resource families with being able to continue on to higher education, what responses might local society undertake to either reconcile or remedy these inequalities? Will Ladakhi young adults begin to migrate beyond their region to seek out employment in Indian cities, and beyond, in larger numbers, or will Ladakhi society continue to support the social status of its educated and unemployed young people residing locally? Both anthropologists and policymakers will be interested in learning about how such shifts take place, be they with the influence of government or other external narratives, or with local leadership taking the reigns to make sense out of the problems and opportunities associated with Ladakh's turn towards becoming an educated society.

APPENDIX - INSTRUMENTS

I. LADAKH HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

SECTION 1 – Household Information

A. Household Name:

B. Urban or Rural:

C. Religion:

D. Date of survey:

1. Number of Members

(Only include individuals who consider this their primary home; exclude situations such as adult children who have started their own households; include children who may be away at school but otherwise this is their primary home when not at school.)

2. Number of rooms in house

3. HH located on ancestral property (Y/N)

a. If no, who owns the land?

b. If no, what is the reason for the location of the HH?

4. Number of livestock, by animal (including young/babies).

5. How many fields/land do you own? (Measured by number of days' fieldwork, a commonly used Ladakhi approximation of land ownership.)

6. What other major assets related to subsistence does the family own? For example, guest house, shop, travel agency, taxi, bus, or other business.

7. Who is the main person responsible for making the important decisions?

8. Is the money from employment pooled or private?

9. If household's livestock or farming produces products for sale, what products are they?

10. In the last 12 months, what was the most important occupation/money-making activity of the HH?

11. In the last 12 months, has any member of the HH received money or goods from the following:

a. Retirement pension

b. Social security/social subsidy

c. Food aid

d. Other type of government benefit

e. Religious organization

f. Charity groups/NGOs

g. Other groups/organizations

12. If yes to #11, who receives the benefits?

13. During the last 12 months, have you or any other members of the household given money

- or goods to support individuals not part of the HH? If yes, explain situation.
14. Does the household or its members have any serious debts? Does the household have savings?
 15. How much was spent on education of children in the past 12 months? Or, if it is easier to calculate, how much is spent on a monthly basis?
 16. Did your family have any major medical expenses in the past year? If yes, explain situation.

SECTION 2 – Household Members

Individuals in Household

Collect the following information for each person:

17. Kin relationship to focal children (e.g. Mother, father, paternal aunt, etc.
18. Age
19. Currently Residing in HH (Y/N)? If no, where are they residing, purpose of current residence, and length of time at current residence?
20. Occupation(s)
21. Education Level
22. Current/Ongoing health concerns

Children in Household

Collect the following additional information for each child (including adult siblings of focal children):

23. List daily activities, and explain which ones are most important
24. Amount of time spent studying daily.
25. Amount of time spent on domestic tasks (fetching water, firewood/dung, cleaning, cooking, washing, etc.)
26. Typical daily domestic tasks and/or help with family business
27. Amount of time spent on activities for pay outside of HH
28. Amount of playtime, general leisure in day
29. Currently in school? (Y/N)
 - If Yes:
 - a. Does child like going to school?
 - b. Type of school attending
 - c. Name of school
 - d. How would you rate this child's performance in school?
 - e. How would you rate the school's quality of education?
 - If No:
 - f. Reason child is not attending school.
 - g. Does the child wish to attend school?
 - h. Do parents wish child to attend school?
 - i. At what age and class level did child stop attending school?

SECTION 3 – Open-ended Questions

30. What do you expect of your children when they become adults? Do you expect them to have certain occupations or responsibilities? Will they be expected to care for you in your old age?
31. What are the most notable differences in your child's life experience as compared to your experience as a child?
32. In your opinion, what are the most important things for a Ladakhi child today to have in order to succeed in life, and why?
 - a. Follow up if relevant: Please explain why education is so important.
33. In your opinion, what makes a school "quality"?
34. If child is at a boarding school/hostel, at what age and why did you choose to send the child?
35. If you had more resources, what would you most like to provide for your children that you currently are unable to provide?

II. CHILDREN'S GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. Introduce researcher and assistant, reiterate goals of research project and remind participants of assent process. Answer any questions.
2. Ask students to introduce themselves, with age and current Class in school, one by one.
3. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine a Ladakhi child who has a good life and is doing well.
4. Once they have an image in mind, encourage children to free list characteristics of that child.
5. If students are quiet or shy, have them share these characteristics in small groups of 2-3 students, then ask groups to share their ideas.
6. Ask questions that probe appearance, activities, wealth, social ties, education, etc.
7. Ask about the reverse: describe characteristics of a person that who is not doing so well.
8. Follow-up questions as relevant:
 - a. Explain more about why you believe education is so important.
 - b. What should parents do for their children?
 - c. What are children responsible for doing?
9. What are some good things and bad things about Ladakh today?
 - a. Follow up as relevant with probes to define common terms like "development," "facilities," "tradition," and "culture."
 - b. For bad things, ask what can be done and what participants might plan to do about them.
 - c. For good things, ask more about why these things are valued, and relevant probes about identity or autonomy.
10. What are your plans for the future? What will you become? (If not mentioned, Will you take care of your parents?)

III. AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORIALS

Writing assignments:

- What do you like about school? Why? What don't you like about school? Why?
- Who are your hero(s)? Explain.
- When you are an adult, what do you hope your life will be like?
- What do you hope for in the next year? What do you hope for when you are an adult?
- What did you do over the long weekend/holiday?
- Pick a favorite actress and with your group write the plot of a Bollywood movie for them.
- Work with a partner or alone and write a story about something that happened in your village that was exciting, interesting, scary, funny, different, etc.
- What did you do on Saturday and Sunday?
- What do you want your life to be like when you are an adult/grownup?
- Pick a picture (cut out from old magazines, so they don't have context) write a story about the picture.
- Write safety advice about Yetis.
- What are characteristics that make a good friend?
- What are characteristics of a good husband/wife?

Oral discussion prompts:

- What is a good life? What do children like you need in order to have a good life?
- Tell me about your village and family.
- What do you want to be when you are an adult?
- What are your favorite and least favorite subjects in school? Explain why.
- What are some problems facing Ladakh today? How should they be solved?
- Why is education so important for children these days? What are the outcomes of education?
- Will you live near home or elsewhere when you are an adult? Describe and explain reasoning.
- Describe something unique about your village or neighborhood. (E.g. historical event, spiritual importance, something exciting that happened there in your lifetime, special qualities or characteristics, etc.)
- Tell me about an interesting or unusual thing that happened in school this week.
- Describe the process for preparing your favorite meal.
- Share about an important or memorable event in your lifetime.
- Describe something funny that happened during a class.
- What makes a good student? Do you think girls or boys are better in school? Explain your reasoning.
- How would you suggest improving your school, hostel, village/town, and the district?

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