

Bu ras ye hani ho
 Dar menze hani ho
 Sagji ye hani ho
 Seri sagji hani ho
 Saji ye hani ho
 Saji Lephang hani ho
 Sunar ye hani ho
 Sunar rughing hani ho
 Chila sagji ye hani ho
 Youi pathar hani ho

 Numeni dar hani ho
 Chong gi sgyid-pu hani ho

 Numeni kog-lding hani ho
 Basoi sgon-sgrig hani ho
 Shalad ye hani ho
 Shalad thingi thom hani ho

What clothes do you wear?
 We wear clothes of silk.
 What is your occupation?
 We are engaged in gold collection.
 What is your land like?
 Our land is made of flat meadows.
 What plants do you grow?
 We grow bamboo.
 What are your houses like?
 Our houses are decorated with turquoise.
 We have doors of lapis lazuli.
 We have hearth stones made of *chong*
 (a precious stone).
 We have hearths of lapis lazuli.
 We have thresholds of ivory.
 What are your dances like?
 Likely to draw a lot of spectators.

Women's Development in Ladakh

Spalzes Angmo

Women have symbolised creation and motherhood since life began on this planet. No society or nation where women are not respected has ever grown. In our ancient civilisation, despite being a primitive traditional society with low literacy, womanhood has been respected. Indian history is replete with glorious examples which symbolise Indian womanhood at its best. To emulate we have the courage and vision of Indira Gandhi and the compassion of Mother Teresa, to name but a few among the hundreds who have illuminated the pages of our history. God perhaps has been a little prejudiced when he created man by giving him much more physical strength, but God has compensated women by giving them more compassion, resilience and noble values.

Human energy is the best available renewable source. However in some areas of the country the rate of population growth is so high now that the increase in human energy is becoming counter-productive to growth and development. But in the case of the Ladakh region as a whole, the density of the population is not great and it is here that human energy is very important. Half of the total population of Ladakh are women, and unless they play an active part in all fields of development of this ancient area half of the human resources will be wasted. Women in Ladakh have an immense role to play in various aspects of life, according to the changing times. The Women's Welfare Society has organised various seminars on women's development. The main purpose of these seminars was to discuss the various socio-economic problems of Ladakh's women, and to suggest ways and means for their upliftment.

Social and economic position of women

Although women in Ladakh do not suffer from many social evils such as dowry deaths and female infanticide as their counterparts in Northern India,

a lot still needs to be done to give them equality with males. Comparatively the social position of women in Ladakh is quite high though it is not easy to confirm whether they in fact occupied a much higher position in the olden days than now. Since there is a view that social influences from other parts — such as the highly idolised model of Indian womanhood — may have gradually undermined the position of women in Ladakh in some form or other. Polyandry which was practised in the past is decreasing though it is still prevalent in the remote villages. There is a view among some people that the position of women in Ladakh is almost equal to men because of the fact that Ladakhis practised polyandry. However, the fact of the matter is that even when polyandry was being practised in the past, the decision-making power of a woman was confined to household matters. On the other hand the position of those women who remained unmarried (because of the practice of polyandry) was pathetic. They had to spend their entire life helping their brother's family. Thus the arguments that the Ladakhi women's position was equal to that of men in the past does not hold true.

Regarding the economic position of the women of Ladakh, it might be best to discuss first the type of work in which they are employed and the remuneration they receive. Analyses have shown that in Ladakh women work much harder than men, i.e., twice as much, and in the villages this is also true for girls when compared to boys. For women, the major areas of concern relate to work that does not give financial reward but nevertheless requires an enormous input of physical energy (over 12-16 hours a day during the farming season). During the last 8-9 years Ladakhi women have actively taken up vegetable growing as a means of earning their livelihood. Village co-operatives have been formed and the vegetables are sold through these outlets to various customers such as the Army.

In Leh town the women sell their vegetables at the market, thereby achieving direct economic benefit. However, insofar as the villages are concerned, it is only in the more progressive villages, like Nyemo, where a system exists to ensure that payment goes directly from the co-operative to the women. This encourages the women to work even harder and improve their livelihood. This unfortunately cannot be said of all villages in Ladakh where it is mostly the men who collect the cash.

On the labour market itself, women are paid much less, which is a universal phenomena especially in developing countries. Though it is difficult to arrive at a consensus on the economic status of women in Ladakh, there is no doubt that there are more working/salaried women in Ladakh now than in the past, and as a result their economic position is much stronger than before. Also, the modern Ladakhi woman is definitely more aware

today of her decision-making rights. In these matters, however, still more needs to be done.

Education and women

Education is one of the most important factors for the development of a society. Education and literacy are avenues to better jobs and more skills which can make women self-reliant or at least give them a choice. In the field of education in Ladakh there is a high drop-out rate among girls, especially at the middle school level. After fifth class, girls are kept at home to help with household chores and farming. Separate girls hostels are required at these levels to prevent such drop-outs. There is also a lack of residential facilities for women pursuing higher studies. One of the priorities of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council has been to ensure that such hostel facilities be made available everywhere, also in remote areas, avoiding the biases of previous policies.

Since most village women are illiterate, adult education is of the utmost importance in order to make these women fully literate or at least capable of writing their own name and mastering the basic reading and writing skills so necessary in modern life. Women's organisations have taken an active part in educating village women. The Women's Welfare Society has carried out adult education programmes, for example in the remote area of Diskit in Nubra valley. The emphasis of the programme was to teach the women the basics of the traditional Bodhi language, since this is the language they prefer for everyday communication. Such programmes have been effective in making women more confident in their general social and economic outlook, and especially in their daily dealings in the markets. Another important aspect that came up in group discussions in the villages, conducted in the context of the Women's Welfare Society programme, was that the older generation of women strongly held that, apart from the formal education imparted in school, the preservation of our ancient culture and traditions were equally important and should form an integral part of Ladakhi learning and living.

Agriculture and women

The primary occupation of the people of Ladakh is agriculture. It is mostly women who are engaged in cultivation, while livestock and cattle-rearing are the principal occupation of the nomadic women of the Changthang area. The importance of white collar jobs, especially government service, has caused

pressure on the younger generation to abandon agriculture, and hence has led to a decline in production. Due to the high cost of fodder and cattle-rearing, there has also been a decline in the keeping of livestock. The system of *ra-res* (where one person from the village herds the goats and sheep of the entire village) is in decline due to the fact that children are now sent to school. Ultimately, such changes could lead to frustration among the younger generation, since there is a limit to the number of government jobs. For these reasons village women emphasise that children should also be taught our traditional farming methods, so that the younger generation has the option of turning to agriculture if they find other avenues closed.

As mentioned above, large quantities of vegetables are grown during the summer. Greenhouses can foster the cultivation of vegetables in early spring and winter, providing women with a supplementary income and an additional source of livelihood. The advent of the greenhouse in recent years has been a real boom for the women of Ladakh, and has strengthened their motivation to strive for greater self-reliance and economic independence. Another important step towards women's liberation and empowerment has been the decision of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council to allot land to couples, registering it in the names of both spouses.

Employment generation schemes

Through the Social Welfare Department, the government runs a number of employment-generation schemes all over Ladakh. Unfortunately, however, in the remote and backward areas especially, there is an insufficient awareness of these programmes. In brief, these government schemes include:

- National old age pension scheme, which provides financial assistance for the age group of 65 and above;
- National family benefit scheme, which in the case of the death of the family breadwinner pays, in the case of accidental death, a sum of Rs. 10,000 to family members between 19 and 64 years of age, and 5,000 in the case of natural death.
- National maternity benefit scheme, which provides cash assistance of Rs. 300 per pregnancy up to the first two live births to women under 45 years of age.

In addition to these, there are other welfare schemes offering financial assistance and employment-generation training schemes in tailoring, knitting, etc., to widows and divorcees. Schemes such as Development of Women and

Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and Training of Rural Youth in Self-employment (TRYSEM) have also benefitted women, although greater awareness and motivation is necessary in the remote areas.

One of the main reasons why all these government schemes have not been really successful is that the government frames development schemes in the larger context of India, rather than taking into consideration the strategic importance of Ladakh and especially its geographical isolation whereby it remains cut-off from the rest of India for the six months of winter, all of which raise the unit cost of things. Consequently, most schemes really do not produce the desired results. In addition, many of these programmes require effective follow-up measures in the form of cooperative societies, which would help to provide women trainees with a ready market for their products.

The Women's Welfare Society

The Women's Welfare Society was formed in 1994 with the objective of reaching out to women in the remote areas of Ladakh. With this aim in mind it has contributed towards numerous social welfare activities such as the relief effort for the flood victims of Nubra. Charitable work was undertaken for the poor and aged, blankets and sewing machines were distributed among the victims. Funds for these initiatives were raised by organising a charity fair in Diskit, the first of its kind in a remote border area. The society also undertook adult education programmes in Nubra and taught preliminary reading and writing skills to the illiterate women.

Since ours is a new organisation, we have sought to raise funds through various charity fairs and bazaars in support of our work in fields where women face serious distress, such as health. There is a high incidence of rheumatic heart disease and also of breast and cervical cancer. As there is no radio therapy facility at the District Hospital in Leh, many women patients find it increasingly difficult to meet the expenses of travelling to places like Delhi and other cities of northern India for treatment. Action in this matter is urgently needed. While the government offers some financial assistance to such patients, the amounts are small and the bureaucratic process involved in approval of such cases is so slow that the decision often comes too late for the patient.

In general, the people of Ladakh — and its women in particular — envisage a Ladakh in which there is sustainable development that takes into account our distinct culture and environment. We owe it to the younger generation to preserve our rich culture and traditions so that they can grow

up in harmony with our natural environment and live with the values of compassion and simplicity, just as our ancestors have done since time immemorial.

Borrowed Language: Passive Assimilation or Active Incorporation of Modern Concepts

Bettina Zeisler

1. How much of Ladakhi is still Ladakhi?

Modern times madlap sipa nang tyuris Ladakse *economy*-la mangpo *change* costok. Daksa *education* mangseang *important* gyurtok. *Lekin education problem* shrante inok. *Sikul-i* nangla *teacher* kacik mene Gyagarne inok. Di *teacher*-la Ladakse *culture*-i skorla *interest* minduk. Cia zerna Ladakse skat mishesok. Yang *kitab-i* nangla Gyagare gyalraps nang *mathematics* nang *science*-i skorla driste inok, *magar* Ladakse gyalraps yang Ladakse thrimse skorla mane driamenok. *Governmental primary sikul-i* nangla *kitab madlap class* shnga tsukpa Ladakse skat *medium* inok, teneparla *middle sikul-i* nangla *kitab gyat tsukpa Urdu medium* inok, teneparla *English medium* inok. Thrugua *English* gyalla mishesok. Yang *examination* songte *shaet* lophtruk mangpoa *failure* yonganok. *Shaet* lo mangpo silte *magar government job* mithobok, *pene* mangpo mithobok. Yang *private sikul-i* nangla *first class*-neparla *English medium* inok. Budyik sila *tem* minduk. Defia thrugua Ladakse skat kule kulea tsapik tsapik rjedok. Khyokthongun *hoṭ l-i* nangla *kopi* thungcesia dzomste, *happy*-nanyampo dukna, khongi *problem*, *girlfriend*, *music*, *car* lasoks tshangme skorla spera tangna *English* nang *Urdu* manpo kolinok.¹

For those who are not familiar with the remaining Ladakhi words, the main point might be paraphrased as follows: It is only at governmental primary schools (in Leh district) that the Ladakhi language is used for teaching. The medium language of middle schools is Urdu, while English is the medium

1. Transliteration, as well as phonological transcriptions of Ladakhi and Tibetan, correspond to the Wylie system, except for the following diacritics: dots below d, n, and t indicate retroflex articulation, bars on vowels indicate phonological high pitch in Modern Tibetan (pitch distinction applies only to first syllables), but vowel length in Hindi and Persian. Correct pronunciation of English loanwords is rendered in English orthography which is, together with transliterations from other languages, marked through underlining.