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Paradoxes of Conversion

Everyday Lives of Tibetan Buddhist
Child Monks in Ladakh

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Abstract

Converting to modernity does not only imply changing what one does and how, rather it involves changes in one's relationship with existence as a whole. Every culture is founded upon metaphysical presuppositions which determine the way its people relate to each other including children and childhood, and the environment that they are part of. Consequently, I view cultures as an ecosystem. Restructuring and inserting new elements (schooling, tourism, consumer economy and so on) which are founded upon different metaphysical presuppositions cause a considerable strain on the roots of the ecosystem. This is especially true if the compatibility threshold between the two systems is low. Modernity is based on a linear understanding of causality, while the culture in question is founded on a cyclical understanding of causality. Some of the practical implications of this strain emerge in this study.

The belief in rebirth and practices around it stem from a cyclical understanding of causality. No child is born a tabula rasa, and is in fact a continuation of previous cycles. For debates in childhood studies around the 'being and becoming' nature of children and childhood – this understanding opens the door to a fresh consideration – that both adults as well as children are *processionary becomings*. This does not imply a necessary acceptance of the hypothesis of rebirth, but discards the possibility of being born as a tabula rasa. As a young project, the thesis is unable to present a definition of childhood as distinct from adulthood. However, it takes the position that no one is born a tabula rasa.

Monasteries are an indispensable part of Ladakh. Ladakh is a peaceful, high altitude culture on the Indo Tibetan border and is experiencing accelerated growth towards globalisation, predominant representatives of which are schooling, tourism and television. This qualitative project tries to understand the everyday lives of child monks in a monastery, who play a pivotal role in social reproduction in the region. The monastic community, known as the sangha becomes an extension of the family for these children. The relation between the sangha and the lay community is based on values of reciprocal generosity. Schooling occupies the biggest space as child monks follow government syllabus and guidelines. However, it is debatable whether this model of education is working for child monks and aiding them in performing their roles in a modern scenario. The monk, the school child and an exotic part of the touristscape are some identities that these children have to ebb and flow through.

Seen within the context of globalisation and the crises that come along with it, the will of children to adopt lives of simplicity is perceived as valuable. At the same time the text acknowledges that becoming a standardised global child and being a monk at the same time is a highly challenging paradox.

Contents

Appreciation

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Background	7
2.0. Facticity of Ladakh	8
2.1. The Norberg-Hodge Lens	9
2.2. Contemporary Local Lens	11
2.3. Sustainability and the Good Life	13
2.4. Discussion	14
Chapter Three: Methods and Methodological Perspective	16
3.0. The Field	17
3.0.1. Access and Entering the Field	17
3.0.2. Sample	19
3.0.3. Informed Consent	20
3.1. Positioning	23
3.1.1. Pre-position	23
3.1.2. Co-establishing My Position in the Field	24
3.2. Being in the Field	26
3.3. Methods	31
3.3.1. Background and Research Design	32
3.3.2. The Research Design	33
3.4. Leaving the Field	36
3.5. Data Processing and Analysis	38
3.5.1. Processing and Ordering	38
3.5.2. Conscious Naivety	40
3.5.3. Anonymity	42
3.5.4. Validity and Reliability	42
3.6. Limitations of the Study	44
3.7. Discussion	45

Chapter Four: Theoretical Perspectives	47
4.0. Point of Departure : Social Constructionism	47
4.0.1. Social Actors	48
4.0.2. Family and friends	49
4.0.3. Age	49
4.0.4. Modern Schooling and Age	50
4.1. Metaphysical Clarifications or A Question of Causality	51
4.2. The Buddhist World - View	52
4.2.1. Causation or the Theory of Dependent Arising	53
4.2.2. Every Act is a Fruit and a Seed	53
4.2.3. The Noble Truths and the Noble Path	54
4.3. Discussion	55
Chapter Five: An Overview of the Daily Lives of Child Monks	57
5.0. Meet the Child Monks	57
5.1. Everyday Life	61
5.1.1. Clothing	61
5.1.2. Food	61
5.1.3. Daily Routine	63
5.1.4. Duties and Responsibilities	64
5.2. Children's Perspectives	66
5.3. Discussion	67
Chapter Six: On Education and Environment	69
6.0. The Education and Environment Campaign	71
6.0.1. Education	71
6.0.2. Environment	72
6.1. Children's Perspectives	73
6.1.1. Education	73
6.1.2. Tourism and Environment	75
6.2. Field Notes and Observations	78
6.2.1. The Morning Assembly	78
6.2.2. The Examination	78
6.2.3. Differences in Priorities	79
6.2.4. The Epistemological Inferiority Complex	79
6.3. Discussion	80

Chapter Seven: Values and Rebirth – An Ontological Insight into an Ecosystem	83
7.0. Some Philosophical Foundations of Buddhism	83
7.1. The Sangha is an Institution within a Socio-Ethical Ecosystem	85
7.2. Sangha as a Family	88
7.3. Child monks as Active Participants in Religious Practices and Socio -Religious Reproduction	93
7.4. Rebirth and Rinpoche Children in the Light of Futurity	95
7.5. Accommodating Globalisation as an Ontological Dilemma	101
7.6. Children's Perspectives	105
7.7. Discussion	107
Chapter Eight: Conclusions	110
8.0. Children and the Valuable Will to a Life of Simplicity	111
8.1. Processionary Becomings	113
8.2. They <i>are</i> Monks	114
8.3. Challenges of Converting to Modernity	115
8.4. Voluntary Simplicity	117
Literature	119
Appendix One : Glossary	
Appendix Two : Imagery	

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To Philipp

Chapter One

Introduction

In what follows I present my study on the everyday lives of Tibetan Buddhist child monks in Ladakh (India) based on a field study carried out in a monastery over a period of two months in Summer 2012. My purpose has been to explore and understand what it means to live the life of a monk as a child, everyday in Ladakh.

This has been a process of consistent discovery. When I began this project all I had with me was the intuitive interest in child monks, an old monk-friend who always welcomes enriching collaborations, support from my companion and liberal inter-disciplinary boundaries from NTNU-NOSEB wherein this project would be realised. Everything that followed thereafter has been a process including discovering the questions that I want to ask or rather need to ask. There was no work that I could trace on Buddhist child monks in particular or children in renunciate lives¹. The literature and research on Ladakh that was available focused more on the challenges of adapting to a globalising world and the problematic implementation of colonially-rooted models of modern-factory education which are eradicating precious forms of life (Dana 2007, Goldsmith et al 1995, Goering et al 1993, Norberg-Hodge 1991,). Though this provided a researched perspective on what I was about to get into in terms of background, it gave no concrete handles to approach monk-childhood directly. Along with this my foundation in both Indian and western (analytical and continental) philosophy provided me with theoretical tools especially in terms of metaphysical frameworks and presuppositions that underlie mundane lives of the people I was going to enter an epistemological relationship with.

1

It was only towards the end of my process that I discovered the study by Armugaan Hajazi published in 2010, titled - *Lamahood. A sociological study of young lamas of Leh.*

The apparent absence of “directly relevant work²” when I began as I see it now worked in my favour in so far as I didn't have to make added efforts of bracketing other perspectives on my subject. This was conducive to **allowing the emergence of creative and original perspectives in contemporary debates which is the primary aim of my project.**

The conceptual attitude of 'conscious naivety' inspired by the wisdom of the adults and children I lived with, which guides my analytical process, sustains this aim. I will explain what I mean by conscious naivety in the chapter on methods and methodological perspectives.

Shortly after I began processing the procured data, I discovered a network wherein I could experience 'academic relevance' which is an important feeling for me as a writer-researcher in my formative years. I discovered that there are other people out there, for whom this subject is important in terms of human science research. Another reason why this was important for me to move ahead was because I had begun to become vulnerable in terms of aligning myself with people who think this is an 'exotic' subject. My own experience on the contrary was that my informant community was as ordinary as wooden houses in Trondheim.

It is my fortune that the confluence of Religion and Childhood Studies has been growing wider in the past two decades in terms of comprehensive perspectives (Browning & Bunge 2009, Palmer 2001, Coles 1990, Hyde 1990), methods (Bales Ridgley 2011) as well historical works (Sasson 2012, Bakke 2005, Alcott 1991) to consider a few areas. In his *Philosophy of Childhood* (1994), Matthews argues that children are also moral agents contrary to the belief that they are passive receivers of socio-ethical education. This is compatible with the discussions now categorised under the label of Childhood Studies about opening up the horizons of our conceptual fields to acknowledge children as social actors (Mayall 2002, James et al 1998). This has created the possibility for the new generation of researchers to experiment and discover new ways of engaging and doing research with children, such that their voices are included in our world-views. Children are social actors in their own right and exercise agency with their respective social structures (Mayall 2002, Lee 2001 Prout & James 1997). Another aspect to consider here is that although childhood itself is a social category common to all societies, the way childhood is conceived of as distinct from adulthood differs, or in other words is constructed

2 Though discerning what this means is an ambiguous task in itself.

(Qvortrup 1994).

Within this context, this text explores yet another form of childhood in a society where one can claim that there are two distinct kinds of childhoods i.e. laymen childhood and the monk-childhood. Contrary to the popular belief I encountered that 'children are forced to be monks at a young age and must live terrible lives of austerity', my research in Ladakh revealed that several children voluntarily chose monkhood (the youngest case I discovered, was an adult monk who expressed that he began urging his parents since the age of six because he was very attracted to the life and he pretended to be a monk till his parents gave him permission at the age of eight). In the globalising age, as education becomes an important issue for the Ladakhi society, free education and boarding facilities given by monastery schools that give is also a consideration in making the choice. Further, there are cases of rebirth, advice from oracles and high monks in the 'best interest' of the child and respecting the wishes of parents among other reasons, which I discuss in the section on an overview of daily routines. In the section on their daily routines I present their daily time-table which includes the daily prayers, duties, school, games, food, television and other mundane activities. I will also attempt to present their own social world and their dynamics while throwing light upon how the child monks often take moral responsibility for each other. The analysis chapters divided into three broad themes present some of the findings in a systematic way as follows:

Daily Routines: The children have a tight schedule from 5.30 am – 10 pm. It includes daily prayer rituals in the morning, before meals and in the evening. From 10 am – 4 pm children have regular schooling with breaks. It is usual for children to sweep, wash, clean the school, help cutting vegetables, assist the cook, run errands for adults, serve tea, help in construction, lift heavy stones, take care of the garden etc. The child monks are confident and field-smart in managing practical activities necessary in their daily life. Several instances were observed of very efficient team-work skills developed through informal activities such as duties and work e.g. pitching the tent for the summer camp, maintenance work on weekends, social service etc.

Education and Environment: The region is desperately trying to install and keep factory-education running as implemented compulsorily all over India to keep up with modernisation. There are several problems in this installation. Prominent features of the system are army-style morning assemblies,

segregation of age-groups in classrooms, standardization of syllabus/text-books and long periods away from family since a young age. No traditional knowledge or methods are incorporated. This system is observed to be incompatible with the organic Ladakhi culture. Although the villages have an excellent summer environment conducive to learning, children are required to be in class rooms to learn. Children learn about the environment from text books in classrooms, instead of actually spending time in the open. Direct contact with the environment is gradually decreasing. Secondly, as tourism in the region increases, it has been observed that tourists tend to treat the little monks as exotic objects to be photographed and exhibited. Children's permission is not sought even if they are in a private moment e.g. eating with fellow students. On consulting the children about this, I found that children do not like to be photographed without permission.

Values and Rebirth: The participation of child monks in rituals trains them for a monastic life since childhood. This also appears to be a mechanism of the society to ensure socio-religious reproduction. Children receive respect from laymen and are also monetarily reimbursed for performing the monk-role. The children seem to get habituated to 'being monks' in public through participation in rituals. Occasionally they are also given duties for e.g. serving tea and running errands in the monastery in case older monks are not available. The tradition of reincarnate child Rinpoches, reciting daily prayers, performing duties in the monastery and participation in community rituals (e.g. visiting village homes to perform rituals) gives the children an active role in continuing monastic culture. The social value system teaches the children to care for all sentient beings (e.g. children were often observed not killing insects). Children tend to keep each other's ethical actions under check and take moral responsibility for each other. Children demonstrate a lot of respect for adults and value obedience.

The cases of rinpoche children who are reincarnations of higher monks and receive a special status, treatment and respect as compared to other kids because they are considered 'precious' is for me one of the key insights in understanding socio-religious reproduction. The notion of rebirth is an important factor in the everyday lives of the people. Doing good, has the instrumental value of developing merits which will balance the misdeeds of the past and ensure a good life after death. My current contention is that the rebirth hypothesis is far from having the status of a mere religious dogma, because scientific

research (e.g. Stevenson 2001) brings it into the realm of academic attention³. Empirical research suggests that most cases of remembering the past life occur among children (Stevenson 2001, Satwant 1990: 232-233). Further these cases are not found only in regions where such beliefs exist, but also in regions where the beliefs do not exist (Satwant 1990: 247). Children with memories are more likely to be suppressed in regions where the belief does not exist. (ibid. 1990: 236) In the Ladakhi culture however this voice is taken rather seriously and is intricately woven into the larger process of socio-religious reproduction.

The Ladakhi society reveals itself to me as giving children space to exercise their agency and morality in a rather liberal way within their own cultural framework. This is because every individual whether an adult or child always has the possibility of leaving the institution of monkhood without any reported stigma or hostile treatment. Child monks are active participants in community rituals and receive a high degree of respect from adults. They also receive money as a gesture of respect and gratitude for participating and performing rituals, which they usually decide how to use. For parents of child monks, the child (and also when he grows up) may give the family moral advice in the face of conflict or interpersonal challenges.

Monkhood can be understood through its inherent hierarchical structures and the number of vows one takes. As a child the basic requirement is to take refuge in the buddha, dhamma and sangha which are the foundation of Buddhist practices. These concepts are the conceptual/spiritual, foundation pillars of monkhood. In chapter seven I also discuss how the sangha assumes the role of the family for not just the children, but all monks.

It is beneficial to be aware of the possibility that some of the aspects discussed about monk-children's lives in this text may be common to all childhoods in Ladakh, while some are specific. Secondly, that this text does not discuss lives of girls and women in nunneries which also have a special role in the society and possibly cradle yet another kind of childhood.

In principle monasteries and monks are held to play an integral role in keeping the cycle of the Ladakhi life turning. The child monk occupies a pivotal position in social reproduction for which he is trained

3 Nevertheless the findings of this work do not depend on the verification or falsification of this hypothesis.

since a young age, such that it becomes a part of his way of being lest he chooses to remain a monk for life. Nevertheless, integrating and connecting with globalisation⁴ and material development makes it necessary for child monks to also become school children. In words move along the trajectory of becoming standardised, global children⁵.

This movement I contend does not only require practical and structural changes in what one does, but it requires changing one's relationship with existence as a whole. The struggle lies in negotiating world-views. Thus this study is an attempt to formulate and express a reading of a particular childhood through a framework of ontological relationships with one's daily world.

4 The term globalisation is used as defined by the Oxford English dictionary i.e. the process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.

5 By global child, I mean adhering to a standardised idea of a universal childhood. The global child is a concept invented in the process of this study. Although the concept can be expanded to accommodate several characteristics, there are some I consider indispensable for this identity. First and foremost, the global child is defined by chronological age i.e. he/she is below 18 years. Secondly he/she goes through the process of systematic schooling and is not encouraged to work. Thirdly, the global child is a consumer of at least one multi-national product. Lastly, the child learns English.

Chapter Two

Background

Setting a background against which this study can be presented is a tricky task for both the writer as well as the reader because of the layers that need to go into it. I propose to present backdrop layers which have been relevant to my process; however the reader is at liberty to choose and include his own layers into the scheme as they approach the analysis chapters. I will begin with the background I used before I began the study, followed by the background I encountered while I was in the field, as well as the background of current socio-scientific concerns in Europe and Scandinavia which were presented to me after I left the field and returned to Norway and what I reckon is the red thread which can embroider these together as I see it now.

The first background set of perspectives come mainly from scholars who are trying to understand Ladakh in a global context today along with an introduction to the region in terms of its history, geography and politics. The second set of perspectives is derived from contemporary local publications in order to understand how Ladakhis understand their own place in the world today. I will also bring into the discussion some locally published perspectives from children and adult writers. The third set of perspectives summarises discussions about the challenges of sustainability and the good life which appear to be an urging concern in the global North. While this may appear to stick out like a sore thumb, its relevance within the construction of this backdrop is vital for reasons which will become clearer in the chapter on education and environment. For now it could suffice to understand that every scholar that I am aware of who has written about Ladakh describes it as a peaceful place with happy people who live self-sufficiently in sustainable harmony with their environment. Changes in environmental balance are a pressing concern for Ladakhis as much as the global north. I have already discussed a little bit about the current research on the confluence of religion and childhood studies which can also be read as part of the background. Lastly, I will present as a conclusion my own gathering together of these descriptions to make the backdrop more accessible.

2. 0. Facticity of Ladakh

Ladakh is a high-altitude, mountain culture on the Indo Tibetan border. It is an autonomous region under the controversial state of Jammu and Kashmir which has a special status as part of the Republic of India. Politically Ladakhis have been struggling for their identity to be recognised, for example their language (in contrast to other regional languages like English, Marathi, Bengali and so on) is not recognised by the 8th schedule of the Indian Constitution. Further, their cultural identity is drastically different from India. Also known as Little Tibet, Ladakh has much in common with the Tibetan culture, as well as other regions such as Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh with a predominant Buddhist culture. The Indian military has its troops in Ladakh since it is part of Kashmir (one of the most militarised zones in the world) and it has strategic value for India due to its proximity to Tibet (under the People's Republic of China). The region itself has not experienced the kind of violence and its toxic deposits as in the rest of Kashmir (Tariq, Roy et al 2011) except the Indo Pakistan Kargil war. It is struggling to keep alive the Buddhist way of life and Ladakhi culture which is under threat of erosion and eradication posed by rapid economic development and the pressure to globalise.

The Ladakhi culture is based on a subsistent, self-sufficient, agricultural way of life and it breathes the values of human-family, compassion and non-violence. Certain socio-political and economic changes that have been introduced into this culture have been observed by scientists and activists to be incompatible with and abusive towards this way of life (Dana 2007, Goldsmith et al 1995, Goering et al 1993, Norberg-Hodge 1991). Today Ladakh is positioned as a tourist region in India and most of the modern jobs fall within the formal and non-formal tourism sector; the rest within civil services and military (Dana 2007). The local economy weakens and loses its modest and self-sufficient character as more and more subsidised products are brought in from other Indian states like food grains from Punjab. The local market has to compete in order to survive (a value which is absent in traditional Ladakhi culture), making it very difficult for its people to cope with competition. In order to create more jobs and somehow remain in the global market, there needs to be human resource generation achieved through training children from a young age. Children who go to primary school are guaranteed members of the labour market (save a few rare exceptions) and those who manage to receive and pass secondary and tertiary education are bound to become part of the formal sector, if not, they remain unemployed since they have not developed skills to survive within the indigenous form of

life and its ecosystem (Norberg-Hodge 1991). Child monks also receive modern education, but their future prospects need to find balance between their social roles as well as the new job market. I will discuss more about this in the chapter on education and environment.

2.1. The Norberg-Hodge Lens

The region is promoted by the Indian government as a tourist destination, in turn influencing the way in which the Ladakhi identity and culture is transforming. For instance, in travel guides monasteries are included under 'things to do or see'.⁶ Dana (2007:4) writes,

Globalization has taken all forms in Ladhak from intervention by the World Bank and IMF to tourist-driven cultural reforms. One paper reports, “Started in 1993, the festival used to be held during the peak time of June and July but was shifted [to September] to attract tourists to the relatively lean season.” An increasing need is placed on being a member of the global community and along with this comes the growing value placed on “development,” a concept with varying implications but that is most often defined in neoliberal economic terms.

Compulsory Indian schooling systems are introduced in the region as education trends are changing. These curricula are taught either in Hindi-Urdu or English and enforce dominant discourses of progress and development, which portray Ladakhi traditions as 'backward'. Western style education imposed through compulsory Indian schooling system (conducive to 'development') is leading to a loss of cultural heritage as the youth abandons their subsistence-agriculture way of life (Dana 2007, Dollfus 2003, Norberg-Hodge 1991). Further, while 'educated' children can read or write Urdu or English they remain illiterate in their own language.

The implementation of a national curriculum has devalued Ladakhi customs as it places an increased value on Western principles and ways of being which are seen as more developed. Dana (2007:5)

Dana (2007) reports that the traditional Ladakhi culture based on subsistence agriculture had a system of educating its children worked into the seasonal cycle which allowed children to be in school during the dark, cold months unsuitable to farming. The society is full of unique sacred communities based on a Buddhist way of life which have protected Tibetan and Himalayan customs for generations. Within

⁶ Heidegger has identified this as 'Enframing' in the Question Concerning Technology.

the context of globalisation, the global market economy, interventions by the World Bank and IMF to tourist-driven cultural reforms Ladakh is experiencing the pressure to accept the unquestioned assumption that the goal of development is to become like the rich countries. (Trainer 2000, in Dana 2007).

Helena Norberg-Hodge who is instrumental in discussions on contemporary Ladakh has been criticised as having a romantic view (Bray 1998). Norberg-Hodge accepts the value of real education and the enrichment of knowledge, in maintaining a critical position towards the kind of western-style education pressed onto traditional cultures in the name of development. In isolating children from their immediate environment, modern westernised education blindfolds children from seeing their own context as they leave school unable to function in their own world and unable to use their own resources. While monasteries for religious training were an exception, the traditional culture⁷ had no separate process called 'education'. It was a result of intimate relationships with the community and the environment. For example when they helped to sow, they learned that one part of the village was warmer than the other and from their own experience they understood the differences between strains of barley and the growing conditions suitable for them. They knew how to use the tiniest weed and how to identify animals on far away slopes and the intricate web of fluctuating relationships, connections, processes, changes in the natural world around them. For generations Ladakhis grew up learning to provide themselves with clothing and shelter, to make yak skin and robes from sheepwool and to build houses. Therefore their education was location specific and nurtured their relationship with the living world, equipping them with an intuitive awareness which enabled them to use resources in an effective and sustainable way, as they grew older.

This knowledge is not provided in modern schools, which is a place to forget traditional skills and look down upon them. Westernised education through Indian curricula came to Ladakh in the 1970s and by 1991 there were 200 schools. Norberg-Hodge (1991: 111) writes,

... there is nothing Ladakhi about it. Once, while visiting a classroom in Leh, I saw a drawing in a textbook of a child's bedroom that could have been in London or New York. It showed a pile of neatly folded handkerchiefs on a four-poster bed and gave instructions as to which drawer of the vanity unit to keep them in. ... Most of the

⁷ By culture I refer to the ideas, beliefs, customs, institutions, behaviour and habit patterns of a particular people. In some cases it also means arts and other expressions of human intellect.

skills Ladakhi children learn in school will never be of real use to them. ... They learn out of books written by people who have never set foot in Ladakh, who know nothing about growing barley at 12,000 feet or about making houses of sundried bricks.

If these children pursue higher education, they learn about building houses of concrete and steel divorced from their ecosystem. In terms of agriculture, the knowledge gained is about industrialised farming, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, large machinery and hybrid seeds capable of generating fast crop for a world market.

The Western educational system is making us all poorer by teaching people around the world to use the same resources, ignoring those of their own environment. In this way education is creating artificial scarcity and inducing competition. (ibid. 1991:112).

An example of this process she explains is the way the local yak and its hybrids are being replaced by the Jersey cow who can give up to 30 litres of milk as compared to the yak who gives 3. The yak who is adapted to high altitudes of 16,000 feet or more and prefers to live high up in the vicinity of glaciers, thrives on sparse vegetation and as it grazes gathers energy from vast distances, which in addition to fuel was used by people in the form of clothing, food and labour. The Jersey cow on the contrary has to stay down at 10,000 feet where people live needs a special shelter and has to be stall fed on specially cultivated fodder. Norberg-Hodge (ibid. 1991: 114) further writes,

'Education pulls people away from agriculture into the city, where they become dependent on the money economy. In traditional Ladhak there was no such thing as unemployment. ... Modern education has brought obvious benefits, like improvements in the rate of literacy and numeracy. It has also enabled the Ladakhis to be more informed about the forces at play in the world outside. In so doing, however, it has divided Ladhakis from each other and the land and put them on the lowest rung of global economic ladder.'

2.2. Contemporary Local Lens⁸

Most modernised Ladakhis I met are aware of the unique quality and way of life of Ladakh especially in contrast to the rest of India, as well as Jammu-Kashmir.

8 Quotes in this section are taken from local publications, namely magazines.

I see Ladakh as a unique place on earth because there are many monasteries, high mountains covered with snow, lakes, rivers and beautiful landscapes. Ladakh is mostly cold but people live happily and peacefully. (Karma Padma Lhamo, Class 4, Moravian Mission School, Leh in *Heritage Himalaya*, December 2011)

Ladakhis seem to be eager to become part of global development and are of the opinion that modern education is indispensable to achieve this. At the same time the locally published magazines and discussions I encountered repeatedly voiced concerns regarding: the fate of the Ladakhi (also known as Bhoti) language, environment and sustainability, preserving culture, traditions and heritage, being good human beings/ Buddhist way of life and responsible tourism. I present a few quotes from local publications to illustrate this observation,

“ ... people of Ladakh including the whole Himalayan region have been demanding its (Bhoti language) inclusion in the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution to give it recognition a national level... Despite being an old language and having a perfect script, its fate is still hanging in balance. (*Promote Bhoti* by Stanzin Donsal in *Heritage Himalaya*, December 2011)

The purposeful movement of nomads' herds is often perceived as wandering and an unsound type of use of the rangeland, instead of an efficient utilization of forage. ... These views are not supported by research findings which suggest that nomads possess considerable indigenous knowledge and that many of the traditional nomadic pastoral strategies and practises are rational and ecologically and economically sound given the environmental and socio-economic constraints under which nomads operate. (*Changpas: The Nature Lover* by Stanzin Namgyal in *The Melody of Ladakh* 2012)

No matter how much knowledge and the degree you earn, you will be first known for the kind of person you are and then for the post you hold ... The world today needs good, kind human beings for nothing more than just for the survival of humanity. (*Goodness is the Mantra* by Chimet Ladol in *The Melody of Ladakh*, 2010)

“ There is no denying the fact that a tourist cannot or does not contact with 100% of the people of the the region. ... Tourists consider guides as an envoy. The fact that tourist guides play the role of an envoy on a small scale cannot be ignored.” (*Responsibility of Tourist Guides* by Abdul Hakim in *Heritage Himalaya*, December 2011)

Observations and analysis by scholars mentioned in the earlier section and the emerging, contemporary view of Ladakh as seen through the eyes of its own people share a common ground in so far as the struggle to globalise in way that respects the eco-cultural continuity of the region goes. The experience

of Ladakh as a beautiful and peaceful place with good people and rich, self-sufficient cultural heritage and human values is shared by both insiders and outsiders; children and adults. The profound concern of losing elements which are the identity of Ladakh in the process of modernisation, binds these views together. Underlying this concern I suspect is an even more profound concern that the life that lies beyond these self-erosive compromises may not be better than the good life that they already know.

2.3. Sustainability and the Good Life

On returning from the field, I spent a week at the University of Oslo with scholars and researchers who are preoccupied with environmental challenges that consumerist, materialistic lifestyles of the global north pose. From what I gathered, 'challenges' is too mild a word to express the gravity of the matter as scientists recognise it. O'Brien has taken a strong position in arguing that climate change is no Hollywood film and effective strategies as well as practise of change are an urgent calling She agrees with researchers who observe that we are in an transformative era where humans are having an unprecedented influence on the global environment which is irreversible (in Boykoff and Moser 2013). Nørgård's work has resulted in a discussion of the aim of 'happy and sustainable degrowth' for affluent countries in implying that the shift to a less labour productive amateur economy from some of the professional economy activities could be a wiser choice for the greatest good. He addresses his conclusion that economic growth is not the law of nature, but a result of deliberate political decisions and therefore growth is open to new political discussions in so far as its physical limits are concerned (2013). Philosopher Kate Soper's conviction that even if the consumerist way of life was indefinitely sustainable it would not enhance human happiness is expressed through her notion of altruistic hedonism, which is not self-restraint but the pleasure of divorcing the growth-driven shopping mall culture (2008).

Social Philosopher Richard Gregg began discussing the value of voluntary simplicity in the 1930s (1936). He argued that simplicity is a factor in advance in civilisation; along with simplicity, changes in the current mode of production and decentralisation of production were essential to secure a permanent advance in his culture. He propounded simplicity as essential for non-violence and as aiding the expression of love which is a sentiment accompanied by the realisation of human unity. Although the heart of simplicity is spiritual and found in inner detachment, this inner state must be expressed through

outer acts, in order to have sincerity, prevent self-deception, strengthen inner attitude and gain further insights for the next step. In terms of what he calls 'psychological hygiene' simplicity appears to need to be acknowledged as a necessary practice for a healthy society. He justifies his contention that choices need to be narrow based on physiologist Pavlov's experiments on conditioned reflexes with dogs. Pavlov put one of his subjects in a position wherein he had to make several choices with fine discriminations and this resulted in the dog having a nervous breakdown. The dog had to be sent away to rest for six months in order to be normal again.

Gregg believed that simplicity is perhaps a part of the utter gentleness and may be essential to those who really practice religion.

2.4. Discussion

Indeed for a culture like Ladakh as I systematically experienced it over two summer months, simplicity is a practice which is interwoven into a sustainable way of life which includes rich inter-human and human-environment relations. The religious institution appears to me to be much more than dogmatic, rituals reproduced generation after generation. It seems to be a technique to preserve and put into mundane practice the profound, ancient human realisation of the impermanence of material life and oneness of all beings. Their vast empty landscapes are filled with prayer-flags and prayers carved in stones for the well-being of all sentient beings and it is in these techniques that the child monks participate. Viewed within the larger global context discussed earlier, the participation of these children may emerge as highly valuable. Ladakhis have had and have hard lives no doubt, but they seem to go through their lives maintaining the health of their inner and outer spirit.

This way of life it seems to me is being put through an extremely challenging demand on their civilisation; the demand of politically, materially and ideologically integrating into the mainstream, consumerist global culture. The process of making this shift independently in a way that their ancient knowledge of wise, sustainable and happy living survives puts them in a highly vulnerable place, with few or no coping tools. On the other hand is the affluent minority world which on the surface still owns the power of being a model for development, but is breaking within taking down with it the possibility of environmental sustenance.

Even though there is enough research to support that the materialist approach of the global north is neither sustainable nor does it enhance human happiness, this information is not communicated⁹ enough to peaceful and sustainable cultures that have to take profound decisions in terms of the direction they have to take. What scholars and researchers of the minority world are proving and discussing scientifically, to me was presented through intuitive concerns of the locals in my informant community.

The absurdity of it all is that while the global north begins to see the need and value of simple living, with a non-materialistic inclination; cultures like Ladakh are succumbing to the risk that material and modern transition brings with it.

Modern factory-education, material development and consumerist lifestyles on the one hand and the traditional network of closely-knit socio-religious institutions (with few choices) on the other; the current generation of child monks I worked with have to find ways to realise their roles in constantly encountering this absurdity. This demanding absurdity, I propose as the thread which embroiders the background of this study.

⁹ For example through mass media like television or Bollywood cinema which is a major source of new information in the region - the content in general portrays urban, consumer lifestyles in a rather glorified light.

Chapter Three

Methods and Methodological Perspectives

Designing a research project to explore and understand what it means to live the life of a monk as a child everyday, particularly in Ladakh required a methodological perspective with a high adaptability threshold from the very root. In several aspects it was a place I had not visited before and was far away from my own cultural and social background. I had visited culturally similar places in terms of the Tibetan influence and monastic lifestyles, but to work on the Indo Tibetan border without much possibility of contact with my supervisor, family, friends and colleagues would be completely new. Moreover, I did not know how I would adapt physically to a high altitude, cold desert. All I could do was be mentally prepared for Ladakh to literally take my breath away!

In this chapter I discuss the study from a methodological point of view. There are broad six sections as follows: the field, positioning, being in the field, methods, leaving the field and data-processing and analysis. It has been my effort to take the reader back into the field and show what I did and why through the medium of this chapter. I analytically revisit a particularly challenging experience and share the process of building and sustaining relational dynamics in the field in general. Further, ethical considerations such as seeking informed consent and anonymity are discussed along with themes like power, empathy and confidentiality. Except for informed consent and anonymity, all other ethical considerations integrated themselves into the text without separate sub-headings.

In the first section I present an account of how it was in terms of gaining access and entering the field, followed by the way the informant sample was selected and my practice of seeking informed consent. By positioning (which is the second section), I refer to who I was in terms of my identity and background before I entered the field and how I positioned myself as a researcher once I was there. The discussion focus predominantly on the role 'name' played in establishing an identity for my informants and also for me. I will then discuss a big challenge that the project faced, followed by a presentation of the research design and methods used in the field. After a description of and reflections on leaving the

field, I will finally present the process of data analysis including the limitations of this study before I conclude the chapter.

3.0. The Field

3.0.1. Access and Entering the Field

I have been extremely fortunate in this research. The moment I thought of going to Ladakh and working with child monks, gates opened for me. During my masters programme in philosophy at University of Pune¹⁰ I met a unique monk Tenzin Dorjey¹¹ who always welcomed me to visit Ladakh. Tenzin Dorjey has become a good friend over the years. We share an enriching mutual exchange of knowledge and guidance. When I told him about my interest in working with children in his birthplace, he was very supportive. He contacted another close friend Konchok Tashi who presides the education committee of the village. Konchok Tashi is an enthusiastic and inspiring monk with a very broad outlook towards life. Not only was he welcoming but also absolutely thrilled about the possibility of having an observer amidst them. His openness to my experimental methods, honest request for feedback and sharing my outsider perspective on their society gave me confidence. Konchok Tashi is a passionate person, aware of the situation in Ladakh and India as a whole; both politically and socially. He is aware of the phenomena of globalisation which is entering their lives along with the role of modern education in this context. Moreover he knows the value of living in a place with rich and evolved human values, where the pure water streams into open fields, the air is clean and the people are self-sufficiently integrated into the cycle of their natural habitat. He doesn't have a dogmatic fixation upon religion and rituals, but tries to find solutions keeping the essence of the values of his life world. He would often share his thoughts in a very articulate manner with me whenever we met and lent me a keen ear as I expressed myself like an unedited human being.

There are several levels to gaining 'access' in my experience. Access, as I saw it, was not just the permission to enter and operate a data machine in a certain place. It was the process of building inter-subjective relations and trust; a process of becoming family. Konchok Tashi introduced me to Padma Tashi - the principal of the monastery's school / and the other teachers there. I had decided to go there assuming the dual role of an English teacher and a researcher. This put the principal and teachers in a

10 Formerly University of Poona

11 All names have been changed to ensure anonymity of informants

more comfortable position in accepting me and allowing me to spend time with the children.

They had arranged for me to stay with a family who lived very close to the monastery. Ama-le, aba-le (mother and father), their two sons lama Gyaltzen and acho-le (brother) and the daughter achi-le (sister) who visited occasionally from Leh, this was the family. The father had recently built three little rooms to meet the demand of tourism and agreed to rent a room at a student price to me for two months. Since the rooms were not ready when I arrived, for the first two days I slept in their kitchen. I was exhausted and ill (because of the altitude and road travel) with one of the most unusual and strong headaches I have ever experienced. Ama-le brought me food and massaged my head compassionately. All the family members constantly inquired about me and asked me what I needed to feel better; the staff from the school also visited to check on me. Throughout the two months they did not ask me for money for the food they served me; occasionally I bought food on my own and we cooked together. One of their sons lama Gyaltzen was a monk who studied in a monastery in a neighbouring state and the other son studied in a state about 2085 km away. They were visiting home for summer. Lama Gyaltzen was enthusiastic about meeting me and speaking English, he gave me access to his memories, his thoughts and world-views very generously. I suggested that he could write a daily diary about his life to help me as well as practice his English. He immediately took to the idea and the things he wrote enriched my data¹².

Both sons are part of a youth group (of which Konchok Tashi is an advisor) which was planning an education and environment campaign in the region a month later. The president of the group Tsering Namgyal who is also a university student in the state approached me to join them for the campaign. This was unexpected, but a wonderful opportunity to survey the villages where the child monks came from, meet their villagers and see their life. The tour took place about a month after I had begun working with the children, so I was in a better informed position to look into their background. On this tour Tsering Namgyal who has been researching on the local nomadic culture introduced me to a very old nomad. This meeting has been one of the most insightful occasions of not just my field study, but my life.

Access as I said, for me was a process of becoming family and accepting their invitation to enter. It

12 For example his explanation about why he values his parents, gave me an insight into his relationship with his biological family.

happened at several levels than just the one-time permission to operate. That also happened of course – the seeking of an official permission to operate. As I described, the people I would live with were welcoming from my first contact. But political and bureaucratic institutions also play a role in Ladakh since it is part of the controversial Jammu and Kashmir and further shares border with the controversial Tibet. When I reached Ladakh, I wasn't aware that even as an Indian citizen since birth I need permission to be in the area where I was. Neither were the monks and locals who gave me social and institutional access. On my way by road, at the check point when the driver asked me if I had my permit, I confidently replied that I was from Bombay and had an Indian passport. Perhaps my confidence confused him and he also took for granted that I did not need permit after all. Two days after I made it to the monastery, some monks came to me asking if I had permission, because the local police had come looking for 'the girl who has come to teach the monks'. I went to the police station with the principal, but the police in-charge was away on duty. Few days later the police in-charge came to the monastery and I expressed my ignorance and reasons to him. I gave him my passport and letter of request from the Norwegian Center for Child Research. He explained that since it was restricted area, permission for outsiders was not granted for more than a week. This implied that I would have to travel every week to the capital to renew my permission. We finally decided to apply for a special permit to the main office in Leh, given my purpose for visit. It took about two weeks and a good word from the officer on my behalf until a two month permit was finally granted. Access happens at several levels.

3.0.2. Sample

The structure of my project was very open since was looking to understand the everyday lives of the child monks in Ladakh. My question was simple: What is the everyday life of Tibetan Buddhist child monks like? I was required to submit a project proposal before I left defining the sample. The number I gave was 12 boys between the age of 10-15 years.

However when I reached the field and gained access into their world, the school wanted me to work with all 46 children aged between 4-18 years. They wanted all children to learn as much as possible from me in the two months that I was there because teachers/resources with the qualifications and experience that I brought with me had not come to work with their children before. I needed to learn as much as possible from them too. I had the opportunity presented to me of being there the whole day, to

eat with them and the freedom to decide what I wanted to do. My decision to work with all children as much as possible came mainly from the ethical concern of reciprocity which I was meeting as a teacher and sustaining the feeling of inclusion among the children as a researcher. Research with children is enriched by the researcher questioning both the methods as well as academic and personal assumptions taken into the field (Davis 1998). So I decided to apply this guideline and question my own pre-understanding of 'sample' and 'data' that I had defined in my preparatory process. This allowed me to open up and accept every sample and data that wanted to present itself to me during my stay. What data I would use and how, is something I could decide later.

Similarly living with ama-le's family and when I travelling with the youth group, I met villagers, nomads, educators, tourists, as well as spoke to other monks. I found myself choosing over and over again to accept all forms of 'data' to come to me. There were several moments of exhaustion from my immersion, which oddly enough breathed more energy into me, several occasions when I was human, guest, teacher, researcher, a friend, a sister, a daughter and roles I'm not sure I've known before or can identify, all at the same time. But I found myself floating in the care of the world around me which took the burden off me 'to take care of myself' and allowed me an immersed floating with a purpose. It's all seems idealistic one would say from an academic point of view, but what was the sample and how did I decide? I followed multiple methods and each had a sample variation.

For semi-structured interviews which I recorded (or noted on paper in case the informant did not want his voice recorded) I spoke to twelve children between 7-18 years, 4 teachers, 10 adult monks, 12 laymen youth, 9 western tourists, 2 nomads, and 4 families. I approached the informants and asked if they would like to participate and in case I had their consent we went ahead. Other data collection methods included observation, photographs, videos, sound recordings and daily field notes. Some meetings regarding the education and environment campaign were also recorded with the consent of the participants. With the children I used several child friendly methods (Clark 2005, 2001), but with adults I conducted simple semi-structured interviews. Section 3.3.2 wherein I describe the research design, presents a clearer account of the sample variation corresponding to each research tool.

3.0.3. Informed Consent

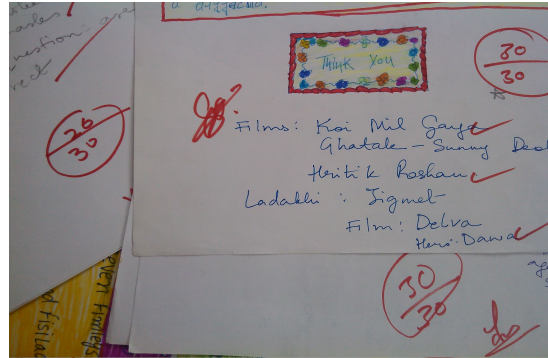
Corresponding to my realisation that gaining access had several layers to it, was an insight about informed consent. I received signed documents declaring that I could conduct research and use the data for my research as long as I treated it confidentially. One such document was given to me by the secretary of the youth group which organised the education and environment campaign, the other was from the school where I worked with the children. But, I was aware that these documents were formal consent to meet the needs of institutions outside the region I was obligated to.

With my adult informants I chose to seek verbal consent before I began an interview. If they did not want me to record them, I took notes as they spoke. Producing a document and seeking a signature would influence the informal milieu of the exchange. Perhaps it would evoke an unnecessary feeling of doubt or give an impression of official interrogation which was not my intention. We shared a friendly relation and the trust in this case was part of it. I followed the same principle with the tourists even though they were probably less intimidated by acts of signing since they hailed either from urban or parts of the world where signing was an ordinary act. This helped me experience consistency in the way I dealt with all my adult informants in Ladakh.

The children on the other hand undertook not only the serious act of signing documents, but also giving the researcher marks for recording accurate information. During the introductory session¹³ with the first group of informants, we began by telling the children that I was there to learn about their lives. In the research workshops we would speak any language we wanted to and *they* were the teachers (while in the English sessions, we tried to speak only English and I was the teacher). They had to introduce themselves and tell me what each one thought he could teach me. To me this revealed aspects of their lives I could look into and to them it brought a sense of expertise with regard to me. After this each child had to draw whatever he liked and he was not obliged to be in the room for this activity. When we finished, I sat with each child and asked him to tell me something about his drawing, the colours, the choice of theme and so on. The drawing served as a starting point for conversation and breaking the ice with each child. After a child finished explaining, I repeated what he had told me and made points

13 For the introductory session I sought the assistance of an interpreter to make sure we started off with clear communication. Since it was the first time I would engage closely with the children, I had yet to find out how much communication is possible with the languages we had in common. I realised that it was possible to continue workshops without an interpreter and confirmed this after consulting the children.

behind his drawing. The child was then given the paper and a red pen¹⁴ and had to mark a tick for every point I wrote correctly about him. After the corrections, he had to give me marks for my interpretation and if he thought I could use it for my studies and book¹⁵ he had to sign it. This amusing activity was the first step towards establishing a ground where we could share power and they had the right to consent. It was the first time ever that the children had signed something and they enjoyed being a teacher who could give marks.



Every time I changed a tool, children had the opportunity to participate by choice. If a child expressed or I sensed resistance towards an activity, I gave him alternatives he felt comfortable with. Sometimes the children formed groups according to the tools they preferred e.g. the role-play group, the drawing group, the writing group and so on. In the English sessions we repeatedly did an exercise called 'My Opinion' where we discussed the meaning of opinion and different ways of expressing it. This facilitated a sense of freedom of expression which implied freedom to consent or dissent. My intention in seeking informed consent was not primarily to receive a 'Yes' from the children, but to communicate clearly that they could say 'No' if they wanted. Moreover, that a 'No' would not be at the expense of our friendship.

Honesty was a 'deal' we made. We enacted the deal several times. I would ask, “Deal?” as I put my bare palm forward and they'd respond “Deal!” as each one piled his hand onto mine and we created a heap of palms on top of each other. The heavy weight of this 'heap of palms' or 'deal' on my palm supported by my dainty wrist (to me) was the weight of responsibility that came with the informed consent. This was the responsibility of respectful confidentiality above all else.

14 The red pen is classically associated with teachers and it was also the case in their school.

15 I told the children that for my exam I had to write a book about what they told me.

3.1. Positioning

3.1.1. Pre-position

I identify as a world-citizen with an Indian passport who is born and brought up in South Bombay, and spent her early adulthood in Poona. Since my parents have different regional and linguistic identities (Probasi Bengali and Maharashtrian) and I have spent my early adulthood away from them with other cultures, I do not have a sense of attachment to one culture or language as 'mine'. My first language is English (a blend of English [UK], English [US] and Indian English [South Bombay]) which is not the first language of either of my parents. I was born in a Hindu family and raised in an all-girls Catholic convent-school for 12 years. I have been exposed to other religions such as Islam, Jainism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism since an early age. My approach to ethics and religion is also shaped by a training in philosophy which is predominantly influenced by buddhist, existentialist and phenomenological thinkers. I am fascinated by the roles religion and god play in the lives of human beings.

I went to the monastery looking to be accepted with the dual identity of an English language assistant and a researcher. I presumed that I would be perceived as a 'foreigner' for all practical purposes though we share the same paper-nationality¹⁶, a woman among male-monks, an English teacher and a researcher. The effort was to be perceived as a human being, rather than a woman or foreigner/outsider, as almost equal in terms of learning, rather than a teacher and as a 'becoming' like the children.

The primary frame of reference for the community in terms of receiving me was that I was a friend of a monk from their village. Most villagers I met are proud of Tenzin Dorjey and the youth look up to him in their pursuit of education. He has travelled places, expanded his social network and struggled his way to continue his academic pursuit in the country's capital¹⁷. Being associated with someone the villagers and children not only knew closely since childhood but admired, gave me a strong platform for being accepted on my terms.

16 Signifying official membership of a country regardless of one's ethnic, cultural or linguistic identity usually validated through documents such as passports or other attested identification cards and papers.

17 New Delhi

3.1.2. Co-establishing my position in the field

When I first saw the children, they showed me how shy they were and yet bubbling within with the energy of boys in a boarding school. Through their eyes and smiles they'd show eagerness to know me and I would return this sentiment with my smiling eyes. Some brave ones would say, "Good morning ma'am!" and I'd reply, "My name is Tanu." The exchange of the looks and smiles was like standing on the threshold of their home and saying, "I'd like to come in". It was as though they were inside a house discussing with each other, "Should we let her in?" Some were perhaps a little sceptical and others highly eager. They knew I would come into their classrooms anyway because the principle had decided so, but if they'd take me to the open fields, places they liked or simply give access to the classroom within the physical classroom, was something only they had the agency to do

The principal and teachers planned to formally welcome me into the school before I began. A day was chosen. After the morning assembly a teacher explained in English that this was a 'golden opportunity' for the children to interact with me and deepen their understanding about education which is not just about books. The principal then put a piece of cream silk cloth known as khatak around my neck and the children applauded. He explained to all the children in Ladakhi that there would be weekly workshops (class-wise) and everyone would have a turn to spend time with me. He said I had come to their village from Norway to study about child monks like them and would also teach them English. Lastly, he told them that I was their equal and they should call me Tanu. This last piece of information was the consequence of a discussion¹⁸ I had had with the principal before.

"Please let the children call me Tanu."

"How would that feel? They need to respect you because you are older and have more knowledge and wisdom than them."

"I don't feel like respect depends upon a title... we can use a title and yet not really feel respect for a person. If they feel respect naturally I accept it and I also respect them, but they need to feel like I am a friend. I want to be friends with them ... as equals. This is important for my way of working. Children will not open up to me if they see me as a member of the staff. "

"Ok, if you are comfortable this way and think it is appropriate ... It's your wish."

18 I used mostly Hindi-Urdu with the principle and some teachers. With one teacher, I used only English. The choice of language was based on what they felt comfortable using.

Before long for most including the teachers and principal 'Tanu' became 'Tani' (short for the Ladakhi name Tenzin). During the first two weeks several children spontaneously called me ma'am and I would gently remind them that I prefer to be called Tanu. Some were thrilled to call an adult by their first name; it was a unique experience for them. When I arrived in the morning or left at night greetings of “Good morning Tani!” or “See you tomorrow Tani, Good Night!” would intersperse the air and almost immediately be the only sound that would occupy my body. If one started, soon the others would join in and sometimes they wanted to be louder than each other. In the evenings when I'd leave after dinner, they were glued to the television and would take a precious moment off to greet me good night! Evenings brought with them the world of television because that's when electricity was available. They'd repeat “See you tomorrow!” until I was far enough on my way not to hear them. I walked home in the dark, through the barley fields in the presence of the mighty mountains that surrounded us, gasping for breath in high altitude with the power of the human spirit they'd replenish in me. Sometimes the moon threw a thin veil of light all over, at times it was just stars. The last sound of “See you tomorrow!” fading away. I'd reach home and go straight to the family's sitting room where they all watched television in the evening; I seldom went to my room right away. At home ama-le, aba-le or one of my house-siblings would have me in and pour me a cup of tea, “Come Tani, it's very late today. Come, come, sit. Have you eaten?”

The identity that I was understood through, was an identity that did not disappear when I came home every night. I had become Tani. Tani was the English teacher from Norway who was studying the daily life of little monks. She was a friend of Tenzin Dorjay because they studied in the same university in Pune and her parents lived in Bombay where she originally came from. She lived with lama Gyaltzen's family. At home I was a member of the family; I facilitated this process by reciprocating the welcoming hospitality of the family. I began for example doing chores and helping around the house, so that they wouldn't treat me only as a guest.

A month later the short 'Tani' was given the foundation of a full Ladakhi name at home. My brother lama Gyaltzen and I agreed that I was Tenzin Angmo. It began as a joke that one cannot have only a short name, but needs to have full name. Every Ladakhi has two names which are in fact the first name. They do not use a family name, but their homes have a name. So if one asks a Ladakhi for the family name, they will most likely tell you the name of the house. While addressing each other they usually

use one of the first names or the nickname with the suffix *le*, which is a sign of respect. The suffix can be used regardless of the age and sex of a person. Lama Gyaltzen and few others sometimes addressed me as Angmo-le, but for most and above all the kids I was Tani. Phunchok Thinlay the oldest of the boys, however never called me Tani or Tanu for that matter. For him it was always *ma'am*. The first week I kept reminding him that it was okay to call me by my name. On our first neighbourhood walk together I asked him why he didn't call me Tanu. He replied,

“Because it's odd. You are much older than me and I respect you.”

I accepted being addressed as ma'am by him. The least-adult role (Mandell 1991) is a valuable tool in using child-friendly methods, but it cannot be imposed and one has to accept one's conventional identity as perceived by others. It was a point when I could have lost a balance, in the pursuit of wanting to be equal, I would have assumed the more powerful position in our dynamic.

In his classic *Romeo and Juliet*, oft quoted Shakespeare questioned the significance of names, since calling a rose by another name would not alter the perfume as he put it. However, it was evident from this experience to me that naming in lived-experience serves as a handle to relate to one's own reality. Through accepting their naming of me, giving the possibility of calling me by my first name or accepting titles such as *ma'am*, I maintained that there were several possibilities of relating to me. We shared the power to choose who I was in Ladakh and this was fundamental in my identity as an instrument of research.

3.2. Being in the Field

By now I have communicated rather clearly that I consider my situation in the field as a researcher's dream given the generous support, love, sense of integration and acceptance I received. Perhaps the credit goes predominantly to Ladakhi culture in general and the people. This does not imply in any way that there were no challenges and it was a smooth ride all the way. In what follows, I share a challenging situation whereby I found myself in a conflict with the primary gate-keepers. In my experience this was the most challenging of all since I risked losing not only the formal consent to work with children and use the data I had already collected, but also the relationship I had built with the

people.

The president of the education committee had requested me to prepare a report of my observations and work in the school. The principle had also suggested that he would like to visit the parent institution in the capital city with me to meet the director of the monastic education network, to discuss critical issues that I thought needed attention. The intention behind the suggested report and the meeting was to bring the attention of the higher authorities to matters at root level. The president and principal were of the opinion that, the perspective of a field researcher would get more attention than their own. It was an invitation to collaborate to improve the quality of education for the children. It was a pleasure for me to reciprocate. Although it was an added task apart from the teaching and the research I accepted it not only to respond to the generous support of the community towards my work, but also because writing the report would serve an analytical function in my own process.

This request empowered me since it was an expression of their confidence in my work with their children. It strengthened the identity of a researcher within me which came as a result of my need for cooperation and being understood for what I was doing being met. Moreover it added to an experience of meaningfulness as I thought that my work had the potential to make a contribution at an administrative and policy level. It was fuel like this, apart from the care I received at home and in school which made it possible for me to work extra hours.

This was my first report writing assignment outside academic premises. When I wrote the report I tried to include observations and suggestions based on my prior literature review, the work with the children as a researcher and teacher, as well as the insights I had gained by travelling through the remote areas with the education campaign. My concern was to represent perspectives from the children, youth and teachers as well as villagers and nomads which I had gathered over 40 days.

The principle and above all the president encouraged me to be critical and had been respectfully open to every criticism I had. I noticed that the Ladakhis I met did not take criticism from outsiders personally or as an attack on their culture. They tried to reflect on what was being said and engaged in the conversation with their own perspective.

As I finished writing the report and looked over it again, I was satisfied with the content. But at this moment my academic training interfered with my intuitive presence and I asked myself : But is this critical enough?

This was followed by an act which brought upon the toughest ethical challenge of my research period. I decided to add a section which I titled 'Additional Comments'. It was one page with around seven points. As I reflect on this moment, I can see myself searching for problems to put into the report to make it more 'critical'. The report was ready and I printed out the first draft to share with the principal and teachers for feedback, so I could make changes if required for the final version.

One of the teachers, who looked after administrative matters in case the principal was busy, read the report and found one particular point on the additional comments page as an inaccurate and unreasonable observation. I think this made him feel mistrustful, disappointed and guarded since it came across as though I wanted to present a negative picture of the school to the parent institution. Had this been true, it could have influenced the relations between the networks and probably stopped the aid they were already receiving. It coloured his perspective as he read the report and began reading sentences out of context. He shared this with the principal and the principal appeared furious and hurt. Due to my obligation to confidentiality I choose not to share the comment in this text since the matter was delicate. However, I would like to discuss the conflict that became a consequence and how it was resolved.

The principle and teacher called me into the principle's room to discuss the report. I sensed trouble in the air. Since this was the last week and I had visitors¹⁹ to help, I asked them to take over the English workshop. I was apprehensive of what was going to follow, but prepared myself to face the music and patiently give any explanation that was demanded of me.

The teacher showed me the statements they felt were offensive and I tried to explain that if you read them in the intended context, it did not mean what was being interpreted. This went on for a while with aggravated and enraged input from the principal, till I identified one comment which was the root of this network of reactions. The principal removed files to show me accounts and factual explanations to

19 Friends from NTNU. This was a planned visit and they were well acquainted with the project since its inception.

prove his point. He said, “Write negative things about us, but as long as they are true.” I began to explain that I accepted that it was not a well informed comment and very subjective. I suggested that the process of reviewing and revising together was important in order to avoid such errors. I began explaining how in the academic field, the first draft is never the final draft even though one prints it, because I heard him express that printing implied finality. I tried to reason out that I was an amateur researcher in a learning process and this was a mistake, not intended to present the school in a bad light. An exchange of accusation and defence followed, until in an effort to calm him I uttered in response to his fuming, red face ...

“Please don't be angry!”

“Of course I'm going to be angry if you write wrong things. We took care of you whole-heartedly and gave you all the support you asked for generously. If the chiefs in the capital read this, they could shut our school down. You are here for research, you have to report facts! You have no idea how we built this school, there was nothing here. Stay here for three years and then you will understand how hard our life is and what a challenge it is to run a school like this!” the walls trembled with his enraged voice.

“Why did you do this Tani...” the teacher added in a disappointed tone.

I saw it clearly, in that moment. The need of the moment was not explanations for what I had done, but an empathetic acknowledgement of his sentiments.

“I see why you are angry. I am sorry for the hurt and disappointment I have caused you. It must be hard, I can only imagine...”

I repeated this empathetic apology several times accompanied by joining my hands together because it is a gesture appropriate in situations like these, among others. He expressed his rage and hurt some more. I met it with an empathetic ear and when the moment felt a little calm, “Is my apology for the pain and disappointment I have caused reaching you?” I said. He calmed down, “Yes it is.”

I suggest working together to revise the report and offered to go through it line by line with the principal's trusted teacher. Later that evening I sat with the teacher and read through the report together

with him, explaining what I had written. He appreciated and agreed with most of it and even shared his own ideas about what education should be like and the practical challenges the region is facing. This in turn enriched my understanding and in turn helped me revise the report.

Rosenberg in his approach of non-violent communication describes the indispensable process of receiving empathetically as 'a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing' (2003:91). Natural empathy is blocked by intellectual understanding (2003: 93), but happens if we focus on listening to what people are needing rather than what they are thinking about us. (2003:95). No matter what others say, we only need to hear what they are (a) observing, (b) feeling, (c) needing and (d) requesting. (2003:94). In this case, the other party had observed a statement which they thought was not based on facts and portrayed a negative picture of them. This caused feelings of disappointment, fury and mistrust because their need for honesty, being seen and understood, appreciation and cooperation was not met. The request was to present a report which represented a legitimate picture of them. When I began to express an empathetic apology, I was not apologising for my observation or saying I was wrong and they were right. It was not a matter of who was right or wrong, I had written something according to my observations and they had seen the matter through another telescope of information which was not available to me before. What I was sorry for was the feelings that my action had triggered. Although the cause of our feelings is not other people's behaviour (2003:35), acknowledging that I had stimulated highly unpleasant feelings probably contributed to an experience of understanding. As I connected to their feelings instead of thoughts, it became easier for me see what was the need of the hour that I had to respond to.

Another factor that helped greatly from their side in my view is that the teacher did not seem to align himself with the principal's fury. He tried through his disappointment to show me the problem areas and was open to discussion. Had it been only the principal and I, the dynamic could have been two extreme point of views. The presence of a third person brought in a triangular sense of balance. Secondly the Ladakhi society is based on values of peace. Harvey (1983) argues that their Buddhist way of life fosters inner resources and personal characteristics of peacefulness. Another possibility is that the monastic way of life is detached from social, political and moral orders. Ladakhis idealise a harmonious and conflict-free society. While they recognise the failings in their own society, they think that conflict is a symptom of a degenerate society (Pirie 2007). This did not mean that conflicts and

anger were suppressed, as I have described. But the emergence of conflict was met with a willingness to find harmonious solution, instead of a reward-punishment approach. In the former expression of feelings and unmet needs are addressed such that even though everyone needs are not met, they matter. The latter on the other hand focuses on finding out who is right or wrong and is rewarded or punished accordingly.

One of the possible insights that emerge from my analytical reflection on this conflict and resolution is that in the face of challenges, resolution may also be found within the resources of the community. The turning point for me was the realisation that the situation demanded an empathetic reflex, which probably came due to a combination of my personal as well as academic background. Nevertheless, the cultural milieu I found myself in made it possible for this turning point to arrive as well. I doubt whether it would have been possible for me to be empathetic in a challenging situation had I not received the care, empathy, support and appreciation from the party I was in conflict with.

3.3. Methods

Working with children required me to have a bag full of research tools which were conducive to facilitate a deep listening (Rosenberg 2003, Gudmundsdottir 1996) of their voices. Methods used for research with adults could not simply be taken into a field with kids. As founder of the Reggio Approach - Loris Malaguzzi writes, children have a hundred languages (1997):

*Il bambino
è fatto di cento.
Il bambino
ha cento lingue
cento mani
cento pensieri
cento modi di pensare
di giocare e di parlare²⁰*

This called for a research design which made it possible to discover their *hundred voices*. Researching

²⁰ (Italian) The child/ is made of hundred. / The child has/ Hundred languages/ Hundred hands/ Hundred thoughts/ Hundred ways of thinking/ Of playing, of speaking.

children is not only about picking the right ethics, roles and tools (Connolly 1997, Solberg 1996), but a constant process of questioning my own definitions of what I was doing, often putting me in a position where I asked myself, 'Would this be accepted as *scientific* research?'

As the title of my project suggests the focus of enquiry could be defined in terms of everything that constitutes the mundane lives of these children. This made my project very broad and open-ended. While on the one hand, it could've been better to narrow down on one aspect of their daily lives, I deliberately decided to maintain a broad structure since this was my first direct contact with the Ladakhi culture. Focusing on one particular aspect is a project that could possibly arise out of the knowledge that emerges from this primary engagement. In the following table I summarise the scope of my research questions as *The What, Where, When, With (whom/what), Why and How of:*

Eating	Learning
Sleeping	Studying
Playing	Doing Chores
Praying	Performing Duties
Meditating	Building and Maintaining Relationships

3.3.1. Background of the Research-design

During the preparatory stages, I met Alison Clark during a workshop she conducted for students at the Norwegian Center for Child Research. Meeting her in person gave me a better understanding of her approach and inspired me to include it in my own design. Since I was going to assume the dual role of a teacher and researcher in the field, this approach I assumed would help me cope with the blurry lines between my activities, which would not always be strictly demarcated in practice. I chose to implement a polymethodic design based on Alison Clark's mosaic approach (2001, 2005) which stems from the understanding that during research with children, the line between being a teacher and a researcher becomes very thin (Seidel 2001).

One of the theoretical starting points of my study was the notion that children are competent beings as discussed in the sociology of/for childhood (Mayall 2002, James et al 1998). In this view children are not passive objects of research, but social actors who are beings and not only becomings (Qvortrup et al

1994). Secondly, I wanted to acknowledge in practice that the least powerful members of a society in fact are experts in their own lives and have knowledge which is indispensable to researchers. Therefore, friendly tools which could make their voices visible needed to be used, as seen in the development of participatory appraisal techniques (Hart 1997). This has also been a starting point in the development of the mosaic approach (Clark 2005, 2001). The approach is multi-methodic, participatory, reflexive and adaptable. Apart from treating children as experts in their own lives, recognising the different voices of children, including various types of informants and focusing on children's lived experiences – it can also be applied in a variety of institutions (Clark 2005:13). I found that these elements made the approach suitable for my study as well as the question which is at the heart of the approach i.e. *What does it mean to be in this place?* (Clark 2005:17). The adaptability of the approach had the potential to help me cope with the challenges that would arise out of assuming a dual role. The creative, multi-methodic nature of the approach could keep large groups of children engaged over a period of time as it happened in my case. This approach also had scope to include adults in the process which would enhance my insights as a researcher. Further, the approach does not depend heavily on spoken language, but gives room to multi-layered listening; I concluded that this would be especially beneficial with participants who have a foreign mother tongue. Above all since the method focuses on lived-experiences and my empirical study aimed to understand the daily lives of the children from their perspective, I based my design on this approach.

As pointed out, the mosaic approach acknowledges that in working with children the line between a teacher and a researcher can often blur. In trying to assume the least-adult role (Mandell 1991) I conducted intensive research workshops with the children titled 'My Daily Life' which created a child-friendly space for the children to express their perspective the way they feel comfortable doing. This included engaging with role-play, neighbourhood walks, theme and non-theme based drawings, games, sentence completion exercises, opinion polls, focus group discussions and interviews. Apart from the data procured through these workshops, I got valuable insights through the work I did with them as a teacher and participant observation.

3.3.2. The Research Design

The design can be broadly categorised in three parts, namely the workshops with the core child-informant group, the English language assistance hours with all the children in the school and the

research with adults who are part of the children's daily lives. In the following tables we can see the tools used and number of participants in each part of the research design. The groups of children in the core-informant groups who participated were between the ages of 10-18 years. As an English language assistant, I worked with all the children i.e. between the ages of 4-18 years. I was unable to segregate them according to the chronological age since I had to work with them according to the class they were in. Not all children were enrolled at the same age and were enrolled in a certain class according to how they fared in the entrance test held by the teachers. Grouping them according to their chronological age would be hampering with their established dynamics, risk a feeling of exclusion and moreover cause inconvenience to the school routine. The English language sessions similarly were held class-wise and not age wise.

Part 1: Methodological tools in the workshops with core informant-group

Tool	No. of Participants	Comments
Drawings	28	Theme-based (e.g. everyday objects, everyday food) and drawing without instructions. Activities were followed up by discussion and clarification.
Neighbourhood Walks	24	Guided by children, followed up by drawing maps of areas visited
Focus-group discussions	24	Themes for discussions emerged after first two weeks in the field.
Opinion Polls	24	Discussions were followed up by 'secret votes' to get an overview of the general opinion or preferences of the group on issues discussed.
Sing and Talk	24	I found that Ladakhis love to sing. Sometimes children spontaneously sang during workshops if they wanted and we 'chatted' about themes that emerged from the songs related to their lives.
Role-play	24	Children presented scenes from their daily lives. Some acts were filmed with consent. We watched the videos together later and they explained further what they were doing.
Photo and Video presentations	24	Children saw videos and photographs from the research process and explained what they saw and knew to the researcher.
Sentence completion	8	Individual activity
Ranking	15	Objects drawn by children were ranked in order of importance and frequency of use.
Private, semi-structured interviews	12	Assisted by an interpreter from the monastery. The interpreter was my house-brother, a monk from the monastery and a resident of the village

		since birth. He had also been a participant of my research and understood what I was doing. Children could voluntarily participate in the interview and were recorded by consent. They consented to the choice of the interpreter and were given the possibility of choosing another interpreter if they wanted.
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Part 2: English language assistance

Tools	No. of Participants	Comments
Games	28	E.g. A ball was used to practice terms such as because/therefore/but etc. All the children sat in a circle. One child began a sentence (e.g. I eat momos.) and threw the ball to a fellow student who had to complete the sentence using because/therefore/but (e.g. ... because they are tasty.)
Role-Play	9	The children wrote essays titled 'My village'. Then the essays were used as a base to create a short skits
Drawings	13	Rhymes and essays from their syllabus were visualised on paper with colours.
The Flag-project	46	The tashi-delek is a stream of colourful prayer flags. The children created their own theme-based flags (e.g. flowers, animals, countries).
Singing	28	Songs which reflect regional values of brotherhood and care for all sentient beings e.g. "Heal the World" and "Imagine" can be practiced as a medium to improve pronunciations and learn colloquial usage (eg. There is = There's, Do not = Don't etc.).
Presentations	3	Children were encouraged to describe experiences and present them to the class.
Spelling Bee	8	Competitions to improve spellings

Part 3: Research with adults

Tools	No. of Participants	Comments
Semi-structured interviews	44	Interpreter assisted if required. Informants will include teachers (3), adult monks (12), parents and family (5), indigenous nomads (2), tourists (10) and youth (12). Most interviews were audio recorded, notes were taken if informants requested not to be recorded.

In addition to the above, semi-participant observation and field-notes were umbrella tools covering all three parts of the research-design. I also recorded 5 meetings with the youth group and education committee which I attended as a participating observer. I was invited to participate in these meetings to share observations that emerged from my work as a resident teacher and researcher.

3.4. Leaving the field

In the last week I had two fellow students from NTNU who came to visit me in the field and helped the children in the English language camp. The visitors were also close friends who had been involved in the preparatory stages of this project in particular, as well as other projects we participated in in Norway. Their visit was valuable in the process and well timed, since I could share the responsibilities of being an English language teacher with them, and focus on collecting pieces of data which I felt I could not leave the field without. They were equally welcomed by the monks, school, family and the children. For me this was also the beginning of re-establishing contact with the world I came from and begin familiarising my informants about my soon to come departure. I had still not managed to draw the line of whether 'data collecting' was over or not. Until the last moment I remained an observer and kept field notes.

Two days before the day of departure, a group of child monks arrived with their teachers and principle. They were on a journey as part of a school-trip and took a night halt at the school. My informant children shared their dormitory space with the visiting children and the adults shared their room with other adults. The principle of my school had served a term as principle in the visiting school and was especially eager that his guests have a comfortable stay and leave with a good impression of his present school. An evening was organised where my students presented a skit, songs and presentations they had learned as part of the English language camp and sessions I had conducted. Children from the visiting school also presented some songs and rhymes they had learned. The monks from both sides presented each other, as well as my friends and me with khataks²¹. The visiting principle thanked me for my work with the children as he presented me with the traditional khatak.

I requested him to present my children with gifts of appreciation which I had prepared for their

21 Traditional white scarves offered gifts as an expression of care, gratitude and to generate auspicious interdependence.

participation in the English language activities. I thought it would be more encouraging for the children to receive appreciation through his hands. Also had I given the gifts myself during the evening, I risked overstepping his respected position. This was a matter of choice, the respect that the monks showed me always kept the passage open for me to place myself anywhere in the hierarchy of respect as I wanted. As a consequence it would not be received with awkwardness had I given the presents myself. The power dynamics felt more balanced and allowed me better participation when I showed acceptance for their established social order.

The next night the school hosted a goodbye dinner for us. This was my last night in the village. They prepared special food and served us tea; Konchok Tashi addressed us with appreciation and gave a motivational speech for the children. It was my birthday the next day and one of the teachers requested the children to sing John Lennon's *Imagine* (which we used to sing together) for me, one last time. I was deeply touched expressed how grateful I was to be accepted by them and that they had been very generous 'teachers' to me for my studies. I further expressed that my hope was that the next time I see them and they would be much older, we would converse in English. As the last exercise I said,

“I will teach you a new word and you have to find out what this means over the next years of your studies. The word is PhD. That is a birthday present I would like.”

“PhD.” they whispered to themselves.

Having seen the potential of the children and how important knowledge and education is to the community, I had begun to develop an aspiration of seeing each of these children go a long way in the pursuit of knowledge. My reciprocity at a material level was the help I offered in their educational process and the presents I gave. But at a non-material level I shared my confidence in them and my vision of the pursuit of knowledge that can be a possibility for them if they want. The next morning we went to the morning assembly. After it was done I said thank you again.

“Bye Tani! See you tomorrow!” They said habitually.

“See you!” I said. Leaving with the idea of coming back gave me a sense of hope I needed to cope with the farewell. The principle came to me. We shook hands.

“Thank you.” I said

- “Thank you so much. And if there has been any offence on our part, please forgive us.”

“Forgive me, for my ignorant actions. It's all behind us now ...”

- “Yes.”

“Goodbye. I have an appointment in the other village now.”

- “See you.”

At home bags were packed and the car arrived. I said goodbye to aba-le and hugged ama-le. Brother lama Gyaltzen helped carry my heavy bag and accompanied us to the car. We sat inside. “We'll be in touch on facebook, once I return to college,” he paused, I nodded and waved. “Miss you,” he said as he waved out. I couldn't respond because my heart was so heavy. Tears streamed down my cheeks as the car drove away and my friend loaned me her arm and her shoulder to empathise and console me. The journey to integrate and adjust into another reality, the one I had pulled out of for this immersion, was ahead of me.

3.5. Data Processing and Analysis

3.5.1. Processing and Ordering the Data

The principles of analysis which I began with were not different from the simple logic we follow in our everyday lives, find our way around and solve everyday problems. (Ennew and Boyden 1997:172)

By analysis then, I describe a process I use for my everyday life as well as scientific issues (Peter Loizos 1995, in Ennew & Boyden 1997:172) perhaps that is why I am unable to separate distinctly between the period of analysis and data collection. Ely et al (1997:140) explain explicitly that qualitative research is characterised by a progressive and continuous process of analysis from the very beginning of data collection, which functions to guide the focus and adaptability of the data collection process. While this was the case in my work as well, I recognise that I have been a co-analysers in the field alongside my participants. The workshop shaped itself largely based on the direction the children wanted to steer it in. With the adults - when I was done with my questions I would ask them if they wanted to ask me something. But turning the roles around and being questioned by them, I got further insights into their perspectives which guided my analytical process. It became clearer in the field that my data is being produced as an inter-subjective and interpretative exchange between the informants

and me (Ansell 2001). Thus, I was not the sole-interpreter of the data (Clark 2006). I received the interpretations of the informants of their own lives and then put this information through my own knowledge bank, to seek further information. The more I was able to communicate what my knowledge bank was made of, the more they were able to connect and respond to me. This also worked the other way around – the more they told me of what they knew or didn't, the better equipped I was to respond to their questions about my data-collection process. Field-notes helped process and organise information while I was there.

The analytical stage was different once I left the field and sat down with the data alone (Ely et al., 1997:40). Moving forward from an explicitly inter-subjective analytical co-creation of knowledge, I arrived at an implicitly inter-subjective stage. By an implicit inter-subjective stage I refer to the process where I began looking at my data alone - partly sprawled on my carpet at my residence, partly in printed texts and partly in terms of audio recordings, videos and photographs on my laptop. The reason this remains an inter-subjective process is primarily because the material now represented my informants. Secondly, the secondary sources like local publications and official documents I had gathered further represented a reality which did not emerge from me. Though the interactive nature was consistent, the difference was that the decision making power in this stage rested entirely with me, which brought with it added responsibilities. The main responsibility was to process the data further in a way that it becomes accessible for academic report writing, but at the same time reflects the world-views and decisions that had been given to me.

After spending time on simply being overwhelmed with the amount of data collected, I gathered some equanimity to begin organising it. It was clear that not all data would be used, since the presentation of the thesis had to be done within a limited time and word space. I triangulated broad themes to begin categorising the data. I found these themes emerging over and over through every perspective I had gathered, including my own.

The themes further guided the interviews and meetings I transcribed. For the transcriptions I aimed to capture the dialogue as close to what was actually said, however I did not record every haw or pause. The haws and pauses that I recorded depended on if I heard them as adding to the response. I listened to the recordings before transcribing them, in order to familiarise myself again with the dialogues; this

also served as an analytical step. In case the interviews were not in English, I chose to translate and transcribe simultaneously in order to manage my time efficiently²².

I then engaged in writing and rewriting in response to the data I was now receiving, refining it further into notes. This was followed by reading and perusing the notes, recording observations, repeating the process until I could write again. I followed the process I described to allow patterns and insights to emerge which contributed to the analysis chapters as sub-themes. This stage in a metaphorical sense could be described as *interviewing the data*, since I found myself asking the same questions in different ways and looking for responses within the data I had. It was what I did with my informants, except I was now doing it with my data which represented my field and informants in my work space in Norway. All the way I kept trying focus on what was most relevant to the children's daily lives.

Analysis is not just a matter of managing and manipulating data. I had to be prepared to go beyond the data to develop ideas that would illuminate them and link my ideas with those of others (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:159). In terms of linking ideas with others however, it required a lot of prudence lest I linked data with ideas at the expense of obscuring the voices I had gathered.

3.5.2. Conscious Naivety

My background in philosophy, the tendency to philosophise and the theoretical baggage I carried with me was something I thought I needed to be alert about during this process. No doubt this background influences my lenses; however the bigger challenge was to negotiate whether it should be allowed to enter the foreground of the study. If at all I had to do this when would this be, was the question that followed. The central question of the study was - what is it like to live like a child monk everyday in Ladakh? The answers lay in the everyday lives of the children in Ladakh and so it was fundamental to be present with the informants or the co-created data in their absence. Theoretical, rather a predominantly philosophical engagement would not give me the answers. I decided to meet this challenge through the root cause of the challenge itself and found support within the realm of ideas. I constructed a conceptual tool, which would allow me to define my attitude in terms of engaging with my data facilitating the possibility of remaining close to the life-world I wanted to explore. I called this attitude - *conscious naivety*.

22 Interviews were conducted in English, Hindi-Urdu or Ladakhi with English or Hindi-Urdu interpretation.

Conscious naivety is a deliberate leaving aside of theoretical knowledge whilst interacting with qualitative data. It is a playful, child-like engagement underpinned by a current of curiosity. By playful, I do not mean irresponsible or careless. Imagine a child who has been given brushes and paints or clay without instructions, painting or moulding for the first time. What is alive is the joy of present engagement, without the deliberate intention of creating a certain pattern or design. This engagement facilitates an understanding of the mediumistic possibilities, structures and material nature of what the child is interacting with. There is a self-revealing of the material which is allowed as a consequence of such an engagement. Conscious naivety is certainly influenced by Husserl's *epoche* or bracketing (1973) and Heidegger's description of how Being reveals itself (1996). The inspiration however comes as a result of a particular observation of my informant's playing with a cow during one of our neighbourhood walks.

The children led me to see a little house we called the tsampa factory. Tsampa is staple Tibetan food made by grinding roasted barley; it is also used to make Tibetan porridge with butter tea. In the village, this is traditionally done in little houses owned by families and the grinding system runs on natural water energy. On the way to this factory we stopped intermittently as I was introduced to little bridges or special plants and we took pictures and videos of our little trip²³. At one particular halt on the way stood a cow, I am unable to put my finger on the trigger which led to the ecstatic play which followed. Two of the boys jumped into the cow's space and began howling and hollering playfully, to which the cow began responding. The others jumped in and in no time I was dumbstruck by a group of young boys and a cow running around in this space, chasing each other. For a moment I was afraid of the children or the animal getting hurt, until I reminded myself that *they* were my guides and knew better. It was me who needed protection, not them! But as I watched this scene without intervention, I realised that the play was precisely about engaging with the cow as it was *in that moment*. Their responses seemed to connect with the animals responses. The wild play was balancing itself (in turn protecting both parties) on an intuitive connecting between everyone involved. They knew all about cows in theory and practice. Further they had certain roles in the society which they were well aware of, but this was playtime. The connecting they managed to create the given wild cacophony was not possible with careful theoretical consideration 'in that moment'. When I asked them later about this game, the answer was simple: *'We don't think, just play!'* However, it is this *connecting* I presume that makes ethical

23 As requested by the children.

considerations naturally possible for them such that neither the cow nor the others get hurt.

In the field I deliberately decided not to make connections with the theories I knew. During the implicitly inter-subjective stage, I also ensured dedicated time to engage with the data with the same approach. There were times I allowed myself to make links with theory and of course introduced again theory during the analytical stages, but this was alongside times where any theory-linking was avoided to the greatest degree possible. These periods were a joyful, theory-free time with the data and ones I enjoyed the most in this process.

3.5.3. Anonymity

One of the steps I followed after leaving the field was to give the interview recording files numbers instead of names. The transcripts followed the same numbering. In the thesis itself all the names have been changed and I have tried to present descriptions such that the community and village may not be identifiable by the readers. Other data recorded on paper where children wrote their names is only accessible to me. Lastly, in the thesis I chose to include drawings of photographs instead of original pictures, so that people and places are protected.

3.5.4. Validity and Reliability

The question of validity and reliability is essentially the question of knowledge and truth – an epistemological dilemma that has been discussed in the western traditions from Plato (Theatatus and Meno) to Ayer (1956) and Gettier (1963). In fact Gettier's essay *Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?* is a reminder to the scientific community of the limitations of the task of defining knowledge.

Positivist notions of reliability assume an underlying universe where inquiry could, quite logically, be replicated. This assumption of an unchanging social world is in direct contrast to the qualitative/interpretative assumption that the social world is always changing and the concept of replication itself is problematic. (Marshall and Rossman, 1989:147)

Contemporary philosophers of science such as Sarukkai (2010, personal communication 2009) give enough reason and evidence to believe that what constitutes as 'doing science' itself may not be something we can take for granted. Legendary philosophers like Heidegger (1996, 1977) have opened way to recognise the epistemological, ontological as well as human error of recognising only that

which can be measured as existing. The exploratory, qualitative research I have carried out is an attempt to understand aspects of (human) life that cannot be measured. Further the research design is based largely on a new paradigm in social sciences namely the social studies of children and childhood. Within this paradigm itself the attempted project and research design is unique. Nevertheless the question of reliability and validity are factors that qualitative researchers should be concerned about while designing, analysing and deriving implications or judging a study (Patton 2002). *How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?* (Lincoln & Guba 1985:290). A possible response to meet this challenge is to take a position that the quality of a study in every paradigm should be evaluated by the terms of that paradigm itself (Healy & Perry 2000).

Some examples of alternative criteria for qualitative research are credibility, neutrality or confirmability, dependability or consistency and applicability or transferability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Lincoln & Guba (1985:390) employ the term dependability for qualitative research which corresponds to the concept of reliability in quantitative research. On the other hand, Clont (1992) and Seale (1999) have discussed dependability along with the concept of consistency or reliability in qualitative research.

I used a *Triple T* criteria to evaluate the matter as I worked with my data i.e. trust, triangulation and transparency. The questions I asked myself were: Do I have any reason to doubt that the informant tried to deliberately give me false accounts of experience? Was the informant influenced by me or other factors that could have changed his/her responses? In simple words, “Do I trust what my informant is giving me and to what extent?” Secondly - can this particular data be triangulated with data collected through at least more than two other tools employed? A polymethodic design like I had which used more than three methods facilitated triangulation of information on the same issue or topic obtained through different methods and in some cases from different sources as well (Ennew and Boyden, 1997:157). Lastly, in writing the text I have attempted to be as transparent as possible in terms of describing the research process, strategies and data analysis methods, as well as the theoretical frames of reference (Moisander and Valtonen, in Silverman 2006: 282). Describing the limitations of this study is part of the strategy of transparency in order to support the reliability and validity claim of my study.

3.6. Limitations of the Study

On the surface level limitations of this study according to me are that the time spent in the field, analysis and writing was simply too little compared to the possible scope of this inquiry. The limited number of pages for presentation of the results is something one has to constantly deal with. Even though the time spent in the field was little, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in such a way that I have collected enough data to engage with beyond this particular presentation. The limited time for analysis and writing implied having to leave out some data and themes, risking the quality of the final outcome. I am unable to say whether the data I chose to leave out at this moment in time, would be the same data I would leave out had I to analyse and write this thesis after two years. There is data which has been left out because it did not fit in with the current puzzle in *my* eyes which implies a degree of arbitrariness.

The second limitation occurs in the field itself in so far as my informants and I do not share the same first language. I do not speak their first language and sought assistance from interpreters occasionally. Not all informants spoke my first language either. Although we shared a common second language – Hindi-Urdu, the way we learned it and use it has regional and institutional variations. Even though at no point did I think, that this impeded the possibility of connecting with each other, it slowed down the exchange of information. Further, I could not follow conversations when Ladakhis spoke among themselves or during some relevant public meetings. It was an advantage to be an outsider because it seemed to make my informants feel more comfortable when sharing critical or personal information. Had I been a Ladakhi-speaking outsider though, the quality of data could have been different because I would have additional insights. Lastly, I recognise that my schooling and academic training is an obstacle in seeing and reading the world through indigenous logic. I have tried as much as possible, but I don't know how successful I have been. In spite of this awareness, I do somehow employ conventional academic frames to make sense of indigenous realities. This limitation becomes most obvious when I discuss themes such as morality and values. Such terms come with a heavy and historical baggage of unresolved dilemmas and discussions; the usage of such terms itself has very different connotations in the so-called western world-view. Nevertheless, for the lack of appropriate words – I use these ideas. Consequently, the process has been like chasing fireflies; every time I think I have one in my palms – it has already slipped away.

There are several limitations which perhaps my eyes do not recognise and for which I depend on the readers to inform me. But there is one more aspect in particular which I suspect will come across as a limitation and I would like to discuss it here. It pertains to the style of writing in this text. Ennew and Boyden (1997:180) describe an ideal report-writing style as *unemotional and clear*. My text employs an emotional writing to an extent while trying to be clear in terms of presenting observations, thoughts, feelings and discussion. This experimental approach may impede a reader from relating to and accepting the text as an academic piece of writing. There are reasons for choosing this writing style regardless. I think the questions which arise during my study are linked to sensations and feelings within me: for example it is when I felt uneasy about something or extremely pleased with something that it caught my attention and called me to question it or look deeper there. So it seems unreasonable to me to leave the emotions out of the report. In my case they play a big role in driving and guiding my enquiry. The sensations are what connected me to my informants, environment and made a reflexive empathy possible. Leaving this out of the thesis would amount to compromising on transparency. The reader might also find herself or himself confused or amused to read parts of this text when it starts to read like a piece of fiction literature. This is a consequence of the nature of the predominant instrument of analysis I used – the researcher herself. Finding a balance between academic expectations and my own way of expressing experiential perceptions and reflections was a challenge. Part of overcoming this challenge was to remain consciously naïve through periods of analysis i.e. deliberately leaving aside theory and along with it - academic expectations. There are questions within me which doubt the structures and form of academic writing itself and the role it plays manipulating the knowledge we co-create. The awkwardness one may experience in accepting this as an academic text, may in that case serve as a reminder of questions about structure and form which remain addressed.

3.7. Discussion

To summarise the content of this chapter I would like to highlight the exploratory and experimental aspect of this study. The high adaptability threshold of the methodological perspective upon which the research design was based allowed a fluidity this exploration needed. It was a broad question in a peculiar environment and one could not predict with certainty what or whom one would discover on the way. If original and creative perspectives were to emerge it could not be done within the boundaries of

theories I was unwilling to put aside for a while. The beauty of qualitative designs is that they cannot be replicated and this often fails to meet expectations of a scientific study as commonly understood within the globally dominant scientific institution. There are however fundamental questions regarding the nature of knowledge and what qualifies as science, which are left out for pragmatic purposes not only in this chapter, but in social science in general. The importance of including emotions in my study and recognising them as an important guiding force to ask the right questions and keep on asking them is an insight that emerges, thanks to this fluid methodological lens. It is possible to avoid important debates as long as it does not bother us, but it takes only one passionate scholar who cannot hold back any more to break and de-construct grounds which make way for a paradigm shift so that the pursuit of knowledge can meaningfully thrive. But it takes several others to receive, accept and validate such an act for a new paradigm to emerge. It takes several before to lead one's work up to such a point in the first place. Co-construction of knowledge as it happened in this case and other researchers' works as well is even more obvious in the theoretical realm. In the next chapter we take a look at the theoretical framework of this study which is essentially made of co-constructions from a new paradigm in social science, in other words the social studies of children and childhoods.

Chapter Four

Theoretical Perspectives

We have now become slightly familiar with the paradigm of childhood studies in so far as the methodological perspective and choice of methods is concerned. I also discussed in the previous chapter that while studying the data, I partly took up a consciously naïve approach and bracketed theoretical concepts in order to be present and connect with my informants²⁴. Nevertheless conscious naivety was not always the approach in the process. In this chapter, I will explain the theoretical framework and considerations used in the project.

I will begin by explaining the body of social studies of children and childhood mainly through some central concepts in the field which I employ in the analysis chapters. Following that, I present an overview of Buddhist metaphysics with a focus on the question of causation within the context of the human life-course. Finally, I compare the two theoretical bodies to arrive at a perspective on children and childhood suitable for this study.

4.0. Point of Departure: Social Constructionism

The theoretical point of departure for analysis is social constructionism. My foundational assumption is that, 'reality' as an everyday experience is formed through negotiations and interactions among people, as well as through sets of discourses.

The 'reality' we take for granted in everyday lives is a consequence of our interactions with one another as the cultural, natural and environmental milieu we live in. In that sense conventional reality is an inter-subjective phenomenon. This explains the different realities experienced by people not only in different parts of the world, but also within a particular society. Therefore, from a sociological point of

24 Through the data.

view 'reality' is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman 1967). The implication of this knowledge for research in childhood is primarily the insight that childhood is not a natural, but a socially constructed phenomenon.

No doubt by childhood we mean the early part of the human life-course which may be deemed 'natural' in one sense. However, there is a cultural variation in the way growth and development in this period is understood. This applies to aspects such as expectations of capabilities and competences, ideas of children as vulnerable to harm and risk or incapable of moral discernment etc. A globalised or universal idea of childhood is thus deeply problematic. Secondly, what is recognised as a human being's life course itself is not universal as we will see further in this study.

4.0.1. Social Actors

A pivotal tenet of childhood studies is that children are to be viewed as social actors who are active in determining and constructing their own social lives as well as those of others. They are no longer seen as passive subjects of social structures and processes (Prout & James 1990).

Children are taught to meet the expectations, fit in and survive in a society through the process of socialisation. On the surface it appears as though they are passive receivers of such knowledge, but they are eager learners, active agents and participants in the *interpretive reproduction* of society who take part in their own development (Corsaro 1997). Children possess a sense of self which allows them to act on the basis of their own interpretations and act appropriately in different social worlds (Bluebond-Langner 1978).

Corsaro observed that by interacting with one another, children reproduce culture in various creative ways. 'The term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalising society and culture, but actively contributing to cultural production and change (ibid: 18). The constraints they face are mainly as members of the institution of childhood within a society. Given that in spite of the limitations imposed through adults children still have certain capacities, they may be seen as reflexive social actors or actors within networks of interdependencies (Lee 2001). Another further refined approach is to see them as agents rather than actors since their actions influence relationships, decisions and working of social assumptions (Mayall 2002). The locating of children as reflexive actors or agents

within networks of interdependencies highlights that one of the central fields of reproduction within a society is the family (along with others such as friends).

4.0.2. Family and Friends

Children have been studied under the social category of family by sociologists for many years. It is the site and space where they are born and raised. Locating children firmly within the institution of family not only masks their capacity as autonomous decision-makers, but also makes parenting and family synonymous (Qvortrup 1996). Defining what the ontological essence of a family is, is an uncanny task. We can loosely see it as a group of people of different generations related by marriage or kinship ties. By the end of the 20th century sociologists argued to view family as a quality rather than a thing. Thereafter the family is not seen as a co-residence of generations. In other words families *are*, what families *do* (Silva & Smart 1999, Morgan 1996).

Coming to friendship, children's social relations with peers among others is commonly recognised as friendship. Regardless of how young they are, children of even 3-4 years can be involved in intimate relationships with other children (Corsaro 1985). For the Buddhist monastic community the phenomena of family and friendship are experienced through the sangha or an assembly of the followers of the noble eight-fold path. Advancement in the sociological perspective of family as a quality, rather than a thing allows us to understand the monastic world as a form of family. Children who become monks do not essentially 'belong' to their biological parents. In a way they have two families, and on the other hand they belong to neither. Furthermore, contrary to research which demonstrates that given the stereotypes of masculinity it is difficult for boys to form intimate relations with other boys (Frosh et al 2002), I observed child monks to be affectionate with each other.

4.0.3. Age

One of the standard ways to define a child and demarcate childhood from adulthood is through chronological age. For example the UNCRC defines a child as an individual below the age of 18 providing us with a universalised age-based definition which assumes an experiential commonality challenged by the body of research in childhood studies. As an applied concept age restricts several activities deemed unfit for children, as well as protects activities deemed as suitable for children. Children's competences to perform certain tasks or make decisions and choices are seen in conjunction

with age. A key challenge for childhood studies is to differentiate between age and competence. Examples of working children from the global south who tend to their family needs (Abebe 2008), observations of children's abilities to make morally competent choices and philosophise (Matthews 1994) among other things demonstrate that the linkage between age and competence is not necessary. Failure of adults to give children responsibility based on chronological age on the other hand can limit children in developing the competences and learning skills.

Chronological age is increasingly institutionalised across the world within the life-course of individuals and is a key concept in defining what a child is (Hockey & James 2003). However, this is not universally valid. In Western Europe it wasn't until the late 19th century that age was a significant indicator of social identity with regard to a individuals life-course (Gillis 1996). Moreover, the term 'child' has not always been an age-related term, but rather a signifier of a social dependency (Aries 1962).

4.0.4. Modern Schooling and Age

In many countries age is institutionalised through the modern schooling system in so far as children are divided into different age-based classrooms. Structures are formed based on annual enrolments ranging from early-childhood to the school-leaving age. Every class has its own curriculum based on standards of achievement set for children according to their age. As age-based standardisation is established through this process, children come to be judged as failing, behind for their age or gifted depending on their achievement in relation to the standard. (James 2004)

Schooling is an important landmark in the modern conception of childhood. Children were withdrawn from the labour force and school attendance became compulsory. In England for example, this process took place in the late 19th century (Hendrik 1997). School became a 'space' for children as the entire ideology of modern education saw schools and classrooms as proper segregation of children from adults (ibid.). A consequence of this perspective is that the school becomes equated with education and learning. National curriculum systems suggest that all children (especially in accordance with the age) must receive the same education. Maden (1999) has argued that not all children benefit in the same way from schooling. Increased standardisation in turn puts high demands on children who find it hard to fit in with rigid and conformist school systems. In case the experiences, ethos and values they live outside

differ from the ones in school, the battle becomes even stronger.

Schools are also an investment by the State in preparing children for their future as adult workers. Attending school in that case, becomes a form of child work as in learning lessons; children contribute to the future of the state (Qvortrup 1995, Field 1995). Playtime however, is an aspect of schooling that children appreciate most. It is a key aspect of their experiences of schooling since this is the time when friendship flourishes (Blatchford 1998). However, schools and schooling are not a necessary causal condition for play-time, education or learning in general.

4.1. Metaphysical Clarifications or A Question of Causality

Questions such as what is a child and what is childhood which are fundamental in the development of the new paradigm of childhood studies are essentially questions about causality. Birth is a precondition for life, which in turn is a precondition for death. This journey is conventionally divided into periods such as childhood, adulthood and old age. The recognition of futurity is based on the recognition of a child's potential to be something predictably different in the future. Thus, we are essentially looking into the realm of causal understanding.

One of the primary problems for childhood studies research is the view that children are incomplete beings whose purpose is to reach completion through adulthood. Childhood is a social construct. What logically follows is that there is no such thing as a 'universal childhood' which renders politically binding texts such as the UNCRC as highly problematic. There are numerous childhoods in this world.

Many conventional adult attitudes towards children are a result of the notion that children are becoming, rather than being (Jenks 1996 a). Thus **futurity** becomes the defining conceptual social space of childhood. Children represent the survival of the human species as well as the present generation's investment in the collective future. Childhood as the early stage in the course of human life is understood in reference to the future adulthood. Though dependency and futurity are traditional markers of the idea of childhood where adulthood is the final arrival point, in the modern world adulthood can not be seen as a complete, stable state (Lee 2001). The contemporary era is full of uncertainty about the nature of adulthood and thus childhood cannot be characterised as an incomplete

state of dependency making it more complex and ambiguous (ibid.).

We may mark at this point the causal linearity which metaphysically underpins the dominant, conventional, minority world attitude i.e. birth leads to growing and ageing which ends in death. Not all philosophical and scientific thinking is based on this assumption. I will briefly present the metaphysical foundation of Buddhism as an example to support this claim

4.2. The Buddhist World-View

The Buddhist²⁵ perspective on causality is certainly essential in understanding the metaphysical foundation which influences everyday lives and world-view of my informants. Moreover it is even more pertinent to the overarching question of childhood as we shall see further in this study.

Buddha (circa 6th century BC) discovered that causality was a cyclical process as opposed to the linear one as a result of a phenomenological investigation based on first hand meditation. This means that cause and effect are not distinct entities but interdependent phenomena. Smoke for example is an effect of fire and although it appears to be distinct, it is in fact inseparable from the phenomena of fire. This aspect of interdependence is a key feature of the Buddhist world-view in so far as there is no real demarcation between individuals and the environment²⁶. This realisation,²⁷ maybe seen as one of the goals of a Buddhist way of life, which reveals that the nature of things (i.e. beings, actions, ideas) is to constantly change²⁸. Further they arise and pass away with such rapidity, giving us an illusion of permanence. In other words, what arises in this particular moment is an effect of the previous moment and a cause for the next one.

Consequently, Buddhist philosophy distinguishes between conventional truth and the ultimate truth (Chatterjee & Datta 1968, Sharma 1960). For example definitions such a 'age', 'child', 'adult', 'toy', 'book' etc. are conventional truths²⁹. For practical purposes we use these terms, but due to ignorance³⁰

25 There are several nuanced differences among the different schools within the Buddhist tradition. I refer only to the core teachings of Gautama Buddha which is common to all schools.

26 This view is also seen in deep ecological thinking founded in Norway in the 1970s.

27 At an experiential level as opposed to only intellectual understanding.

28 Become

29 It is possible to understand this from the point of our everyday reality as a social construction.

30 Ignorance refers to lack of experiential awareness, not in the sense of theoretical or intellectual ignorance.

we treat them as universal truths. This is not apparent to ordinary persons who are hindered by experiential ignorance, craving, habitual thought patterns and thinking.

4.2.1. Causation or The Theory of Dependent Arising

The theory of interdependent arising or *paticcasamuppada*³¹ elaborates the process of the cycle of birth. This theory has been given a lot of importance in the Buddhist teachings; the experiential realisation or understanding of this wisdom is equivalent to understanding *dhamma*³² (Chatterjee & Datta 1968). Ignorance is the cause for mental formations to arise. Mental formations give rise to consciousness which is the condition for mind and matter. Mind and matter give rise to sense doors which are a condition for contact. Feelings arise as a consequence of contact and are the condition for feeling. Feelings give rise to craving or aversion due to which clinging arises. Clinging gives rise to becoming which gives rise to birth. Birth is the condition for ageing and dying. If ignorance is not eliminated at an experiential level, the cycle keeps on repeating itself. (Chatterjee & Datta 1968, Sharma 1960)

4.2.2. Every Act is a Fruit and a Seed

The principle of interdependent arising is the basis of the concept of karma within this framework. *Kamma*³³ means that all our actions (mental, vocal or physical) have a corresponding consequence no matter how big or small, good or bad. Every action is a fruit of a previous action and the seed for the next. Fruition of the acts may not always be immediate and can ripen in future lifetimes too. Secondly, it is not possible to identify a corresponding cause, because it may be a complex blend of several *karmas* ripening together. (Sogyal Rinpoche 2009)

Within the purview of the question of futurity this way of thought has some relevant implications which will also guide the understanding of the analysis chapters. Firstly, that every child who is born is a continuation of a previous life which means he is born with knowledge from previous lives³⁴. In other words no human is born a *tabula rasa*³⁵ as such. Secondly, every individual is a 'happening or a process'

31 Pali term. Also translated as dependent origination or dependent arising.

32 Ladakhis use the Tibetan term *chos* to refer to the Pali term *dhamma*. I will use the Pali term *dhamma* here on.

33 *Kamma* is the Pali form of the Sanskrit word *karma*

34 Buddhists distinguish between having knowledge and having the memory of certain knowledge. Children are not born with distinct memory unless they are exceptionally intelligent. Adults bear the duty to assist the child to access his epistemological knowledge procured through experiences in former lives and refine it further.

35 The *tabula rasa* discourse on human understanding became popular through John Locke's work in the 17th century. Human beings are born with minds as blank slates which are filled with knowledge as we grow older. This influences greatly the way children are viewed as 'blank slates' to be taught by knowledgeable adults. The other two broad

which will cease to exist only when his ignorance ceases to exist. This is the stage of enlightenment whereby one gains the title of a Buddha. For childhood studies, this implies that there exists a perspective and lived-experience whereby every individual is a becoming regardless of chronological age.

4.2.3. The Noble Truths and the Noble Path

In order to be better equipped to understand the everyday lives of monks, I think is necessary to have a basic picture of the teachings of Gautama the Buddha. The Four Noble Truths - to be seen within the context of the Buddhist understanding of causality, are the central doctrine of Buddhism. They can be loosely summarised as follows (Chatterjee & Datta 1968, Sharma 1960):

- The truth of suffering (e.g. birth, ageing and death)
- The truth of attachment as the cause of suffering
- The truth of cessation of suffering.
- The truth of the way towards cessation of suffering or the eight-fold path.

The noble eight-fold path or the ethical middle path³⁶ consists of cultivating and maintaining the right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (Chatterjee & Datta 1968, Sharma 1960). For both householders as well as monks this ethical foundation is the prerequisite for a good-life. Living the good life purifies the mind and trains its capacity to experience reality at the subtlest level. Thereby, the truth of the intricate web of causal interdependencies, and a consistently becoming/changing reality becomes evident and the Ego dissolves. The more one develops this faculty, the more one finds that compassion flows naturally (S.N. Goenka 2000, S.N. Goenka in Hart 1987). Becoming a monk provides a better opportunity not only to commit oneself to the practise of following the eight-fold path, but also support others in their pursuit.

discourses on understanding children (or human mind) are the Puritan discourse on children as evil in need of discipline and the romantic view of children as innocent or angelic.

36 Sometimes likened to Aristotles 'Golden Mean' (Sharma 1960)

4.3. Discussion

In order to use a blend of perspectives which forms the theoretical framework for a study, the prerequisite is that there is a level of compatibility threshold between them. This is especially the case when the perspectives come from not only different cultures, but also different time-periods. I found a common ground between my understanding of social constructionism and Buddhist philosophy, which made this blend possible.

Both childhood studies (or social constructionism in general) and Buddhist metaphysics recognise that everyday lived reality is constructed by human beings in so far as the notions of socially constructed truth and conventional truth go. Consequently, reality is viewed as processes which cannot be given fixed definitions. Further definitions are used as tools for practical purposes, with an aware, reflexive and open attitude. We see this for example in the problematic usage of age to define a child and the limitations of its rigid usage. The institutionalisation of this concept through schools and the challenges children face to meet standard expectations throws light upon the foundational problem of treating definitions as universal truths and their implications in daily lives across the world. In the context of this study where children and childhood ought to be well defined, we hit a hard wall the moment we accept a globalised or universal definition of children and childhood.

Another similarity is the recognition of individual agency which applies to children as well. Every sentient being according to Buddhist metaphysics has the capacity to act in the present which will have consequential effects in the future. Since everything in the world is a complex web of interdependencies, every individual action will bear an external influence. At a sociological level, this realisation manifests as children are recognised as active agents whose actions influence relationships, decisions and working of social assumptions.

A striking difference howsoever, is the metaphysics of linear causation (birth – ageing - death) which still underlies perspectives in the social studies of children and childhoods, as opposed to the cyclical causation (... birth- ageing- death- rebirth – ageing – death – rebirth and so on) in the Buddhist perspectives. If we are to genuinely understand the everyday lives of Tibetan Buddhist child monks in

Ladakh or Ladakhi people in general from their point of view, I consider it necessary to theoretically open up to the hypothesis of rebirth within the field of childhood studies.

Since the social studies of children and childhoods accepts that there are several kinds of childhoods and not just one, it may logically question the assumption of birth and death as the beginning and end of life. However, this openness to different childhoods is the window through which we access birth, life and death as cyclical process, and all individuals including children as *processionary becomings*.

Chapter Five

An Overview of the Daily Lives of Child Monks

Child monks or monks in general also known as lamas in Ladakh, often evoke the mental image of little buddhas or little angels with halos on their shaven heads - meditating all day long. This imagination probably refers to a form of what we may call popular identification of child monks. That is to say what in the most general sense is expected of them *to be*. Another assumption is that they must have been forced into such ascetic lives away from their families. Therefore, it must be a hard childhood. Over the past year, every time I am asked what I am doing and I express that I am studying daily lives, I am met either with curious excitement for the exotic or faces with deep concern which express, *“It must be such a hard life for those poor little children.”*

The first task in this chapter therefore, is to tune the reader’s imagination in line with impressions which emerged from my study. My study revealed that they are not 'little buddhas', but rather little aspiring buddhas. At the same time they are also boys who go to school. I would use adjectives such as kind, obedient and respectful to describe them, but also they seemed equally playful, very mischievous and full of joie de vivre. This chapter presents an overview and discussion of their daily lives. I will begin by presenting a descriptive account to answer some frequently asked questions when I discuss lives of little monks, followed an overview of their daily life and perspectives of the children on their daily lives before the concluding discussion.

5.0. Meet the Child Monks

Children join the monastery at various ages; there is no minimum or maximum age limit to join the monastery as such. Every child who joins the monastery lives in the boarding school which is part of the monastic campus. The school itself follows a curriculum adopted by public schools in Ladakh. The youngest child I met in school was 4 years old and the oldest was 18 years old.

There are several reasons for joining the monastery which I found within this informant group and also adults who narrated their childhood experiences to me. The one of the most common reasons was that the child wanted to be a monk. When I asked the children who chose to be a monk why they chose it they gave me brief answers such as:

“It's fun.”

“So that my life is better in the future.”

“I like the life.”

“To help others.”

This is an excerpt from an interview with my house brother Lama Gyaltzen as he narrated his childhood journey:

When I saw the other monks, monks rituals I said 'wow I like this so much - this is so wonderful!' And I used to pretend to be a monk, and when I was 6 or 7 I used to request my mom all the time- 'please, please let me be a monk' ...

- You were so small!

Yes I was small maybe 6-7 years old. I pleaded with my parents all the time, then when I was 8 years old my parents allowed me to become a monk.

Other reasons for becoming a monk at a young age are:

1. Family's request or desire
2. Advice from a senior monk or a respected oracle
3. Cases of rebirth as identified by senior monks, respected oracles or as recalled by the child himself and verified by an experienced person.

Monks especially child monks are highly respected members of the society and this I found was part of the motivation to join the order. In public functions for example child monks are served refreshments before laymen adults. Laymen children on the other hand are often served last. It is also common to see regional folk bowing down for blessings from child monks. By being part of the group which preserves and reproduces traditional, ethical and religious wisdom they are perceived as doing a noble deed by the community in turn helping their society. Children see themselves as helping their people and families in their lives in times of suffering or moral dilemma. Parents and families are open to

accepting moral guidance from their children and in some cases even expect it. When I asked the children what they wanted to do when they grow up the most common answer was either to be a teacher or to help others. Helping others appeared as a defining characteristic of being a monk in terms of the 'purpose of their life'. Monks also serve the function of conducting rituals which are very important to Ladakhis and therefore have an important status, as a university student expressed:

In Buddhism there are many ritual practices and other very important things. So monks are important in our Buddhist society.

Another university student expressed:

.. very important you know ... monks are very important because they are preserving the teachings of Buddha. They make us realise what we are. Without monks our society is like you know ... end of society.

Lastly, another determining factor is the education and boarding facilities that children receive which are free of cost. Each child receives a monthly scholarship from the public fund if he passes his exams. Some children said that they wanted to come to this particular school and therefore became monks.

One could raise a doubt whether children understand the meaning of being a monk. There are levels of being a monk especially in terms of the number of vows one commits to. Children are expected to follow basic vows which apply to all Buddhists such as no killing, no stealing, practising speech and thought which does not cause harm (children used the Hindi term – paap, to refer to this). As adults they are not allowed to use intoxicants or marry (sexual conduct). In the interviews and during other casual interactions they demonstrated awareness of these basic vows and also the implications for their future e.g. not marrying, not taking intoxicants etc. They seem to understand very well that part of their purpose is to help others by reading scriptures, participating in socio-religious reproduction like performing ceremonies or the mask-dance and practising dhamma³⁷. The following excerpts from the semi-structured interviews illustrate this insight:

Child 1:

Are there rules for monks?

- Yes

Can you tell me some ..

- Don't marry

³⁷ Dhamma (Ladakhi: chos) is the the metaphysical principle of nature which is deeply interwoven with ethical conduct. In theory Buddhism has no God, but the principle of dhamma.

Anything else?

- We shouldn't sin (paap)...

Child 2:

Do you have to follow any rules?

- Yes

What are they?

- We bring the chotpa to rituals and read holy books

There may arrive a point when the child doubts his decision while he is still a child or after the age of 18; this may as well happen to a person who joined the order as an adult too. In a Ladakhi monastery it is possible for one to leave if he chooses. One who leaves in fact leaves behind the respected status attached to being a monk, but is not judged for his decision. I interviewed two adults who were monks as children and decided to leave; they did not report any difficulties they faced when they left. They have friends in the monastery as well as in outside the monastery. One adult monk was uncertain if he would continue in the future and showed no sign of fear or external pressure because of his process of doubt. An excerpt from an interview with an adult monk who is also a teacher in another monastic school:

... suppose you know ... from these 45 students someone says I want to leave the monk ... you know ... leave it. You want to come you come ... sometimes at the age 40-50 some regret you know ... I want to be a dhamma being so they join the monk life ... so ya there are many cases ...

- That's another thing I noticed, it's not forced...

... not forced even with children, if the adult says then the adult 'requests' and the child says yes or no. And even as an adult leaves there is not pressure from the sangha, so ya it's really interesting. And also within monks there are a lot of different monks because (nervous laugh), like some I really don't understand how they are ... (nervous laugh), like when an outsider comes we expect all buddhas, (giggly laugh) all buddhas!! But now of course like you said I understand they are all human beings and it's not like if you wear the shantap³⁸ then you are a Buddha. Now you know for example you, if you want to be a good human some become a nun. But it is not important you know, if you want to be a good human being you can be a good human being without being a monk or a nun. We have many high lamas or masters without wearing this shantap. Good meditators. Now you know too much expecting is not good.

Instances of force to join the monastery or discrimination in case one left, did not appear in my study; this is not lead to inferring that they may not occur at all. However, what is noteworthy as we see in the excerpt above is the recognition that joining the order does not necessarily imply becoming a good human being and vice versa.

38 Part of the monastic attire worn as a skirt.

5.1. Everyday Life

Child monks come from various villages in the region and few come from the same village. They all live and study in the same structure i.e. a small boarding school which belongs to the monastery. The concrete house has a kitchen, classrooms, an office, small dormitory-style rooms to sleep in and rooms for teachers. Rinpoche children sleep in the teachers rooms.³⁹ There is a store room for their trunks where they keep their things and semi-traditional toilets. A modern toilet and bathing room was being constructed when I was there. This building has mainly been constructed with aid from an English organisation. On touring the region and visiting other schools, I found that it is one of the best schools in terms of infrastructure and facilities in the region. The school offered classes from level 1 to level 5 when I was there.

5.1.1. Clothing

Once children join the school, they wear a shantap which is a red monk skirt, with a waist coat and a red cloth which they wrap around their shoulders. Indian schools follow the school uniform system⁴⁰. For the child monks the shantap (worn by all monks and integral to a traditional monk's social identity), also serves as a school uniform which is integral to an Indian school child's social identity. In theory monks should only possess a shantap, the waist coat and shoulder cloth as clothing items, but in practice today younger generations of monks 'mix and match' their attire. For example, I found colour coordinated, factory produced t-shirts, pullovers and caps integrated into their attire. Child monks treated their attire as 'uniforms' which they would not wear on weekends or before and after school. The principle bought them football shorts, t-shirts and caps to wear. During school hours they had their sports shorts under their robes. In case they went out to play in the fields they simply tucked their shantap into the waistline of their football-shorts and began running around.

5.1.2. Food

During my stay there the school re-appointed a new cook. The first cook was a Tibetan whom they had found through common contacts, the second cook was a young Nepali who came to the monastery as a

39 Children who are reincarnations of senior monks of the order. In bigger monastic institutions rinpoche children may have their own room and also private tutors. Limited resources in this school did not allow this luxury. Sometimes the term tulku is also used.

40 Except cases like international schools for rich children or other alternative schools which are exceptions.

construction labourer and decided to stay. He left Nepal when he was in his teens and worked in small eateries in New Delhi and later as a construction labourer in North Indian states till he was brought to Ladakh by a contractor. When the Tibetan cook had to leave, the Nepali boy and his friend found an opportunity to support themselves and stay on.

Children follow a simple vegetarian diet everyday, because meat is too expensive to buy. Two children were vegetarians. Regular ration included wheat, rice, vegetables such as turnip, potato, carrots, beans, lentils, fruits such as banana and mango, sweet tea with milk, biscuits etc. Due to cheap subsidised food supply from other states, children did not eat local products on a regular basis. The school was surrounded by barley fields cultivated by families mostly for private use, but their diet did not include much locally grown food.

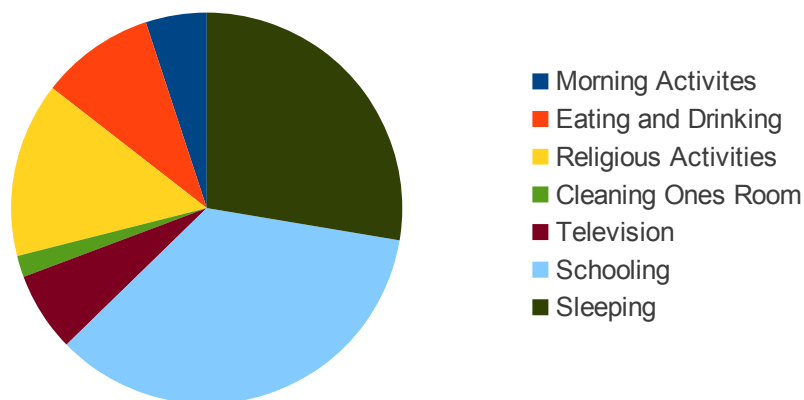
Their consumption also included 'munchies' from little shops outside the monastery or things their families sent or gave them. Sneaking out to shops to buy chips, biscuits, instant noodles, soda and juice, hiding them in their trunks and under their attire and having little secret feasts was very popular among the children. This was a 'known secret' since the teachers and adult monks were aware of this but pretended not to be. Eating in between classes or meals with their exclusive groups was a matter of joyous indulgence for them. This secret 'munchscape' was one of the spaces where their friendships and sense of 'own world' blossomed. I confess to have been a partner in crime in such activities. My participation started developing when I happened to find children hiding behind the monastery gate or feasting in the absence of a teacher in class. When the kids expressed a feeling of 'being caught red-handed' I expressed my offence that they did not share with me and they began offering me munchies. I began carrying my own munchies and eating it around them, so I also had the chance to offer. Sometimes as part of the English lessons I went with the 4th grade to the fields where we practised Michael Jackson's *Heal the World*. When we took a break they began talking in whispers and I asked what it was. The boldest of the four said 'We want to go to the shop.' Singing practice in the field with munch-breaks became a routine with this particular group. One of them was from the same village and one day the group planned that the break would be a visit to his home, so we went there and enjoyed being served tea, biscuits and soda by his older sister. All the while they giggled as they indulged and I felt like a child who had finally been accepted into the popular group!

5.1.3. Daily Routine

The following table is the daily schedule of the children during the school season as designed by the school staff. Children have two vacations namely a short summer vacation of about two weeks and a long winter vacation which can stretch up to three months given the demanding climatic conditions of the region.

5:00 – 5:15	Wake up	10:30 – 15:50	School with Lunch Break (12:30-14:30)
5:15 – 5:30	Morning Exercises	15:50 – 16:20	Sweet Tea Break
5:30 – 5:45	Sweet Tea	16:20 – 17:30	Handwriting and Painting
5:45 – 6:30	Washing Face and Hands	17:30 – 18:00	Prayer Reading
6:30 – 7:30	Learning Prayers	18: 00 – 19:00	Evening Prayers
7:30 – 8:00	Breakfast	19:00 – 19:30	Dinner
8:00 – 8:40	Cleaning one's Room	19:30 – 20:20	Watch News on Television
8:40 – 9:40	Morning Prayers	20: 20 – 21:30	Study/ Homework
9:40 – 10:00	Getting ready for School	21:30 – 22:30	Watch Television
10:00 – 10:30	Morning Assembly	22: 30	Bedtime

In the pie diagram below we can see an overview of the approximate amount of time dedicated to each group of activities daily during the week. During school hours children have a two hour break (approximately 30 minutes for lunch plus 1 hour and 30 minutes for rest which children also use as playtime). I have included the break as part of schooling because technically they are still 'at school' during these hours; the time spent on lunch is included under eating and drinking.



On weekends in summer children participate in activities such as:

1. Debate, speech, drama or sports competitions

2. Maintenance help e.g. cleaning, gardening, fixing basic infrastructure etc.
3. Bathing in the river in groups
4. Washing their own clothes
5. Playing cricket or football
6. Airing out blankets and mattresses out in the fields
7. Lazing around in the fields
8. Shaving heads

Children who come from the same village go home to their families on Fridays after school and return on Sunday evening or Monday morning. Others visit their families only during vacations; if family members visit the monastery they can meet the children.

5.1.4. Duties and Responsibilities

It is possible to distinguish between assigned duties and responsibilities and assumed duties and responsibilities. The former denotes duties which are determined by adults and the latter denotes responsibilities the children take on without being told.

In terms of formal duties and responsibilities older children (10 years and above) take turns to help the cook in the kitchen. The turns are handed out in a schedule prepared by a teacher. In case the cook is absent or on a break children also prepare tea for other children, adults or guests. Apart from that they are responsible for the cleanliness in their own dormitories, classrooms and the eating area. After meals children are responsible for washing their own bowls and two children on rotating duty check if their fellows have cleaned their bowls well. There is a lady appointed to wash their clothes (especially for the younger children), but in principle older children have responsibility for washing their own clothes. On weekends children help with gardening, cleaning and maintenance work under the guidance of a teacher. I often observed them working in groups and singing together especially when the task was demanding like moving stones⁴¹. Singing while working can be observed even among adults while they work in fields or construction sites in Ladakh. Once in one or two months older children shave each other's heads and also shave the heads of younger children. During festivals or special prayer weeks in the monastery, two children were on duty in the main monastery. They served tea to adult monks who

41 Sometimes in class when I gave them drawing activities I observed them gently humming as they got engrossed in their tasks.

prayed all day long. The pair on duty changed everyday. Children also participated in social service such as cleaning up natural surroundings visited by Indian tourists⁴² who are notorious in the region for their habitual littering.

In terms of informal responsibilities the most striking observation was not just the sense of responsibility the older children had towards the younger ones e.g. helping them with bathing, dressing up or giving affection, but the sense of moral responsibility they had towards each other. For example, during public events I observed children nudging each other to sit upright if they fell asleep or read the prayers better if they got bored. Once I was substituting for a teacher in the second grade and I offered some children pencils to complete their exercises because theirs were too small to be sharpened any more. One of the children hid his pencil behind his book and lied to me in order to get a new pencil from me. I discovered his pencil and explained that I had pencils only in case children did not have anything to write with in the class. Somehow this issue came up in the 5th grade during our workshop and the children expressed a mixture of embarrassment and anger. I asked why it bothered them so much because it did not bother me since they were small would understand on their own that they didn't need to lie to me. But two boys from the 5th grade presented a different opinion on behalf of the group, they said that the second graders had been sneaky and it is not something they want to encourage. Out went two boys and asked the little ones who had hidden the pencil, the boy who had done it came into the fifth grade. They talked to him in Ladakhi in a stern tone and explained that stealing and lying was simply not acceptable.

They did not punish him, but they used their own authority to reinforce a sense of honesty in him. They had their own system of justice. The fifth graders later explained to me that they were disappointed with the second graders because this was not the first time this tendency was spreading in that particular class. They thought that if this continued it is not good for the ethical development of the little ones and it also had a negative effect on relations with visitors who bring generous presents for them. I also sensed a need in them to protect me because they thought I had been a naïve victim of the little one's sly attempt. There were other highly considerate ethical acts I observed the children doing and helping each other carry them out; the most touching of them all was their relation to insects. Whether we were in the fields or in the school children never killed insects around them but gently

42 The money collected from tourists at the entry point (Rs. 10/ 0.15 Euro per head) is distributed among villages and monasteries who in return are responsible for the environmental maintenance.

lifted them up on a piece of paper or a leaf and shifted them outside their space of occupancy. If one child could not manage the delicate task, there was plenty aid that rushed towards him.

Duties and responsibilities whether assigned or assumed, form spaces wherein children's competency was most prominent to me. Within these spaces they were independent in several areas spanning from practical or physical activities, forming close and affectionate relationships, taking financial decisions to making ethically strong life-decisions, taking ethical responsibility for themselves and others or performing tiny ethical acts on a daily basis. I identified these as informal spaces of learning and it appears without doubt that this informal education⁴³ is a space for these children and adults to actually experience these children's competent capacities.

5.2. Children's Perspectives

Through research activities such as sentence completion, role play, drawings, neighbourhood walks, semi-structured and informal interviews the children gave me a lot insight into their lives. Some of it is integrated in the aforementioned descriptions. Here I will discuss insights that come as a result of mainly one of the drawing activities which was to draw 'things I use everyday'. Objects can light up a network of other objects, meanings and actions related to them (Heidegger 1996) and can therefore be a useful point of entry into understanding daily lives from the informants point of view.

The most striking difference between the insights gained through other tools and this one is to see that parts of the body and nature were part of the children's perception of 'things I use everyday'. The mountains, water, leaves, flowers, and grass are part of their everyday consciousness. Objects such as the mountains, sun and trees which I perceived as 'just standing there', the children perceive as integrated into their daily lives. A similar revelation came to me in terms of body parts. From the time I began designing the research and defining the research questions, I did not perceive eyes, nose, hands, feet, hair or head as *something* I use everyday. The table below is a categorised presentation of the items which the children drew. The most popular item of daily use which appeared in almost every sheet was - the cap.

43 I use the term education as distinct from schooling.

Nature	Movement	Schooling	Schooling contd.	Clothing	Leisure/	Light
Clouds Grass Water Flowers Sun Mountains Tree	Car Road Walking	Bag Book Chair Pen Ruler Sharpener White-board Newspaper Scissors Sharpener Calender Dictionary Chart	Bell Map Eraser Ink-pot Cello-tape Colours Paper Carbon Paper Pencil Box Pin Table Stick Storybook	Clothes Sweater <i>Shantap</i> Shoulder wrap Gloves Socks Shoes/Boots Shirt Cap Pin Needle	Ball Cricket bat Football T.V Dish T.V Mobile Newspaper Battery Kite	Kerosene lamp Electrical lights
Food	Food contd.	Body	Personal use	Cleaning	Religion	Other
Rice Egg Banana Juice Water Potato Turnip Mango Carrot Roti (bread) Tea	Vegetables Apple Onion Tomato Jug Spoon Bowl Cooking- gas Ladle Knife Pot Glass	Teeth Eye Head Mouth Hand Ear Nose Hair Foot	Comb Toothbrush Toothpaste Vaseline Blanket Pillow Soap Bed Water-bottle Water	Broom Dustbin Bucket Washing box Water	<i>Gonpa</i> Prayer Flags <i>Shantap</i>	Money

Schooling as we have seen even in the pie chart earlier, occupies most part of the children's daily lives. An interesting insight that I get from this chart is that items related to schooling are the highest in number and items related to religion are one of the least. The paradox is that as a monk one trains to live a life with least possessions, but modern schooling requires that children own many things which are somehow indispensable for the process.

5.3. Discussion

What we are looking at here is a group of children who seem to conceive of their own identity in terms of 'purpose of life' which is to help others. By choosing monkhood or respecting the requests or advices of adults around them, these children consciously participate in the socio-religious reproduction of an ancient culture, as well as sustaining the ethical foundation upon which the Ladakhi lifestyle is founded. Child monks are highly revered members of their society and are perceived as being special. Consequently they form part of an unusually distinct category of childhood within their society. Further, their daily life in the monastic space appears to be a lively space of joy, friendship and contentment balanced with a sense of duty and responsibility. Surrounded by a mighty mountainous landscape and glaciers which melt into flowing waters in summer – nature and their own bodies are an

integral part of everyday lives in their world-view. These aspects of their lives are spaces where their competencies are most prominent. Within such informal spaces of learning children perform practical or physical activities, form close and affectionate relationships, take financial decisions, make ethically strong life-decisions, take ethical responsibility for themselves as well as others and performing tiny ethical acts on a daily basis.

With the cap as the most popular daily object, an everyday diet based on the staple crops of states hundreds or thousands of kilometres and schooling occupying more than double the time spent on religious activities, what we are also seeing here is the transformation of this unique childhood into a global childhood on a daily basis. Schooling, apart from the tourism industry and mass media, is one of the central mediums through which Ladakh is connecting with globalisation. In terms of the children's daily lives this is clearly the core medium of transition. While informal education is the space for experiencing oneself as competent beings and connecting with nature, formal schooling as education appears to be a space where children become more or less passive learners disconnecting with their natural surroundings. On this note we are prepared to take a look at what the child monks spend most of their day doing i.e. being schooled. In the next chapter, I will present empirical data and discuss schooling in relation to the problem of environment in Ladakh within the overarching umbrella of globalisation.

Chapter Six

On Education and Environment

In 1948, education gained the status of a basic human right by the United Nations and is positively associated with human development, reflected in economic growth, a productive labour force, improved health and controlled fertility (Dyer 2002). Education contributes to factors such as social development (Sen 2007), and is also one of the main determinants of economic growth (Oztruk 2001). It influences a country's capacity to borrow foreign technology and use it effectively, in turn enhancing the country's output and exports. Therefore, education is an important contributor to technological capability and technical change in industry (ibid.).

As one of the founding beliefs of modern society, development in the most ordinary sense means improving the conditions of life (Peet 1999). Conventionally development is measured with pure reference to the size of the economy which is the value of the 'total output of goods and services produced by an economy' (World Bank 1989, in ibid.). The more developed a country is the higher its Gross national product per capita income. Alternatively the human development index calculated by the United Nations Development Program takes into account other social and cultural variables, rather than just economic growth. This conception of development considers increasing access to knowledge, nutrition, health services, security, leisure, political freedoms etc. Knowledge here means adult literacy and mean years of schooling (Peet 1999). Similarly, education is used to denote modern institutionalised schooling. However, education (from the latin root *educare* meaning to bring out or lead forth) is a much broader term of which modern schooling is but only one way (Qvortrup 2012, personal communication). It is therefore, in my view, misleading for the United Nations to announce that education is a fundamental human right or to pledge to primary education for all as a Millenium Development Goal. Instead, this globally prescribed conviction is aptly expressed as 'modern schooling is a fundamental human right' or 'primary modern schooling for all'.

Cultures across the world have always educated their children, in the sense they brought up their children to learn ways which aid children to survive resourcefully within their environmental contexts.

Traditional Ladakhi culture had no separate process called 'education'. It was a result of intimate relationships with the community and the environment. For example when they helped to sow, they learned that one part of the village was warmer than the other and from their own experience they understood the differences between strains of barley and the growing conditions suitable for them. They knew how to use the tiniest weed and how to identify animals on far away slopes and the intricate web of fluctuating relationships, connections, processes, changes in the natural world around them. For generations Ladakhis grew up learning to provide themselves with clothing and shelter, to make yak skin and robes from sheepwool, to build houses. Their education was location specific and nurtured their relationship with the living world, equipping them with an intuitive awareness which enabled them to use resources in an effective and sustainable way, as they grew older (Norberg-Hodge 1991). If we have to uphold the basic idea that there are several childhoods for which there is sufficient scientific evidence, we cannot logically adhere to the conviction that universal primary schooling is a reasonable goal because it implies that there is such a thing as a universal childhood and a schooling system that fits all children all over the world.

In the case of Ladakh, I observed that a shift from traditional education to modern schooling has an influence on the child's relationship and interaction with his natural environment given that standard modern education requires children to spend a lot of time in classrooms with textbooks and notebooks. The absurdity of it all is reading about environment and farming through text books, while the texts of nature lay bare open right outside. On the other hand as the tourism industry grows, staple food is imported from other states and the only way forward after passing institutional exams is to enter the labour market – Ladakhis are also deeply concerned about the environmental crisis.

The assumption that all children can be schooled in the same way not only implies that there is a universal childhood, it also implies that we can all use the same resources of livelihood or the idea of human mono-culture as a sustainable pursuit.

6.0. The Education and Environment Campaign

In this section I will present the findings from the education and environment campaign conducted in the region by an active youth group. I was invited to be part of this process as a visiting researcher and volunteer. Members of this group come from the region but are taking university education outside the region for example in Jammu, New Delhi, Dehradun or other Indian cities. I learned through these students that a large percentage of money earned by families through tourism does not stay in Ladakh but is spent in other states in the higher education sector because Ladakh does not have a university. When I interviewed members individually about their perspectives on education, environment, development and culture with respect to Ladakh, I asked them to rate Faith, Education and Environment in order of importance. Most members chose Education as most important, followed by Environment and Faith. The prime importance of education for the youth interviewed lies in the passage to modern development that it can potentially open up for Ladakh's future. It is therefore important for them to sensitize the locals about this system of education. The meaning of education for most as the interviews reflected was to support an 'all-round development' and not just changing from the outside, but becoming good human beings. The findings of the campaign which were a result of meetings and interaction with local communities, schools, children and village folk were presented in a seminar attended by school children, teachers, the youth group, monks involved in the education committee and volunteers and the honourable councillor (government representative) of the block of villages. They were presented under the two broad categories namely, education and environment. Education had further sub categories – teaching staff, subjects and syllabus, language, infrastructure, government apathy, community apathy.

6.0.1. Education

a. Teaching staff: Most schools report inadequate teaching staff and vacancies. The appointed staff is either under-qualified or lack sufficient teacher-training especially subject specific training. Motivation on part of teachers and encouragement from government is low. Generally there aren't teachers for physical education, art or music which both adults and children think is important for the schooling process, neither are there separate appointments for laboratory or library management. As a result the work load for few appointed teachers is heavy and they have to rely on their own resources to find

suitable ways to deliver.

b. Subject and Syllabus: Due to lack of teaching staff, schools are unable to cover the prescribed syllabus efficiently. The syllabus itself is either delayed in terms of updating or is changed abruptly. Creative development such as painting, music, drama etc. is not part of the curriculum. Similarly, vocational subjects in general or sufficient optional subject choice at the higher secondary level are not offered. Computer or information technology education does not have a priority. Nursery level education prescribes private publications (in public schools) which are very difficult for the teachers and children. Last but not the least, the syllabus is not related to the local context.

c. Language: After grade ten, the Ladakhi language is not compulsory; it is not offered to nursery level children either. Teachers for compulsory or optional languages were not efficient or well-trained.

d. Infrastructure: Most schools have low or no electricity supply and heating systems. Classrooms, library resources, laboratory facilities and buildings are inadequate. Residential schools do not have water-heating facilities and schools in general have poor toilet facilities. The supply of books is not sufficient.

e. Government apathy: School staffs express experiences of neglect from higher authorities, lack of concern from administrative officials and low responses from local leaders.

f. Community apathy: Support from the village education committees and parents is decreasing. Parents, the school staffs say, do not take an interest in the child's school work or offer active support in doing homework for example.

6.0.2. Environment

Folk expressed that they sense their culture and civilisation at risk due to environmental hazards. They are not aware of harmful effects of plastic and tourism in a systematic way, but experience that the tourism in the region is beyond the capacity of their natural resources, for example carbon emissions from over 200 tourist vehicles visiting daily in summer. In addition, although plastic bags are banned in the region a lot of products packaged in plastic are imported or brought in by tourists. There are no

garbage recycling facilities⁴⁴.

6.1. Children's perspectives

6.1.1. Education

What is important: When I asked the child monks to rate education, faith and environment in order of importance, the most popular answer was either environment or faith followed by education. The child monks like their school very much and seemed very happy to be there. Some examples of reasons for liking the school which I discovered through the interviews ⁴⁵and casual interaction are:

- a. ... because there are many children here.
- b. ... because there are many facilities here.
- c. ...because we have the chance to play so much and we have television here.
- d. It's fun.

Our Magic School: In a group drawing activity, I requested the children to imagine that they could make their own school. They had magic powers and could change or have whatever they pleased. There were no limits to the choices. Every drawing that I received was a drawing of their own school, with small variations in place of a door or window. In the following drawing we see an image which resembles the actual school, with a board titled “Magic School”. In general children showed a lot of contentment in terms of the places they lived in, for example when writing or talking about their villages they often described their villages as *big* and *beautiful*. They named the animals and houses in the village alongside describing the nature there. School as a place where they live everyday, is a pleasant place for the child monks.

44 As of now the garbage is burnt periodically, but with the growing amount of tourism and garbage this practice will not be sustainable in the future.

45 I asked for example – “Do you like it here (in school) ? Why?”



Schooling Curriculum and Methods: They expressed the need for more leisure time. Most children found Hindi very difficult and said that they would drop the subject if they had a choice. They like Ladakhi very much and would like to study mathematics in Ladakhi instead of English. Some children like studying English, and some found it difficult especially the text books. The children do not like the text books which they are currently prescribed. They preferred the old text books with 'Angmo and Razia'⁴⁶; the following image is a sample from the text.

These text books were discontinued some years ago, but children still remembered the dialogues and sang rhymes from them. I sometimes observed children going to the bookshelf for an old copy and reading it in their leisure time. Both teachers and students found these books easier to use and were disappointed when they were discontinued. No one seemed to know why this decision had been made. The current books had images of non-Ladakhi children, things and places designed for urban Indian schools. In the research workshops and English lessons I used methods for example walks, drawings and games which the child monks found engaging. They expressed that they liked to study in the fields in summer, something they do not usually practice. Further, they like music, making things with their hands and being with animals – options that they do not have in their curriculum.

The Game of Repetition: It was a weekend when most tasks had been completed and children had free

46 Angmo is a Ladakhi name, while Razia is a common Kashmiri name.

time in the evening before dinner was served. Earlier that day we had decorated walls with charts and drawings made by children, as well as commercially produced educational charts with animals, birds, vehicles etc. Charts were also put up in the dormitory rooms. A spontaneous game began the origin of which I do not know. One of the boys took a stick in his hand and began reading the names of the vehicles loudly as he pointed at the corresponding picture. Two more boys on assuming the student role sat on the mattress and repeated the words loudly after him. I joined the game also repeated the words after the 'teacher'. Before long the group had grown bigger and different boys took turns voluntarily to play the teacher. The game never changed; we simply repeated the words louder each time. Not all words were pronounced correctly and the repetition matched every utterance. Not all vehicles were familiar to the children but they learned the words anyway. Loud repetition seemed to emerge as the central characteristic of what constitutes learning in a classroom in their experience.

6.1.2. Tourism and Environment

When Indian and foreign⁴⁷ tourists visit the region they pay an entrance fee of Rs. 10.00 per head⁴⁸ (to visit certain natural attractions in order to contribute to the maintenance of the surroundings. The money is distributed among villages and monasteries, who in turn take responsibility for the maintenance. By maintenance as I observed in practice, one means garbage management to a large extent. While I was there, the monastery had its turn. On that particular occasion the children went to the tourist spot for the cleanliness drive. It was a day trip which appeared to me as a social service picnic of sorts, because the children were accompanied in a monastery vehicle by two teachers and after the days work was done they had lunch in a tourist tent-restaurant as well as a snack break in a field. I accompanied them and I was assigned the task of taking photographs by a teacher. This was the first time I witnessed such close contact between the children and the tourists⁴⁹. This event served as an experience to reflect upon both during the English lessons where the children wrote essays and prepared a presentation about this trip, as well as in the research workshop where I sought the children's opinions about tourism, environment and the way tourists treated them.

To provide a brief background of the discussion presented below – the children went to the tourist area

47 All the Ladakhis I met seemed to experience themselves as distinct from Indians and Non-Indians. They used the term Indian to refer to non-Ladakhi people from other Indian states and foreigners to refer to people from outside India. Broadly speaking these form the two categories of tourists in the Ladakhi perspective.

48 Approx. 2 Nok or 0.14 Euros.

49 The second occasion was during a monastic festival later in summer which attracts many visitors.

which has been receiving many Indian tourists since two years after it was featured in a Bollywood film. This has also seen a rise in the garbage which the locals are concerned about. The children and teachers drove around collecting the garbage left pell-mell by tourists and finally burnt it in a pit. While the children collected garbage, Indian tourists expressed admiration (“*What a noble deed!*”), embarrassment (“*Look at how they have to clean up after us!*”) or guidance (“*Look there, you forgot the garbage lying there!*”). The foreign tourists who were fewer in number cheered the child monks and advised the Indian tourists (“*You should learn something from them!*”) or expressed dissent at how little money was collected at the entrance (“*But ten rupees is nothing for such a service!*”). Another interesting dynamic had begun between the Indian tourists and children. The Indian tourists began taking pictures of the child monks and posing with them without their consent.

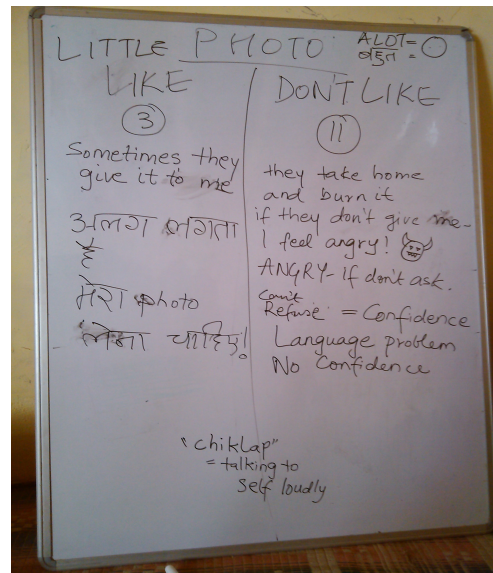
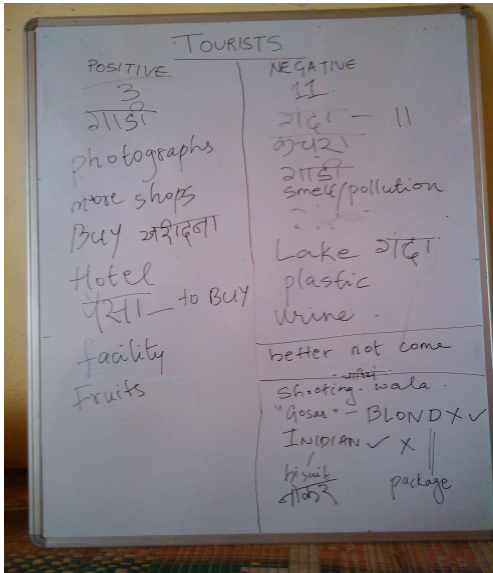
Our discussion (summarised on the whiteboard as depicted in the photographs below) had two broad themes – tourists and tourists taking their pictures. There were eleven children who did not like tourists or them taking photographs of them and three who thought tourism was positive. The three children also liked tourists taking their pictures 'a little bit'. The group that did not like tourists visiting the region was because of the polluting cars, garbage such as plastic and packaging, as well as 'urine smell' which they brought with them. When they offered them biscuits for example, the children felt like they were treated like a 'naukar' or a poor servant. Being treated like poor servants was something they associated more with Indian tourists, while packaged products was associated more with 'gosar' or 'blond-haired' visitors. Similarly with respect to the Indian tourists who posed with them for photographs – this group said they did not like it, but did not have the confidence to say no because the tourists are adults⁵⁰. In addition they were not confident enough in terms of language since Indian tourists generally do not speak Ladakhi, but Hindi-Urdu. The photography also made the children feel angry which they did not express. Two main reasons were that the tourists did not seek their permission and the children never saw these photographs or got copies. They said that when their photographs were being taken they felt 'ajeeb' or strange⁵¹. In general this group voiced a strong opinion when they said, “*They better not come!*”

The second group which comprised of 3 children thought that tourists bring cars and money which is

50 Adults should generally be obeyed and trusted in the Ladakhi culture.

51 I was also uncomfortable when I observed this interaction because it appeared as though the children were being treated as exotic objects who would make exciting vacation pictures.

good so they can have more hotels, shops and money. This will bring more fruits and modern facilities. They liked their pictures being taken a little bit because they felt different or special compared to others and thought that sometimes they get a copy of their picture. They thought that tourists should take their pictures, however they said they liked it a little and not a lot. The former position was a majority position and sentiments of anger and dislike towards tourism were stronger⁵².



6.2. Field notes and observations

6.2.1. The Morning Assembly

One of the first aspects of the boys schooling that struck me was that it appeared to be a movement towards mimicking the convent-schooling I had received in Bombay as child during the late 1980s and 1990s. We had morning assembly everyday where students and teachers assembled together. A catholic morning prayer was usually followed by some presentations and songs by students, information by student-captains, a message by school authorities, army drill commands and the national or school anthem. The boys had a similar routine: they stood in rows and began with a Buddhist prayer, followed by a brief presentation by a student, the same songs everyday, army drill commands and the Indian national anthem. The songs (with actions) and army drill commands were particularly irrelevant to their contexts. The lyrics of one of the songs for example were: 'Comb, comb, comb your hair/ Comb them

⁵² This is particularly interesting given that Ladakhis are known for their hospitality and welcoming culture.

everyday/ Father, mother, brother, sister/ Comb your hair'. I couldn't help but speculate why boys training to be monks who shave their heads regularly had to sing 'comb your hair' and practice army drill commands (e.g. *Stand-at-ease! Attention!*) everyday in the morning to mark the start of their schooling hours. I observed similar morning assemblies in other public schools in Ladakh too. They seem in my research and personal experience to be a distinguishing mark of modern schooling in India. Other defining aspects of modern national or state curriculum schooling in India are text book based learning in classrooms, examinations and school uniforms.

6.2.2. The Examination

When the school held exams, the staff requested me to help with exam supervision. I observed children memorising texts sincerely in the days preceding the examinations. During the examinations for mathematics, Hindi and English students struggled with understanding the questions. They came to me often to understand what the questions meant so they could think of answers and problem-solving. There was hardly a question on any of these papers which I was not asked to clarify. The youngest children aged 4-5 years either fell asleep or sat in the hall bored or making occasional efforts to return to the task of completing the examination.

Primarily examinations are observed to be the sole criteria to measure progress. This appears misleading as children are compelled to memorise and pass perhaps without having understood or learned the matter. Secondly, examinations are compulsory regardless of their age; this includes very small children. Other aspects of the personality and learning abilities are not taken into account in the assessment of progress or intelligence. Subjects like mathematics require bilingual question papers as students struggle more with understanding the language, than the questions themselves.

6.2.3. Differences in Priorities

I observe a difference with regard to the priority status of schooling/education amongst the university youth and the child monks. In our conversations environment and faith (which is also their present immediate surroundings) had greater value for the children compared to schooling itself, whereas the youth was more preoccupied with the future development that education can bring to the region. It is beyond my capacity at present to engage deeper in exploring the significance of this difference. However, I recognise that this difference is significant and needs to be taken into account in further

research.

6.2.4. The Epistemological Inferiority Complex

Often as I spoke to senior monks and senior citizens of the community it was common for some of our discussions to begin within '*I don't know anything, I'm not educated. I did not go to school. You know so much.*' My house mother (ama-le) was a highly intelligent lady who knew perfectly well how to tend to her animals and land. She knew how to make cheese, butter or barley porridge from scratch among many other things. Language was not a barrier for her to express empathy and compassion when it was needed. But on several occasions she expressed that she 'did not know anything'. On the other hand I had begun experiencing the limitations of my degree-certified training and the fact that one of the only ways I know how to survive in this world is through spending money which in turn defines what 'economy' means to me. I know how to theorise and analyse in academic contexts, but in an epistemological sense it is highly probable that ama-le's experiential and skilful body of knowledge in this world is far richer than what systematised institutions can certify. The absence of the certification of knowledge seemed to render in her an experience of the lack of knowledge itself. It bred in me a sense of 'something is not right' alongside a profound sadness to hear ama-le, the other monks and village elders say '*I don't know anything.*' In classrooms the children who confidently chased animals, made profound ethical choices, built a tent, channelled their water bodies or tended to the younger ones echoed a similar low confidence. The text books seemed to breathe a certain sense of epistemological lack into them.

6.3. Discussion

Modern schooling is only one mode of educating children in any society. Consequently, using the terms education and schooling interchangeably is highly problematic and unscientific in so far as it is a logical fallacy to treat a part as a whole. This applies especially to global and national policies in terms of discourses about 'education for all' as a human right, when in fact it refers only to a certain model of schooling. If we are to agree that there is no such thing as a universal childhood, then the pursuit of human mono-culture through modern schooling is rendered into a questionable contradiction. Every human culture in fact educates its children, though it may not school them. In Ladakh this education was location specific as it nurtured the human relationship with the living world and equipped its

children with an intuitive awareness which enabled them to use resources in an effective and sustainable way, as they grew older. This is possibly revealing to us a close relationship between modes of education and environmental sustainability. A consequence of this revelation could be that modern schooling models imported from western or colonial cultures have a role in the environmental crisis in the world. The distinction between education and schooling therefore is indispensable in the process of a sustainable global society at a macro level, as well as everyday mundane living of individuals.

Ladakh like most cultures under pressure to join the global market and modernise, must somehow arrive at this destination through modern schooling. Through the data collected during the regional campaign it emerges that there are many problems and challenges to realise the aspiration of modern schooling for all. The problems are at the level of installation itself for example curriculum content, teaching and learning materials human resources, community support and infrastructure. Since the current formal education demands Ladakhis to teach foreign subjects (e.g. languages), they are unable to provide correct training to children (e.g. grammar). Text books and syllabus are not designed in Ladakh, therefore neither teachers nor students identify much with the content of what is required to be taught. Children have developed mechanisms of passing examinations, but the foundations (especially language) appear wobbly. They face strong obstacles as they study further especially with respect to language.

In the pursuit of providing formal schooling, expert local resources/knowledge such as traditional art and music practices in the monasteries, scientific local knowledge, tsampa-making, butter and cheese-making, cattle herding, farming, mat-weaving etc. are neglected/ wasted because they have no place in the curriculum or the larger discourse of what knowledge and education mean.

The monastery school attracts children to become monks because of the free education facilities. After touring the region for the education campaign⁵³ and visiting several schools, I found that the monastery school offers comparatively good quality education with good boarding and lodging facilities. Child monks have the opportunity to continue with elementary education affiliated institutions outside the region. Apart from the respect child monks receive in the society, the aforementioned reasons are also motivating factors for children to become monks at a young age. However, there is also evidence to

53 Findings from which have been presented in section 6.0.

believe that child monks experience challenges in the process of modern schooling itself. They would like more leisure time and the opportunity to engage more with their natural surroundings. They are disappointed with the current curriculum and feel a sense of epistemological inferiority in this context. It also emerges that while the older university-level youth are concerned about the modern future of Ladakh achievable through modern schooling, the children comparatively prioritise their present environment and faith much more.

It appears as though the problem in installation of modern education in Ladakh stems from an ontological incompatibility. The modern schooling system of schooling in India appears to be based on,

1. segregation (e.g. children in classrooms according to age-group, content according to subjects),
2. standardisation (e.g. curriculum and text books) and
3. speed (e.g. certain amounts of syllabus that must be completed and examined in predefined time periods).

None of these are part of traditional Ladakhi ways of seeing the world. The quest therefore appears to be that of struggling to install a new mechanism into a cultural ecosystem⁵⁴ even though simply does not fit. These new mechanisms require adopting new world-views which in turn transform ways of relating with one's environment, including other beings.

Tourism is, as already mentioned, another player in the global aspiration of Ladakh. Locals express that their fragile, natural surroundings, as they know it, may not have the capacity to thrive through industrial tourism as it is now. While children also recognise the financial benefits of tourism, there is also an experience of anger or dissent towards the environmental consequences. Further, in general most child informants did not like the way they experience the tourists perceiving or interacting with them. My observation during the festivals and social-service picnic was that the child monks were viewed as exotic objects within the touristscape. Sometimes they were met with curiosity from a distance, but they were also often photographed without consent in spaces where interaction was possible.

⁵⁴ Every culture is founded upon metaphysical presuppositions which determine the way its people relate to each other including children and childhood, and the environment that they are part of. Consequently, I view cultures as an ecosystem.

At the family level, money earned through tourism is spent in other Indian states for higher education of children. This is only one of the red threads between education and tourism within the global trajectory in Ladakh. Both industrial tourism and factory-education based on segregation, standardisation and speed are systems that do not occur in the traditional ecosphere⁵⁵. Both these mechanisms alter the social structure which is having noticeable consequences for the environment of the region. In the traditional ecosphere monks had specific roles which they could be educated for since childhood if they chose. Today large part of this education is modern schooling which the monk community is compelled to go through if they are to be part of a global community. However, I am not convinced that the current schooling actually tends to the needs and transitional processes that the cultural ecosphere is going through. It seems as though the right to education is being practised at the expense of their right to learn to be self-sufficient agents of socio-ethical reproduction who have a living relationship with their environment.

55 I use the term ecosphere to mean a space where life is possible, sustained and reproduced to begin with. This cycle in my usage includes relationships and practices which reinforce certain relationships which makes these processes possible. By relationships, I do not mean only interpersonal, human relationships, but ontological relationships i.e. the way one relates to existence as a whole.

Values and Rebirth: An Ontological Insight into an Ecosystem

This chapter views the informant community as an ecosystem within itself. It presents certain in-built mechanisms and daily strategies of sustaining a value system which produce a specific kind of inter-subjective relations. The mechanisms and strategies are founded upon Buddhist metaphysics. The case in consideration also raises profound unanswered questions such as, *what is scientific knowledge?*

Themes which are included in the discussion pertain to the role and significance of the sangha as an institution and its reciprocal relationship with the laity. I will further discuss child monks as active participants in religious practise and socio-religious reproduction, followed by a discussion about the phenomenon of rebirth. The discussion about rebirth is taken up within the purview of debates in childhood studies which revolve around the concept of futurity. Lastly, I will discuss the pursuit of modernity⁵⁶ as requiring a transformation in the ontological relationship with one's environment, which is a stark contrast to the ontological relationships fostered by the macro-social mechanisms of the informant- community. This will consequently throw light upon contemporary challenges that confront individuals who want to live as monks in a modern globalising world.

7.0. Some Philosophical Foundations of Buddhism.^{57 58}

Some basic features of Buddhist philosophy are common to most systems in Indian philosophy. Systems of Indian philosophy are known as darsana or viewing the truth, as opposed to the western term 'philosophy' which means the love of knowledge. The basic problems and chief solutions in both cases are strikingly similar, but the methods of enquiry differ. A primary difference is that western

56 I use the term modernity to mean that which relates to present times as opposed to the past and as characterized by or using the modern and/or industrial technology, ideas, or equipment. Modernity as I understand it also includes valuing the individual above the community.

57 Indeed, the Buddhist world-view has already been discussed in the theory chapter. This section therefore should be read in conjunction with the earlier explanation.

58 The philosophical foundations of Tibetan Buddhism too rest on the general Buddhist foundation. The practices and rituals however stream from the influence of Bon – an indigenous religion in Tibet.

philosophy distinguishes between metaphysics, epistemology, logic, aesthetics and ethics, while Indian philosophies do not discuss these areas separately and thus have a synthetic outlook. This outlook prevents the Indian philosophical world-views from ending in despair and guarantees their final optimism in what may be described as spiritualism⁵⁹. This firm faith in 'an eternal moral order' dominates the entire history of Indian philosophy, including Buddhism. (Chatterjee & Datta 1968)

The law of karma⁶⁰ or action can be understood as the law of the conservation of moral values, merits and demerits of actions. In its simplest sense, this implies that everything that happens to a person is the result of his own work. In general the law of karma means that every action good or bad, produces its consequences in the life of the individual who acts, provided they are intentionally performed with a desire for the fruits of the act. It is the general moral law which governs the life and destiny of all individual beings, as well as the order and arrangement of the physical world. In heterodox⁶¹ systems like Buddhism this law is autonomous and works independently of the will of a god⁶². (Chatterjee & Datta 1968; Sharma 1960)

A follower of Buddhism begins practising a way of life on the ethical middle path by placing his faith in the buddha, dhamma and sangha. Buddha stands for beings that have experientially realised the truth of impermanence and are liberated from the cycle of rebirth, dhamma is the teaching of the principal behind the eternal moral order or nature of reality and sangha is the people committed to the path (S.N. Goenka 2000; S.N. Goenka in Hart 1987). In Tibetan Buddhist tradition the sangha refers to the congregation of monks and nuns under the guidance of their principal teacher - The Dalai Lama. Anyone walking on this path is committed to refining the quality of the mind by practising morality and becoming a good human being. By refining the quality of the mind, the mind becomes capable of approaching subtler experiences with clarity, in turn gaining knowledge and wisdom of the nature of reality (S.N. Goenka 2000; S.N. Goenka in Hart 1987)⁶³. One does not have to be a monk to do this, but

59 William James (1907) describes spiritualism as “the affirmation of an eternal moral order and letting loose of hope” He further writes, “This need of an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs of our breast. And those poets like Dante and Wordsworth, who live on the conviction of such an order, owe to that fact the extraordinary tonic and consoling power of their verse.”

60 Presented and discussed in different forms in various systems of Indian philosophy.

61 Heterodox systems of Indian philosophy, as opposed to orthodox systems do not accept the authority of the Vedas which are the most ancient sacred writings of Hinduism.

62 In Buddhism, it is not the ritualistic aspect, but the mental or volitional aspect karma which regarded as centrally responsible for the fruit of the action.

63 This is one of the modes whereby ethics and epistemology are intertwined in Indian thought.

being a monk gives one an added advantage on the path because the absence of material and household responsibilities allows a life of simplicity conducive to focusing on this endeavour. Joining the sangha, may be viewed as a form of voluntary simplicity (Gregg 1936) supported by the larger society.

7.1. The Sangha is an Institution within a Socio-Ethical Ecosystem

The presence of Buddhist monks and nuns in a society is seen in itself as good and for the benefit of all. It is more than just recruiting human resources to drive the order and keep ritualistic practices alive, the order is essential to a way of life. Practising Buddhism as a way of life and teaching dhamma is for the benefit and happiness of all (Gethin 1998). By 'all' one means all sentient beings including human beings, spirits and gods. *Buddhism is unthinkable without the sangha and the sangha is unthinkable without lay support* (ibid: 94).

As a way of life, Buddhism is a system of training and practice aimed towards eradicating suffering from the root – identified as craving, aversion and delusion. Ideally this training is best done following the way Buddha lived, in other words the lifestyle of minimum possession or a mendicant like a monk or a nun. The basis for this renunciation is:

1. renunciation of the household life for a spiritual⁶⁴ life and,
2. depending upon the generosity of the people for providing one with material needs such as food, clothing and shelter. (ibid.)

The success of this practice at a social level thus depends upon some members of the society having the desire to give up the household life, and enough good will among the other members allowing them the space and means to do so. Buddha's teachings are interpreted not only as an invitation to give up household life, but also an invitation to the laity to support this lifestyle (ibid.). Consequently a symbiotic relationship is formed between laymen and monks in the pursuit of a religious and spiritual way of life.

It is possible to become a monk by simply going forth without full ordination. Most child monks I

⁶⁴ Gethin uses the term 'religious life'. I have used spiritual instead since the word religious also implies ritualistic routines which differ among the branches of Buddhism and were not part of the Buddha's life as such.

worked with had joined the order without formal ordination. One may go through an ordination ceremony if he/she chooses as a child or at an older age. On becoming a monk, one also changes out of the ordinary appearance for example by shaving one's head and wearing a robe. Apart from renouncing lifestyle choices such as having a house, a partner and children and choosing abstinence from sexual conduct and use of intoxicants⁶⁵, one should also renounce having a profession or alternate means of livelihoods. One's personal possessions should be minimal and in terms of the fulfilment of one's minimal expectations of creature comforts, one counts on the generosity of others.

In conjunction to the practice of generosity, are the practices of transference of merit and rejoicing in the merit of others (ibid:109). This signifies that spiritual practice whether as a monk or a layperson should be entered in not exclusively for oneself, but for the benefit of others to. While performing a generous act in its true intended spirit, it implies a giving state of mind which rejoices in the reception of the recipient. Giving grudgingly amounts to compromising on the auspiciousness of the act. Similarly, if one gives nothing at all but is moved by another's act of generosity it is an act of merit (ibid.). The community and the monastery often held prayers or ceremonies for the well-being of all beings present or non-present. It was customary to carve prayers on stones or hang prayer flags which they believe disseminate good will for all with the movement of the wind. At the end of devotional or meditative acts too, folk customarily offered their merits with compassion to all beings.

In addition to generosity, both monks and laity tried to practice good conduct⁶⁶ and cultivated meditation through offerings, prayers and rituals such as using rosaries or other meditative tools. This arouses religious emotions of faith which is conducive to the initial stages of calm meditation (ibid : 110). Adult (lay and monk) informants further told me about going on pilgrimages or visiting places associated with the Buddha's life. Devotional acts are also centred around structures known as *stupas*⁶⁷, which are also found in monastery premises. The monastery is therefore not exclusively for monks, but also a space for lay spiritual and religious activities.

Spiro (1982) in his study of Burmese religious practices, made a distinction between three forms of

65 Sexual abstinence plays a role in channeling one's energy towards spiritual attainments (Gethin 1998). Similarly, refrain from intoxicants has a role in cultivating mindful awareness essential for spiritual and epistemological development.

66 Guided by the directives of the eight-fold path and taking refuge in the triple gem: buddha, dhamma and sangha.

67 A structure which appears like a big mound, usually containing relics of the Buddha. A place for meditation and worship for Buddhists.

Buddhism – apotropaic, kammatic and nibbanic. The first set of activities pertained to a daily protection of the community and its individuals or improving the present conditions. It includes using means such as chants, prayer offerings, rituals and mantras. The second set deals with acquiring good merits through traditional practices of generosity and ethical conduct, in order to produce a better rebirth for oneself. The third and last one comprises practices such as meditation, directly aimed at attaining nibbana or release from the cycle of rebirth. In Spiro's scheme laymen are concerned with the first and second, while monks are concerned with the third. However, in contemporary Ladakh I found both laity and monks concerned with the first and second. In fact it appeared as though monks did not have enough time or resources due to their daily lives and practical/material obligations to train towards a nibbanic goal⁶⁸.

I began recognising the monastic institution, with its symbiotic relation with the lay society as a strategy or mechanism to foster, practice and sustain the spiritual qualities of compassion and generosity. Spiritual life in this world-view is a practice committed to meritorious actions which nurture the qualities of the eight-fold path. The basis of meritorious acts namely- generosity (dana), ethical conduct (sila) and meditation (bhavana), bind the sangha and the laity (ibid.). In a broad sense generosity means embracing actions performed with a generous or giving spirit, but in a specific sense it means giving material support to the sangha. As the recipients of this support, monks have the responsibility of being a 'field of merit' for the laity. This is achieved by following the eight-fold path of spiritual practice sincerely. In living the life of a monk by practising and teaching dhamma, one gives a gift to the society and thus reciprocates the generosity. Gethin describes this as a kind of social contract of generosity between the society and the sangha.

While I was in Ladakh I observed village folk practising generosity by giving the time and effort in building the monastery. The Dalai Lama and his delegation were scheduled to visit the village and teach that summer. Therefore, the monastery needed better infrastructure to welcome their principal teacher and all the villages in the block took turns to come and help achieve this goal. They spent long hours on the construction site and there was no discrimination in terms of gender or age in giving one's labour.⁶⁹ At least one member of the family from each house went to the monastery and did whatever

68 The obligation to learn and practice meditations aimed at liberation from the cycle of rebirth is an individual's prerogative and responsibility. Adult monks in monastic colleges might have the possibility to find a teacher who can guide them. The child monks do not have any such resources that I know of.

69 Western visitors (France, Lithuania, Germany, United States of America and The Czech Republic)I interviewed

their capacity permitted. During festivals I observed support such as cooking and serving food, tea and refreshments and helping in practical organisation. Folk also distributed money to adult, as well as child monks to express their gratitude and generosity. University students discussed Buddhist values and published or helped publish texts about such discussions. Some of them also studied Buddhism or other aspects of Ladakhi culture so that they could contribute to their society at large. The very act of giving, trains the mind to turn away from selfish concerns and loosens attachment (Gethin 1998:108) or a strong sense of 'mine'.

Seen within this light, allowing one's own child to be a monk or 'giving a child' to the monastery is also an act of generosity towards the society. In this act as well one observes reciprocity of generosity at a micro level. When a child assumes a renunciate life and decides to go to the monastery, the parents also participate in an act of renunciation. If we look at family and children as a field where one of the strongest sense of possession and ownership (*my child, my family*) can be cultivated, then the act of allowing a child to pursue the spiritual path for the benefit of all sentient beings becomes one of the strongest possibilities of diluting the sense of 'mine' within oneself. This does not however in any way amount to cutting of relations or disowning kin⁷⁰. On the contrary, it expands the scope of what maybe defined as 'one's family'.

7.2. Sangha as a Family

When a child (or an adult) becomes a monk, it influences the relationship with his biological family in so far as receiving respect is concerned. While some continue living with their families before they go to monastic schools others leave right away. This further adds a long-distance element to the relationship. To paraphrase one of my child informant's father,

expressed surprise at how so many women (old and young) did manual work on the site. They were surprised since manual work in their societies especially on construction sites was associated with men. The local women on the other hand clarified that they do not discriminate between genders several matters. Even at home my house father and brothers often served me tea, washed clothes and worked in the kitchen. It was usual for me to find men carrying babies in the fields or caring for them at home when women were away working. My house mother explained to me that decisions in families are taken by mutual consent of the husband and wife. (This is a stark contrast to the Indian society as I have experienced it, where women do not enjoy equal status in daily life.) Giving one's service for example depends on one's own capacity, so everybody is allowed to participate.

⁷⁰ I observed very compassionate and loving family ties among the monks and their blood relations. In the first analysis chapter, I have also presented that child monks visit their families during vacations and weekends.

Of course, after he became a monk he does not live here and the relation changes - we respect him. All my children are the same to me, but to be a monk is the best thing. He did a good thing. ... These days there are not so many monks, so it is an important decision to be a monk.

On the other hand, another adult informant whose brother chose to be a monk as a child says⁷¹,

My relation to him does not change. He is my brother, so it is the same. But we have to think a bit more - give him respect. ... For example like to you or me we'd say, 'Have tea! Have tea!' But to him we'd say, 'Would you like to have tea?' Like this.

To consider an excerpt from an interview with an adult monk who joined the sangha as a child,

You have brothers and sisters?

- Yes

When you became a lama (monk) did your parents give you more respect?

- Yes

And your brothers and sisters?

- Yes they too.

But you played together?

- Not much, I didn't play ...

Was it your choice?

- Yes. I didn't like it much.

And the villagers, how did they show respect?

- Not much. We are so many, so it is very common and there is no special feeling ...

Ya ... Ya ... but for example when you go for a function or when they serve food?

- In my village ... Ya ya , that time I'm first. Always when food is served etc. the lama is first.

Why are lamas special in the society?

- You know among Buddhists it's said: buddha, dhamma, sangha? We are sangha and we also practice dhamma, that's why..

In becoming part of the sangha, somehow the relation with the blood family is altered and somehow it

71 Paraphrased

remains the same. The principle change that occurs is the element of respect and appreciation the individual receives from the family. Further, there are certain expectations like giving one's biological family time and effort that families cannot have from children who are monks. The monks too somehow do not feel completely different since it is not unusual to find monks in the society. And yet somehow they experience being 'different' given the respect they begin receiving. Further this customary respect can serve as an integrating factor and not necessarily be received as discrimination, as we read in the following excerpt with another adult monk,

When you were small did you get a lot of respect?

- Oh ya!

And did you receive a lot of money?

- Not a lot, little bit.

Did you feel different from other kids?

- Yes if we went to a family's house for example, they give respect to me and not to the others. I got the first seat and was served tea first and then the other children.

Do you think other children felt bad?

- No no that time we were not thinking like that

The monks belonged to everyone and were for everybody to respect and care for. I began perceiving the act of leaving the biological family, as an act of expanding one's family-circle. In the monastery the relations between monks were affectionate, caring and friendly laced with respect for each other. I noticed it was usual for the children to lie down next to each other, huddle together, walk with their arms around each other's shoulders or rest on each other's shoulders. This intimacy also reflected in the occasional fights the children had in so far as they expressed their discontent without hesitation and the matter was over once the tempers receded⁷².

In chapter five, while discussing duties and responsibilities, I presented how children showed a sense of responsibility and affection towards each other. The boundaries between friends and family (e.g. brothers) were hard to demarcate. Even the youngest children (ages 4 – 5 years) seemed to have very

⁷² I would like to point out that this behaviour was not specific to monks as such, since I also observed similar affection-sharing in the lay community amongst families and friend circles.

intimate friendships. For example sitting close together, putting an arm around a friend and similar actions, gave me the impression of a close bond even among the youngest boys⁷³.

Older monks and teachers also contributed to this ambiance of security and care for example giving affection to younger children, taking them to the doctor for check ups if needed or occasionally buying them treats (e.g. mangoes, new shoes) if they went to the city. Once I attended a ritual with the children where they read prayers for the community. During the lunch break I observed that one of them seemed a little sad. An adult monk who was accompanying them sat beside him on the lawn beside the river bank, a little away from the rest. He appeared to be consoling the boy and cheering him up. After a while the boy smiled, as the adult monk patted and stroked his back. Instances such as these led me to infer that the children had the assurance and could find someone to assume the role of a family member when they needed.

Compassionate Discipline: Elijah Ary (in Sasson 2012) writes that the western aversion towards the idea of sending a child to the monastery has partly to do with what one thinks a child's life there is like. The image of a child torn away from his biological care-givers, placed in a harsh environment all alone, left to get over missing his parents is aroused in our minds. But this is not (necessarily) the case as the relationship between a child and his parents is in a way reproduced in the teacher-disciple relationship. He further describes how the complex relationship between the teachers, fellow monks and younger children develop in a monastery. Teachers often play with younger disciples, joke with or tease them occasionally or cuddle them like their own kin. Disciplining or comforting when parents or family members are missed is part of their role which is somewhat akin to biological parents although the biological connection is absent. In some cases (as I found) the child is in fact a member of the teacher's family. Younger monks also learn from this relationship - older students (as it emerges in my study) behave as older brothers, friends and confidants for the younger ones. Teachers feel responsible for the life and well-being of the children, especially since they have been trusted by the parents. This way they have a responsibility towards the parents too as they are trusted with the child's upbringing and education. Consequently, they assume multiple roles at once – a parent, a mentor or a model, a friend, a disciplinarian and so on. The absence of parents was taken into account when making decisions with

73 Corsaro (1985) in his study similarly shows that very young children can be involved in intimate relationships with other children.

regard to disciplining the children. An adult monk who is also a teacher explains in this excerpt,

- As a teacher what are the difficulties you have?

Children are very naughty. Sometimes we beat, sometimes badly. Tourists say it's not good. But they live without a father or mother, they live without the care of the mother. Mothers you know they beat and then love ... Sometimes we teachers have to beat, sometimes hard. ... sometimes we have to solve the problem. ... it is difficult to accept the concept I know Then you see then you realise. for example you live with 45 monks here for a week, without a monk teacher and then you realise.

- Do you decide which age group you will hit or not? How do you ...

Yes yes, ... bad manners behaviour ... for example a four year old boy you know, he was very rough you know, no respect... For five-six months we left him like that, asking politely - do that. He became old, old, old, no change and then we used the stick. If he is changing we don't need the stick. ... Now these days you know everybody says don't hurt the child, don't use the stick. And these days you know many teachers are not using the stick... and now these days you know you see many drug cases happen with the students, why? Before it wasn't happening like that, why now... why, why? So it is shown, this method is ...

- is better ...?

It's something you know!

- Ya ya ... of course ...ya

But that is my personal view

- ya, ya , hmmm

Look for the situation and handle it.

The children themselves did not like to be hit. At the same time some expressed that they see that it is necessary, otherwise they would not study⁷⁴. We get further insight in the following interview-excerpt with a monk (youth) during an interview about his childhood⁷⁵,

When he (a family member who was also a monk and a teacher) hit you, did you also feel that he loved you?

That time no! That time it was like he wants to kill me. But when I review my life, a good life, I think the best times I spent with my teachers who hit me. Because within three-four years I got a lot of knowledge/education. That time I didn't feel he loved me, I felt he wants to kill me! Once I ran away from the monastery! I just felt I have to get away from my teacher. Then maybe 1 or 2 kilometres later I heard sounds of wolves and dogs and got scared so I thought maybe I have to go back! ... Now I think the teacher loved me, he cared for me so he wants that I become a good educated man - good Buddhist education. And that's why he hit me. ...

74 During some of the role plays they enjoyed imitating teachers with a stick and made fun of such episodes. I interpret to mean that they saw a lighter side to these acts and their purpose as well.

75 Informant appeared at ease while narrating these memories. He laughed and smiled genuinely during the interview.

Compassionate acts in the 'best interest' of children included strict acts such as hitting or giving a child a scolding. Children also seemed to show an awareness of this intention on part of the adults. Teachers or monks who had to make these decisions demonstrated thoughtful evaluations before taking strict actions – it was 'something that had to be done'. In the first excerpt the teacher expressed a conviction that the lack of compassionate disciplining of children led to problems in the youth such as drug use. Sparing the rod in this perspective does not amount to acting in the best interest of the child, were the child to walk on the eight-fold path and cultivate mindfulness. Within the purview of 'being a good human being who will help others' as a goal of life - supporting an individual to work towards the goal is seen as being compassionate. This does not necessarily imply affection or leniency. Lastly, as broader family, adult members of the sangha also take the responsibility of ensuring a disciplined development of the child – something the parents or biological family would have done had the child been raised at home.

7.3. Child Monks as Active Participants in Religious Practices and Socio-Religious Reproduction

In chapter five we saw that apart from schooling and sleeping, religious activities occupy most part of the child monks' daily life. There are two possibilities of looking at children's participation in religion one in terms of futurity i.e. without children, religion has no future (Karma Lekshe Tsomo, in Sasson 2012) or in terms of their active religious participation as beings at present. Children are no doubt being trained in monasteries to be able to assume certain roles in the future, but this does not dismiss that they are *already in* that role. This is very different from modern schooling whereby one learns certain skills and then graduates to join a profession. When one joins a monastery it is not so that 'one day he/she will be a monk/nun', one becomes a monk/nun. The amount of knowledge accumulated and experience (or a case of reincarnation) will certainly influence the level or stage one is at, thereby undertaking more responsibilities, vows and receiving more respect. But there is a sense of equality amongst the members of the sangha in so far as they are all on the same path. To paint it with a broad brush – in learning to perform the monastic role, child monks are in fact performing monasticism.

There are three scheduled times the children pray in a day: morning, morning assembly and evening. In addition, they pray before and after every meal. The morning and evening prayers are complex and

performed by reading out scriptures, with mainly music instruments such as hand chimes, a drum and a bell, along with hand gestures. The school captains appoint the persons who will lead the prayers and play the instruments. The instruments belong to the school, but children usually have their own prayer books. It was generally the older children who had their own copies which they shared it with the younger ones. The time table also has some time set apart for memorising these prayers everyday. A teacher examines the students occasionally to check whether they know their prayers. At this stage children are not expected to know the meaning and philosophy behind the verses. As they grow older and if they choose to continue with monastic education, they have the possibility to study these versus in a detailed manner. I noticed that the arrangement and organisation of the morning and evening prayers was very similar to the one's done by adult monks in the main monastery prayer hall for example - ritual objects (e.g. dorje⁷⁶ and a bell), sitting in rows, a prayer leader and instrument players. The adult prayer rituals however, were occasional and elaborate. The prayer leader in the monastery is usually a rinpoche (high reincarnate) monk, but the children simply picked a prayer leader even though there was a rinpoche child amongst them⁷⁷. The drum (daru) was the instrument children claimed to enjoy playing the most. The prayer rituals themselves sometimes also became a field of play – at times they appeared immersed in the recital, but at other times they would purposely recite them loudly, with humorous expressions whilst poking fun at each other. Often the line was hard to draw, especially if they suddenly switched from being serious to playful.

When seasonal prayer rituals were performed in the monastery, monks recited prayers all day long for days together. Two children from grade four or five were sent daily to give service to the monastery in this period. Since the rituals took place during school hours, the same child did not go two days in a row so that he did not have to miss lessons in school. Duties in the monastery mainly comprised of serving sweet or salty butter tea to monks while they read prayers. This duty is not necessarily carried out only by child monks; adult monks (if available) may also do it. Child monks on duty spent the whole day in the main monastery and ate in the monastery kitchen with other adult monks. I sat through some rituals and observed the child monks observing the adult monks perform the rituals. Later with friends or during our role play sessions, they enjoyed imitating the adult monks.

76 The dorje and a bell are Tibetan tantric instruments traditionally used together as a set; the dorje is held in one hand, not struck against the bell.

77 Who also led prayers sometimes.

During festivals and ceremonial processions or rituals there was always space for child monks. They had their own festive attire and usually stood at the head of processions, recited prayer together with the sangha, held symbolic items or held up music instruments e.g. long temple horns which required more than one person to hold it up while the musician (monk) played it. They also had roles in the famous mask dance performances and were assigned a special zone on the platform where the monks sat during the festival. It was not unusual for child monks to be invited by families to perform rituals in their respective villages⁷⁸. In section 7.2 where I discussed the sangha as a family, I referred to a ritual I attended with the child monks where they read prayers for the community. The ritual took place on the occasion of a community member's death in order to pray for the well being of not only his spirit, but their ancestors as well as the community at large. The ceremony comprised of adult monks, lay folk, child monks and lay children reading religious scriptures together all day long, while other volunteers from the community prepared meals and served tea, refreshments and food.

These examples seem to reveal that although it is possible to view child monks as *training* to perform the role of monks in the future, the aforementioned examples demonstrate that the line between learning to play a part in the future and actually playing a part is blurry and perhaps not there at all. They are monks at present, as much as they are monks of the future⁷⁹. Child monks are not only active participants in socio-religious reproduction for tomorrow, but are also active participants in religion as it is lived today.

7.4. Rebirth and Rinpoche Children in the Light of Futurity

By the second week, I began noticing that one of the children spent the evenings in the teacher's room and another child always went into the principal's room. The child in the teacher's room was either reading or studying. Other children lived together and studied in the dormitory. They all studied together during school hours, played and performed duties together. But the living arrangement was distinct. I had noticed this particular child (the one reading in the teachers room) as standing out, even before I noticed that he did not live with the others. I cannot put my finger on why he had my attention – perhaps it was a certain calm glow on his face, but I'm not certain about the attributes which caught

78 Child monks may also receive money for performing rituals for families.

79 Not to forget that they may not be monks in the future in case they chose to live the life of laity, which makes it even more significant to acknowledge them as monks in the present.

my attention in spite of having reflected upon this. I had noticed him. Then one day I asked another child – why he did not live in the dormitory with them, “*Because he's rinpoche right. If he stays with us he will become dirty.*”

By *dirty*, the child was referring to a very specific understanding of spiritual growth. *The recognition of young children as the reincarnations of highly realised Tibetan masters of the past is one of Tibetan Buddhism's most distinctive features. ... Immense importance is given to their discovery, recognition, and education. They function as the spiritual, moral, and (later on) educational guides and role models for the communities, both monastic and lay because they are considered to embody the qualities of spiritual realisation* (Ary, in Sasson 2012)⁸⁰. The Dalai Lamas, the Panchen Lamas, the Karmapas for example are considered to be the highest types of rinpoches because they are embodied reincarnations of benevolent bodhisattvas who return to help all sentient beings. A bodhisattva is considered to be able to achieve full enlightenment i.e. liberation from the cycle of rebirth at the end of his life. However, he/she compassionately vows to keep returning to the cycle of existence and delay his own enlightenment until other sentient beings are liberated (ibid.) It is not however one entity such as a soul which returns, but a continuum of consciousness such that one instant gives rise to the next one. A flame of a candle for example appears to be one flame, but it is a series of flame-moments which arise and pass away with such rapidity giving us the illusion of one flame which burns throughout the night. The flow is causally determined by karma⁸¹. Every sentient being is part of the cycle of birth and rebirth; beings are driven from one thing to the next throughout their lives by hopes and fears of satisfaction of well-being and dissatisfaction of suffering. This is a beginning-less process; upon death one takes rebirth instinctively. Ignorant confusion driven by fears, passions and emotions one takes rebirth in yet another state of confusion. The rinpoches however are not bound to their own karmic patterns and are believed to have overcome the limitations of the ego⁸². They do not therefore take rebirth out of confusion, propelled by passion or ignorance, but for the benefit of other sentient beings (ibid.).

Sometimes it is parents or relatives who notice the exceptional nature of their child and bring it to the

80 Ary uses the term tulku, my informant community uses the term rinpoche. I was told by an informant that both terms refer to the same phenomenon.

81 In the theory chapter we have a basic overview of the Buddhist theory of causation which further explains the foundations of this phenomenon.

82 Through their own efforts in past lives.

attention of the monastery or spiritual teachers. In some cases, the child can also recall names of people, places or events from his previous lives. Let us take a look at two excerpts from interviews with two different rinpoches I met in the monastery:

Excerpt 1

When did they find out that you were a rinpoche?

- I became a rinpoche not so much time ... 3 – 5 years ago⁸³. The first time I became a rinpoche, he [senior monk] said since childhood I didn't eat meat⁸⁴. He said it is good you are not eating meat, you have compassion for animals. And after that our holiness, he recognised me as a reincarnation of a Tibetan rinpoche. And so ... my feeling was so much joy. ...

What is reincarnation?

- You know when one passes away and then comes again that's reincarnation. ... high practitioners also come back to the *samsara*⁸⁵.

Is everybody a reincarnation?

- Yes ... your body changes, but the mind continuously keeps coming.

Do you remember something from your past life ?

- Some remember a lot. But I didn't remember. Some say like I'm from there, I'm that monk, I have this book ... But I didn't remember.

Excerpt 2⁸⁶ :

Did you have memories? How did you know?

- Lots of things. At the age of 2-3, I remembered my past life in (name) monastery. The monastery had many instruments. I said I have this stuff in that monastery; I have a meditation cell there and so on...

How far is this place from (name)?

- It is in Tibet, in (name). I remembered the monastery in Tibet.

Then you told someone?

- Yes, I told my parents.

What was their reaction?

- They went to the higher monk and an oracle to clarify this thing.

Then what happened?

83 Informant is in his early twenties.

84 Being vegetarian is a matter of choice in the Ladakhi culture.

85 The material world with objects of craving and aversion where the cycle of rebirth is realised

86 Interview was assisted by an interpreter chosen by the informant.

- The monk recognised me and it was clear. So it was declared that I was a reincarnation of (name) rinpoche.

Rinpoches usually get a higher or distinct seat during ceremonies and rituals. I learned however that simply being born and recognised as a rinpoche does not guarantee unconditional respect from the sangha. One has to work to maintain the quality of his mind and also to gain knowledge in this lifetime. Raising rinpoches separately or giving them added tutoring is a strategy to support them in their journey. The educational process given is seen as formality that has no bearing on their spiritual understanding or realisation. However, it equips them with tools essential for carrying out their activities in this world (ibid.). Distraction, lack of practise or commitment to the spiritual path can result in losing the level of realisation one has amassed in this sense one can become 'dirty'. Another medium of gaining respect and position in the sangha is studying in monastic universities – on completion of a monastic doctoral degree one gains the title of a khampo. The informant in the following excerpt has earned this title.

Can you tell me something about rebirth?

- Oh yes yes. Rebirth, as something religious some believe it and some don't. But whether you believe it or not we have to look at reality. Religions like Hinduism and Buddhism believe in this. If one commits a lot of non-virtue you will be born as an insect or dog - animal. But what is special about Buddhism is that there is no God which makes you, everything is your own deeds (karma). Nowadays science is growing and looking into this and many things and Buddhist logic match. So one must look into reality. We believe in reincarnation. So what should I say about that...?

Well the Buddhist view is that children are born with the old mind. ...

- Absolutely. There are many like that even in this village. Like when a child begins to speak, by about 3 years he starts saying- there is my house, so many people there, I want to go there, that is my dad and so on. There are many here and in Ladakh like that. It happened with me too. Three years before I was born my parents had a child who died within six months, then I was born. After I was born and began talking, I said you killed me, you buried me in mud, everything. They say I remembered everything. This is my father, I said everything. Wherever you go, many remember their past life, but when they are small about 3-5 years, then they forget. Incarnations of lamas, they talk about their monasteries (*gonpa*), monks (*lama*) and their stuff. They keep 50 -100 prayer (*pooja*) bells and the child finds his own bell ... cases like this.

The other child who lived in the principal's room was his nephew and was recognised as a reincarnation of a rinpoche from the monastery's lineage. He was amongst the youngest in the school and attended grade one with children between the ages of 4-7 years. He received formal recognition through a

ceremony held during the mask-dance festival in summer. The ceremony was attended by all the children, very senior monks and village folk. The village folk were dressed in their best traditional attire and also brought children along to seek blessings from the rinpoche boy. The other rinpoche boy from the school sat along with adult rinpoches on a separate table. While I was filming this ceremony, I noticed something which caught my attention. Throughout the chanting and ceremonial prayers, the little boy looked around him intently and was unusually quite⁸⁷. At a certain point he began making gestures with his palms which resembled meditative gestures taught as part of some spiritual practices in India. No one around him was doing it and it was certainly different from the gestures the children performed daily during prayers. He did not seem fully aware of it himself. I admit that this observation did make me very curious – I showed the video to some monks later and asked what that was and they did not seem to know. The answer I received was, *'He could have remembered it from his past perhaps – during the ceremony something could have triggered, I don't know ...'*

Rebirth does not necessarily imply being born as a monk or a rinpoche, I came across ordinary cases among the children and laity as well. One of my child informants was his uncle (mother's brother) in his past life according to what his mother told me. The child and family were delighted to discover this and the discovery led to the decision of him becoming a monk. Another adult informant who was a university student told me that his grandfather had taken rebirth in another family in the village.

The matter of debate here is not whether the belief in rebirth is true or false, or whether such a phenomenon actually exists⁸⁸. Given that this belief has very strong metaphysical explanations and is lived-experience for a society for centuries, it has strong repercussions for any discussion related to the meaning of childhood. At this juncture I clarify that the window through which I propose this direction of thought, assumes recognition of non-western traditions such as Buddhism which have their own valid, epistemological ground - as scientific in their own right (Sarukkai 2010; personal communication 2009).

Within the Buddhist framework which assumes the principle of karma, the understanding of individual agency becomes extremely broad. Everyone is an active agent, whose present intentions and actions

87 He had the reputation of being one of the naughtiest boys in the school and usually received a scolding for notorious acts.

88 Although the matter has received mainstream scientific attention (e.g. Stevenson 2001, Satwant 1990)

consequentially sculpt the course of life events. Furthermore, in recognising reality as a web which knits itself on the causal principle of interdependencies, it infers that every action on the part of an individual has a corresponding external consequence which may not be immediately apparent to our epistemological capacities. Causation is a beginning-less, spiral process in Buddhist science and therefore the course of life is not divided into linear stages of birth, life and death, rather into cyclical stages which includes rebirth.

Discussions on the meaning of terms such as child and childhood so far have challenged conventional discourses which view children as becomings, rather than beings (Lee 2001, Jenks 1996 a). The conceptual social space of childhood is consequently viewed in terms of its futurity in so far as children represent the survival of not only the human species, but the present adult generation's investment in the collective future. From this perspective, childhood is without doubt the early stage in the course of human life and is grasped in reference to the future adulthood. But since our current era is full of uncertainty about what adulthood itself means, it is misleading to characterise childhood as an incomplete and dependent state⁸⁹ - making it more complex and ambiguous (Lee 2001).

The case in consideration adds a further element of complexity. In this chapter I have presented social mechanisms within the Ladakhi milieu whereby there is a reciprocal relationship between laity and the sangha. I further demonstrated that in joining the sangha, children assume active roles as monks – in other words *in training* to be monks, they *are already performing* the role upon which lay society depends for an ethical, spiritual and socio-religious organisation of their daily lives. What we are looking at is a model of interdependency, rather than dependency. This renders children as beings in one sense and is compatible with arguments put forth by thinkers such as Jenks and Lee. However, the recognition of individuals as having past and future lives implies that,

1. The course of life is much broader than we currently take into account.
2. The knowledge, experiences and habit patterns of past lives are the capital for this life.
 - 2.1. The possibility of being born as tabula rasa is ruled out.
 - 2.2. The possibility of children having more wisdom and knowledge⁹⁰ than some adults emerges.

89 It is equally misleading to characterise adulthood as a complete and independent state.

90 I intend a distinction between knowledge and information.

The recognition that we are all going through a cycle of rebirth and the purpose of our lives is to be liberated from this cycle⁹¹, implies that,

1. We are all in a constant process.
 - 1.1. Everyone is equally becoming.

I, thereby propose a conceptual framework of *processionary becomings* to understand *all* beings, including children. The term *processionary* indicates moving in a procession and in my view lights up an ontological aspect of human existence which has not received any attention in debates within the field of childhood studies. It can be likened to the arising and passing away of a flame, which gives us the illusion of one constant flame, but is in fact a rapid, processionary, succession of moments of causally connected flames. It is possible to conceive of our life-course and ourselves as processionary becomings even without the idea of rebirth in so far as we recognise that we are all constantly developing and learning regardless of age. It cannot however co-exist with the idea that children are born as a tabula rasa. Were one to uphold that the mind of a new born is an empty slate, it would be logically inconsistent to view all human beings regardless of chronological age as ontologically equal in terms of being processionary becomings. The framework further requires that we conceive of the term 'being' itself as a verb and not a noun (Heidegger 1996)⁹².

7.5. Accommodating Globalisation as an Ontological Dilemma

We have now in front of us a socio-ethical ecosystem which has spiritual growth as one of its general purposes. Spiritual growth within this ecosystem is perceived as practising morality geared towards

91 Buddhism as a way of life is one of the way this is achievable, such that through merit making we can cultivate the capacity of the mind to dissolve our habitual ignorance at an experiential level.

92 Being is Becoming

being a good human being by developing the attributes of compassion and generosity as taught by the Buddha. In order to ensure a group of people dedicated to this practise in order to inspire, help and guide others, the socio-ethical ecosystem has structurally included an institution into its daily functioning. This institution is the sangha and it has as its members - people who voluntarily choose a life-style of simplicity, minimum possession and compassion.

... but do you think that now with globalisation, modern life ... Leh is ... Ladakh is you know becoming like a city, is it difficult to be monk in this kind of a society?

- Yes yes obviously too much difficult. Now this time many technology, many facilities, many comfortable life ... everyone wants that. But monk's life you know ... not too much but use it properly. But *not too much* this is very difficult. Same question in the future, what will happen we don't know.

- Adult monk, teacher

As the Ladakhi society begins to accommodate and metamorphose itself to meet the globalising world, several challenges emerge. In chapter five, we saw that the most used object of the child monks⁹³ is *the cap*. Their daily schedule includes television time whereby they are exposed mainly to Indian mass media such as Bollywood films. Little shops around the monastery sell imported⁹⁴, consumer products which the children are very attracted to and buy from the money they receive as gratitude for their service to the community. Further, the biggest chunk of their day is devoted to modern schooling. Most children are bound to move either to the capital or cities outside the region for further schooling.

The challenge for the children as I see it is to find ways to remain a monk and yet be a modern, global child⁹⁵ at the same time. These are very contradictory roles to perform. The cap, modern schooling, commercial films and consumer products are not simply new introductions into their lives. Each of these elements belong to network within a certain ecosystem. It is an ecosystem where calculable modern technological and economic growth is the criteria for development.

In this 'technological age' nature itself is revealed as the chief storehouse of standing energy reserve. Everything that one needs can be stored in a way that it induces a view of reserved resources being

93 As perceived by the child monks.

94 From other Indian states. Products are usually owned by non-Indian companies or multi-national corporations.

95 By global child, I mean adhering to a standardised idea of a universal childhood.

permanently available on demand/order⁹⁶ (Heidegger 1977). In other words one begins to experience things as resources which can be stored and availed on order whenever the need arises. It is not I who adapts my needs to the process of nature, but nature which complies with me. Heidegger held that this ordering human attitude has its roots in the rise of modern physics – which is an “exact science” (ibid.: 303). Consequently the mainstream modern worldview which I contend is the foundation for globalisation today, relates to nature as a calculable force which can be captured, stored and made available to meet our demands.

In this way of being, I stand apart from nature. Existence as a whole becomes a resource for me to consume and dispose in one way or the other. Modernity and modern technological development is based on foundations of modern physics.

Modern physics employs discourses and tools which frame and reveal nature as a set of pre-determinable, calculable and coherent force. The pursuit of modern physics is an entrapment of its 'object of study' – Nature. It is based on an understanding of causality which is a number-centric or calculable model whereby only things which can be measured, exist or come into being. Obsessive measuring and measurability is a modern scientific practice (ibid.). The paradigm which forms the foundation of a Buddhist world-view is not based on such quantitative, linear understandings of causality.

Integrating into the modern world therefore, is not a matter of practical structural changes, but the alteration of the ontological relationship one has with his environment as a whole. It implies a shift in the world-view whereby one is able to see existence itself in numbers, as storable and understand causality as a linear phenomenon. Non-measurable currencies such as merit-making face a strong challenge in so far as they must succumb to measurable currencies of money-making.

Is it possible for macro-social structures which ensure practices of generosity and compassion on a daily level to subsist if they make an ontological shift into the standardised global world? Would this be

96 In *Being and Time* (1996: 66), Heidegger explains, “The forest is of timber. The mountain a quarry of rock, the river is water power, the wind is wind "in the sails". As the "surrounding world" is discovered, "nature" thus discovered is encountered along with it. ...But in this kind of discovery of nature, nature as what "stirs and strives," what overcomes us, entrances us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not flowers of the hedgerow, the river's "source" ascertained by the geographer is not the "source in the ground".

a wise shift? Can the global child perform the role of an inspiring spiritual and ethical guide for the adult society who participates in ensuring the macro-level spiritual growth?

Adapting to modern globalisation is a big hurdle in the monastic pursuit of the eight-fold path. Monks in general are concerned about the diminishing population of the sangha because many, who find it difficult to remain on the path, leave. It becomes increasingly demanding, but they acknowledge the importance of keeping up with the modern world.

Dalai lama said actually we monks are 21st century monks. Ancient monks only study Buddhist philosophy. Nowadays we must learn both Buddhist philosophy and modern education. A monk's life is a precious life he said. So I got a chance to learn Buddhist philosophy, but I didn't learn modern education ...no time. Now I try modern education. I haven't finished my Buddhist philosophy. I try to ... if I get time I will learn some modern education. I think if we don't have modern education, so many people say that monks have no knowledge, that I think is not good.

– Adult rinpoche monk

On a daily average (as we have seen in section 5.1.3) the child monks devote more time to learning modernity, than religious and traditional training. One of the biggest changes in terms of making the shift to modernity in my observation is that modern monks have to be preoccupied of material concerns. As the ecosystem changes, laity is under pressure to fend for itself and cannot offer the generosity it did before. Getting a job or earning a livelihood on the economic market which in principle is not part of a monastic life is making its way into the monastic thoughtscape. Given that *right livelihood* is one of the directives of the eight-fold path, monks have limited professions⁹⁷ they can take up,

Yes my situation is different. They (lay youth) have other degrees. I have Buddhist qualifications, if I want a government job they won't recognise my education. So I don't have the same chance. I can work for gonpas (monasteries) or get like a khampo position...

– Adult monk, student

On the other hand I also found a general optimism among the monks with respect to this demanding transition,

97 Politics and business for example are not advised.

...like science and Buddhism are alike. Dalai Lama said, Buddhist education and science are like same ... scientists observe all phenomena and Buddhist philosophers are also observers. Dalai Lama says. Of course there is also a difference, a lot maybe. Buddhist philosophy goes towards peace, modern education goes towards competition. But we are modern human beings, we must know about it.

– Adult rinpoche monk, student

Another young monk (student) who appeared to be very committed to his path commented on the challenges of modernity,

In terms of development Dalai Lama distinguishes between two kinds, material and spiritual. The 21st century is no doubt materially developed and unbelievable development. I think at the same time such a situation is born, like at one moment everything is ruined – the atom bomb. Material development is good but also very harmful along with material development if we all can study our faiths (dharmas) and practise it in our daily lives, then this destructive situation of the material development ... this problem can be resolved.

The 21st century sangha finds the macro-social structures which sustained it - slipping away with modernity. The social ecosystem is altering and this brings new questions about the meaning and role of being a monk. Further, it puts several strategies of pre-serving and practising Buddha's teachings into profound doubt. While the community is concerned and aware of the heavy demands the globalising era has put on them, some remain optimistic about finding new emerging roles in the modern era.

7.6. Children's Perspectives

The child monks appear to be very aware of the reciprocal relationship between laity and the sangha. When I asked what it meant to be monk, the most common expression used was 'helping others'. In practise for them this meant performing the mask dance, reading about dhamma, practising dhamma and performing rituals. They described the life as 'fun' because there are many children to play with; they had facilities, could watch television and also enjoyed being treated as special or occasionally receiving money from laity. At the same time they expressed that being a monk is difficult because learning and following dhamma is difficult. This was accompanied by the awareness that the special treatment and occasional money they received from laity was because of their 'commitment' to this path. Further, they recognise that giving them money and support for their commitment is a good deed for laity, and another form of helping them.

Most of them spent the money on stationary items needed for schooling and on packaged junk food.

More money was spent on 'goodies' than on stationary. Goodies included different kinds of chips, colas, other aerated drinks, instant noodles, cookies and candies. Some children also gave money to their families, and one child simply collected everything for no particular purpose.

They were divided on whether they 'feel different' from other children. The attire was a factor that contributed to feeling different. They also pointed out that other children went to school, but they went to school as well as studied dhamma and performed rituals. In general they did not feel different with their own friends from the lay community; rather they felt different from lay children they did not know.

Children expressed that they liked the life of a monk, reading dhamma and performing rituals. One child told me that he had chosen to be a monk so that he will have a better birth in the next life. The principal of rebirth was simply expressed⁹⁸ – *If I do good deeds now, then I will be born with a good life as a human. If I do bad deeds now, then I will be born as an animal. Or – I did good deeds in my past life, so I have a good life now. If you do ordinary deeds, you have an ordinary life.*

All children whom I interviewed on the subject appeared to take this principle for granted; except one child monk who agreed with and explained the idea as applying to others, but not to himself. In describing rinpoche comrades, children used words such as 'precious', 'great' and 'more intelligent' to describe them. They explained that one is born as a rinpoche because they did good and great deeds in their past lives or were powerful in their past lives.

In the future they wanted to be teachers, except one child who wanted to be the monastery driver.

Having triangulated their interview responses with other data, I had no reason to doubt that the children were not just giving me the 'right answers' but genuinely meant what they were telling me. The reference to taking delight in television and packaged goodies was also for me a sign of authentic responses. This reference also raised questions in me about how the children were negotiating their roles on a daily basis. Their commitment to dhamma revealed itself through the choice of being monks which they acted out regularly. At the same time there was an attachment to evening television, which

98 Paraphrased

came out in their role play exercises and my observations. We often spent time whereby the children sang and danced delightfully to Bollywood songs about lust, material possessions and romance. Some boys also kept scrap books with images of movie and sports stars they admired. During our English summer camp, we did a conversation exercise and I asked the boys to choose pseudo-names for a role-play. All of them assumed names of movie or sports stars.

Examples like these, give me an insight that alongside their admiration of the Buddha and the Dalai Lama (who are unquestionable role models for them), there is a growing attachment to packaged food brands and celebrities in their minds. Attachments such as these, which are developing in the Ladakhi mind as the region nears development are one of the contemporary causes of why the dhammic life of voluntary simplicity is becoming increasingly demanding for the monks.

7.7. Discussion

I began this chapter by pointing out a fundamental distinction in the methods of philosophical inquiry between traditional Indian and western schools of thoughts. The distinction was that the Indian approach is synthetic in so far as it does not demarcate between epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, ethics and logic. This methodological perspective is not observed in the traditional western philosophical pursuit. A practical consequence which emerges from such a foundation is the recognition of an intimate relationship between morality and knowledge. Perfect knowledge about reality and existence in this framework is not possible without perfect morality. Thus merit-making becomes one of the driving currencies of societies and cultures based on this understanding. In so far as every human culture is a result of ongoing interactions with its natural surroundings, I identify it as an ecosystem in itself, with mechanisms of sustenance.

The monastic institution, known as the sangha is part of one such ecosystem. Through its symbiotic relation with the lay society it may be seen as a strategy or mechanism to foster, practice and sustain the spiritual qualities of compassion and generosity. The sangha as an institution is also a channel of practising voluntary simplicity and protecting their science and wisdom. It is supported by the society, which sees this practise as essential to its prosperous progress. For members of this institution, the sangha also serves the function of a family.

Child monks in the sangha can very well be seen as *training* to perform the role of future monks, but this could prove misleading. Examples from the study demonstrate a blurry or altogether absent line between learning to play a part in the future and actually being a monk. It is possible to recognise child monks as monks in the present and even essential since some of them may not be monks in the future. Child monks are not only active participants in socio-religious reproduction for tomorrow, but are also active participants in religion as it is lived today.

The practise of recognising reincarnate children and the role that the idea of rebirth plays in socio-ethical mechanisms on a daily basis brings up particularly significant implications for the field of childhood studies. The matter of debate in my text has not been whether the phenomenon of rebirth actually exists, although it has been a subject of scientific inquiry in western academia. Since this is lived-experience for a people and it has elaborate and theorised ontological foundations, I have proposed an attitude which assumes recognition of non-western traditions such as Buddhism which have their own valid, epistemological ground - as scientific in their own right. On the one hand, this can spark deep questions about the politics of defining and certifying the meaning of (scientific) knowledge itself, raising profound questions about whether there can be a 'universal' science. On the other hand, it can be an opportunity to explore ways of creating organic scientific approaches which are willing to take on the challenging task of including different cultural perspectives on fundamental questions. Within the context of the debate on futurity as a defining characteristic of childhood, the acceptance of rebirth as an hypothesis can unlock the door to a new way of understanding the meaning of a life-course which has significant implications for the meaning of childhood.

Taking into account the Buddhist discourse of all beings as constantly changing, is a practical example of this proposal. In contributing to the ongoing discussion in childhood studies about viewing children as beings, rather than or in addition to becomings, I advance re-viewing the term *being* as a verb instead of a noun. I have put forth the idea of viewing all beings including children as *processionary becomings* indicating a movement in constant procession. This is an ontological aspect of human existence which has not received attention in debates within the field of childhood studies. Although, it is possible to conceive of our life-course and ourselves as processionary becomings without the idea of rebirth, it cannot co-exist with the idea that children are born as a tabula rasa.

The text proceeded with an understanding that integrating into the modern world is not just a matter of practical structural changes. It requires an alteration of the ontological relationship one has with his environment as a whole. It further implies a shift in the world-view whereby one is able to see existence itself in numbers, as storable and understand causality as a linear phenomenon. Non-measurable currencies such as merit-making face a strong challenge in so far as they must succumb to measurable currencies of money-making. Assuming that every culture is an ecosystem in itself, changes in fundamental structures and social mechanisms is more than a practical problem.

The challenge that beckons the sangha and the Ladakhi society as a whole is to find modern ways to maintain macro-social structures which can ensure mechanisms to maintain the practise of generosity compatible global structures whereby material development occupies centre stage.

The challenges of living a life of voluntary simplicity and performing the role of a monk in the global world make the life of a monk possibly much harder than it has ever been. Some rather convoluted questions emerge from these explorations. Primarily my view is that, it may not be possible for macro-social structures which ensure practices of generosity and compassion on a daily level to subsist, if they make an ontological shift into the standardised global world. Moreover, I find myself sceptical about the possibility of a global child performing the role of an inspiring spiritual and ethical guide for the adult society and participating processes that ensure a macro-level spiritual growth.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions

Followed by implications of childhood studies in terms of the perspective through which one has to read this study, it should be very clear that one cannot scientifically uphold one kind of childhood as an ideal. This includes institutions which shape childhoods in various societies and in so far as institutionalising childhood goes - there is no difference between a monastery or a school. What is distinctive in the case in consideration is a social model which gives children the possibility to choose between different kinds of childhoods at a very young age. There are at least two choices in terms of lifestyle that children in Ladakh have – this choice is absent in modern and globalised (or so called 'developed and westernised) societies.

The case in consideration is evidence in the direction that it is possible for children to choose lifestyles (or at least receive knowledge about alternatives), if the possibilities are presented to them. Furthermore, we are looking at a social model which integrates the possibility whereby children can be religious, ethical, spiritual caretakers for a society.

Another aspect wired intimately into the broader perspective of this study is that just like childhood, a particular way of life cannot be scientifically upheld to be an ideal. I propose the reader to allow the idea that both modernity and 'development', as well religion are ways of lives. It is after all an uncontested faith in modernity that allows 'progress' and modern ways of life to thrive. If you allow this idea into your thoughtscape – it makes space to ask: What is the ontological difference between a university and a monastery? What is the difference between annual exams and annual rituals?

The question is not raised in terms of particular functions that distinguish these institutions, but their essence and the fact that individual participation and engagement in both cases is determined by faith in a particular system. Moreover, that these systems are social technologies and mechanisms of building certain kinds of relationships with one's world. These are modes of entering a relationship with one's

environment as a whole, interpreting and taking a stand on the meaning and goals of life. What I thus propose is to approach societies and cultures as part of ecosystems and somehow ecosystems in themselves.

An ecosystem in the broadest sense is a network of interactions between organisms and their environment. Similarly when I use the term to refer to a society – I intend to recognise human beings as organisms who interact with their environment. Social institutions in this light are mechanisms to foster and reinforce certain relationships with the environment including other beings. Therefore simply introducing new institutions and mechanisms from other social ecosystems will have a bearing on the eco-social sustainability of a particular region. The challenges and erosion that emerge with the introduction of modern systems of schooling or livelihoods into indigenous ways of life is an example of this. Their insertion into and adoption by a people requires a change in the way the purpose and meaning of all life is understood. I hypothesize that these changes inevitably have an influence on environmental sustainability and exploring these links may reveal important insights into dealing with the environmental crisis that accelerated, modern development has brought with it.

Of course, this is not an either-or matter. I highlight and bring the attention towards the observation that in this particular Ladakhi village - the monastery is in fact one of the principal passages to access modernity and globalisation. Examples are visiting tourists, the rapid development and construction for the visit of the Dalai Lama and what is most pertinent to this study - modern schooling for the little monks.

8.0. Children and the Valuable Will to a Life of Simplicity

What I find is an example of moral agency at a very early age. Most children I worked with had chosen to be monks or given informed consent to join the sangha – the youngest case being six years old. I have presented other examples in their daily lives where very high moral agency is demonstrated e.g. not killing insects or taking moral responsibility for each other.

One of the limitations of this study is that I have not succeeded fully in reading indigenous experiences without academic glasses. This especially applies to the logic I impose in trying to make sense of what

I found; our logic itself may not be as universal, as it seems to be. Employing the term moral, I am aware is problematic in an academic context. It comes with the baggage of doubts around the distinction between conventional choices, moral choices and choices out of personal concern. The term has been used for the lack of a better word. To express what ethical acts mean from within the indigenous logic is a task beyond the scope of this study. The lines between the three distinctions in my view are not as stark in this case, as western scientific world-views draw. For example the act of not killing insects could be conventionally induced, done for the sake of not causing harm to the insect - making it moral or to create good karma which is good for the future - making it an act out of personal concern. The question is can we apply such distinctions to the principle of dhamma? As far as I can see – the principle of dhamma is based on logical explanations of causality which blurs the lines between rational morality and natural morality, in so far as moral and meritorious acts have a role in the natural cycle of birth and death. Conventions, traditions and institutions such as the monastery have been created around this principle. Conventions support people to choose (moral) actions which comply not only with social norms, but (according to the principle of dhamma) – natural norms as well. Another consideration is the intimate relation between ethics and epistemology within Indian systems of metaphysics in general. Perfect knowledge about reality and existence in this framework is not possible without perfect morality; in other words being a good human being is linked with being a wise and knowledgeable human being. Thus merit-making becomes one of the driving currencies of cultures based on this understanding. I therefore doubt that western academic distinctions can apply to the term morality in the way I am trying to use it, taking into account a specific kind of logic.

In general there is evidence to show that children have the capacity to make moral decisions and even philosophise (Matthews 1994). But this kind of agency needs social structures which support and take moral decisions of children seriously. Ladakh is such an example.

If the framing of these observations as an example of moral agency is too problematic to accept at this stage – we could - to say the least grant that these children have the possibility to chose a certain lifestyle of simplicity at an early age and in fact do so. I argue that this choice is highly valuable in a global context today.

8.1. Processionary Becomings

One of the main ideas for these children in terms of their purpose of life is 'to help others'. What helping others itself means is based on the metaphysical foundation of the Buddhist eightfold path and the principle of dhamma – what Ladakhis call chos. While in practise this is also achieved through their active participation in religious activities, it is also linked with a cyclical view of reality which does not end in death, but continues with rebirth.

The role that the idea of rebirth plays in socio-ethical mechanisms on a daily basis and practises of recognising reincarnate rinpoche children has significant implications for the field of childhood studies. The matter of debate is not whether the phenomenon of rebirth actually exists. The fact is that this idea has elaborately theorised ontological foundations and in addition is lived-experience for a people. Therefore, I propose an attitude that assumes recognition of non-western traditions with their own valid, epistemological grounds - as scientific in their own right. This is an opportunity to explore ways of creating organic, scientific approaches which include different cultural perspectives on fundamental questions. For example, with respect to the debate on futurity as a defining characteristic of childhood, the acceptance of rebirth as a hypothesis unlocks the door to a different way of understanding the meaning of a life-course, which in turn has substantial implications for the meaning of childhood.

So far there is a tendency in childhood studies to view children as beings and not becomings; I advance re-viewing the term *being* as a verb instead of a noun. Alternatively I present viewing all beings including children as *processionary becomings* indicating a movement in constant procession. This ontological aspect of human existence has not received attention in ongoing debates within the field. It is without doubt possible to conceive of our life-course and ourselves as processionary becomings without the idea of rebirth, however it cannot co-exist with the idea that children are born as a tabula rasa.

As a young project, at this stage the thesis is unable to present a definition of childhood as ontologically distinct from adulthood. From biological, sociological, institutional and structural perspectives, there are obvious observable differences between adults and children. At the same time I think adults and children have more in common than we are currently able to identify due to

institutional and socio-structural veils. Had we not had strong preconceptions of age, or institutions where children are kept and trained - would our perceived differences be this wide? We are all constantly learning, changing and moving towards the next goal. The only position I take at this stage is that one is not born a tabula rasa, it is too early to formulate any other conclusions about childhood beyond this.

8.2. They *are* Monks

Child monks have their own spaces, responsibilities and roles within religious practices on a daily basis. What is important to acknowledge here is that while it may appear that they are 'training' to be monks – they *are* in fact monks already. This is especially important to understand since every person regardless of age who decides to be a monk – has the right to leave if he chooses to do so. So considering that a child may in the future choose to join lay life – his current identity as a monk becomes even more relevant.⁹⁹

To understand the significance of this decision at a macro-level functioning of the society, we have to consider one of the important functions of a monastic institution. A monastic institution within the Buddhist context is based on a symbiotic relationship between the lay community and the monks. Monks are dependent upon the generous support of lay people and in principle the choice of being a monk is taken on not only for oneself, but for the benefit of all sentient being which in itself is a generous act. Monks through their way of life become a field of merit-making for the lay community. The scientific principle of dhamma which is a foundation for both Buddhism as a philosophy, as well as forms of religious practices – is based on what one can call an economy of merit-making.

Through my study I began recognising the monastic institution, with its symbiotic relation with the lay society as a macro-social mechanism to foster, practice and sustain the spiritual qualities of compassion and generosity on a daily basis. In simple words again – we are looking at a society where some members say we are going to adopt lives of simplicity and protect our philosophical wisdom, while another group offers material and moral support to do so.

⁹⁹ I do not intend to suggest that they are 'first and foremost monks', but that this identity *is*. There are also other roles such as being the school child which are part of their current daily lives. Whether apart from being monks and school children, they are children first is a challenging question in so far as it urges us to ask what does it mean to be a child, if such roles are stripped off.

My analysis is that mechanisms such as these cultivate human beings (generation after generation) with a quality of mind which is conducive to sustainable, happy, harmonious and peaceful life cycles. Socially supported voluntary simplicity (for the sake of all sentient beings) has an important role in this.

8.3. Challenges of Converting to Modernity

Some challenges to maintain this mechanism are that with modes of life based on economies of money-making and spending – the lay community may not be able to provide sufficient material support to the monks and monks will have to also spend considerable amount of time working out their own material sustenance. This is in fact already the case, but if this moves further – this social mechanism of cultivating generosity may have to find creative solutions to reproduce itself.

One of the other main challenges to maintain this mechanism today lays in the fact that child monks have to negotiate between two roles in their daily lives – the child monk and the global child. The global child goes through modern schooling and has to learn languages of modernity and the economics of money-making. Child monks spend up to 7-8 hours day schooling and are both school children as well as monks. This is a demanding task for children who have chosen to take on religious and spiritual roles at a young age. They are monks in the 21st century and no doubt need to have the tools to connect with globalisation; however I am not certain whether the kind of schooling is supporting them to do this.

Ladakh - under pressure to join the global market and modernise, must somehow arrive at this destination through modern schooling among other mechanisms. On the other hand my informants also aspire to connect with globalisation. So there are corresponding aspirations and it would not be adequate to view them only as under pressure – although the pressure is strong.

It emerged in the study that while the older university-level youth are concerned about the modern future of Ladakh achievable through modern schooling, the children placed more value on their present environment and faith. Schooling in any case is perceived as a necessity by all.

The data collected during the regional education and environment campaign revealed that there are many problems and challenges to realise the aspiration of modern schooling for all. The problems for example curriculum content, teaching and learning materials, human resources, community support and infrastructure are at the level of installation itself.

However, the monastery school offers comparatively good quality education with boarding and lodging facilities supported mostly by public funds. Children also get the opportunity to continue with elementary education in affiliated institutions outside the region. Apart from the respect child monks receive in the society and the value of making efforts to live on the eight-fold path; this is also a motivating factor for children to become monks at a young age.

Child monks experience several challenges in the process of modern schooling. For example, the need for more leisure time and the opportunity to engage more with their natural surroundings is compromised. The current curriculum disappoints most of them and induces a sense of epistemological inferiority and doubt.

What I would like to bring to attention here is the problem of talking about schooling, as education. This is a fallacy that is being made right from the United Nations, through governments and to grass root local endeavours all over the world today. Talking of education as only standardised, modern schooling is based on the assumption that children all over the world are the same and have the same roles in their own societies. There is enough scientific evidence within the field of childhood studies to demonstrate that this is not at all the case. This study similarly allies with such evidence.

Industrial tourism is another factor promising globalised development in Ladakh. Locals are concerned whether their fragile, natural surroundings have the capacity to thrive through industrial tourism as it is now. Though child monks recognise the financial benefits of tourism, there is also an experience of anger or dissent towards the environmental consequences. Moreover, most child informants do not like the way tourists perceive or interact with them, namely as exotic objects within the touristscape. Nevertheless, it is an identity they have to negotiate with. This could be seen as a third role that they inevitably must assume.

The monk, the school child and an exotic part of the touristscape are some identities that these children have to ebb and flow through. In my reading this ebb and flow through new identities and the task of negotiating between them in order to reinvent what it means to live as monk, is the essence of the challenge faced by these children everyday. On a larger scale this implies challenges for the monastic institution as a whole. Investigating further into this aspect would prove beneficial in determining what kind of education do monks need to make a smooth and sustainable transition into connecting with globalisation, and yet fulfilling the purpose of their lives as they understand it.

8.4. Voluntary Simplicity

Lastly I would like you to consider everything I have presented within the purview of the global crisis of accelerated growth and environmental sustainability. While the global south is speeding up on material development, scientists and philosophers from countries like Norway which can be said to be on top of the material development ladder, Denmark, USA, England and Germany are radically questioning whether the lives of the people in the global north can be called 'good lives'. Alternative models of de-growth are being proposed as a response to these burning concerns (Nørgård 2013).

Social Philosopher Richard Gregg (1936) argued that simplicity is an essential factor in advance in civilisation. Changes in the current mode of production and decentralisation of production, along with simplicity were essential to ensure an enduring advance in his society. He upheld that simplicity is essential for non-violence and aids the expression of love, accompanied by the realisation of human unity. The heart of simplicity is spiritual and found in inner detachment, this inner state must be expressed through outer acts, in order to have sincerity, prevent self-deception, strengthen inner attitude and gain further insights for the next step. Social institutions like monasteries which give the possibility to express these outer acts therefore gain significance in this context. Simplicity appears to need to be acknowledged as a necessary practice for a healthy society in terms of maintaining 'psychological hygiene'.

Seen within this background, the will, choices and informed consent of these children to lead a monastic life and participate in a macro-level mechanism to ensure the practise of generosity, morality

and simple living is highly valuable not just in Ladakh, but in a global context. Their conversion to modernity through schooling for example needs to be designed and assisted in a way that can ensure a life of efficient monks in the 21st century, instead of turning them into standardised, global children/adults.

I find that simplicity in whichever way it be practised (religious or non-religious) is a condition for sustainable living. The global north seems to begin to acknowledge the value of simple living, with a non-materialistic inclination. However, the materially inclined life-styles of the global north are still the dominant paradigm for social and individual progress on the whole. Consequently, societies like Ladakh are motivated to *catch up* with the hope that they will converge with the paradigms of the global north. The paradigm of the global north appears to be gently moving towards embracing simplicity and sustainability – values which the Ladakhi society is required to gradually shed in order to perhaps arrive tomorrow where the global north is at today. This I believe is one among the many paradoxes of this conversion.

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Appendix One

Glossary

Ama-le - (Ladakhi term) Mother

Aba-le - (Ladakhi term) Father

Achi-le - (Ladakhi term) Elder sister

Acho-le - (Ladakhi term) Elder brother

Ajeeb – (Hindi-Urdu term) Strange

Bhavana - (Pali term) Experiential meditation

Buddha – Any person who has gained enlightenment

Conscious naivety – A conceptual tool which requires a deliberate leaving aside of theoretical knowledge whilst interacting with qualitative data. It is a playful, child-like engagement underpinned by a current of curiosity.

Chos – Ladakhi term for dhamma

Chotpa – An offering made to spiritual beings, religious personages or institutions. Butter sculptures were commonly used in the monastery and its surrounding areas.

Culture - Ideas, beliefs, customs, institutions, behaviour and habit patterns of a particular people. In some cases it also means arts and other expressions of human intellect.

Dana – (Pali term) Generosity

Daru – (Ladakhi term) Percussion instrument used by monks during prayers and other religious ceremonies

Dhamma – (Pali term) The metaphysical principle of nature which is deeply interwoven with ethical conduct. In theory Buddhism has no God, but the principle of dhamma.

Dharam – (Hindi term) Faith or Religion

Ecosphere - A space where life is possible, sustained and reproduced. This cycle includes ontological relationships (i.e. the way one relates to existence as a whole) and practices which reinforce certain relationships which makes these processes possible.

Ecosystem - The way people relate to each other and the environment that they are part of based upon certain metaphysical presuppositions which determine such relations. Consequently, cultures are viewed as an ecosystem.

Global child - Adhering to a standardised idea of a universal childhood. This concept can be expanded to accommodate several characteristics, however some characteristics are considered indispensable for this identity: first and foremost, the child is defined by chronological age i.e. he/she is below 18 years. Secondly he/she goes through the process of systematic schooling and is not encouraged to work. Thirdly, the global child is a consumer of at least one multi-national product. And lastly, the child learns English.

Globalisation - Used as defined by the Oxford English dictionary i.e. the process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.

Gonpa – (Ladakhi term) monastery

Gosar – (colloquial Ladakhi term) Blond haired person or foreigner

Khampo – (Ladakhi term) A title earned when one completes a monastic degree in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition

Khatak - Offering scarves (usually white) with symbols of the Buddha. Scarves are offered independently or accompanying gifts as an expression of care, gratitude and to generate auspicious interdependence.

Lama - (Ladakhi term) Monk

Le - (Ladakhi term) Suffix used after names to show caring respect.

Merit-making – Buddhist concept of accumulating merits as a consequence of good deeds, acts, or thoughts which carry over to throughout the course of life or the subsequent lives. These merits Such contribute to a person's development towards the goal of spiritual liberation.

Modernity - That which relates to present times as opposed to the past and as characterized by or using the modern and/or industrial technology, ideas, or equipment; also includes valuing the individual above the community.

Momo – Dumplings made of simple flour and water dough, filled with meat, vegetables or cheese.

Munchscape – A conceptual space created by activities which involve purchasing and taking a hedonistic delight in consuming snacks or small items of food alone or in a group. The desire for and attraction towards items of consumption rather than plain hunger, is an essential characteristic of the munchscape.

Naukar – (Hindi-Urdu term) Poor servant

Paap – (Hindi –Urdu term) Maybe translated as sinning, but the in the Buddhist context it means breaking one's Sila. see Sila for further clarifications.

Pooja – Ceremonial acts of honour, worship or devotion

Processionary becoming – Conceptual point of view which indicates a movement in a procession with reference to the ontological aspect of human life-course. It implies that we are all constantly developing and learning regardless of age and no one is born a tabula rasa.

Rinpoche – Honorific title which literally means the precious one; used for highly respected reincarnated monks

Sangha – (Pali term) Association or community. Commonly refers to the monastic community of Buddhist monks and nuns.

Shantap –(Ladakhi term) Maroon monastic skirt

Sila – (Pali term) Translated as virtue, right conduct, morality, moral discipline or precepts, sila is one of three sections of the noble eightfold path in Buddhism. It is code of conduct based on a commitment to harmony and self-restraint. The principle motivation for this kind of conduct is non-violence, or freedom from causing harm. It maybe understood as an ethical compass or an internal, intentional ethical behaviour motivated by one's commitment to the path of liberation from cycles of rebirth.

Stupas - Big mound-like structure, usually containing relics of the Buddha; a place for meditation and worship for Buddhists.

Tashi-delek – (Ladakhi term) A string full of colourful prayer flags which mean, “May all auspicious signs come to this environment.”

Thoughtscape – A conceptual space where one's thoughts occur, remain, pass and reoccur.

Touristscape – The selective view of a particular place through the lenses of industrial tourism whereby the folk, cultural elements and experiences as well as natural surroundings appear as readily available to be photographed or for purchase.

Tsampa - Staple Tibetan food (also eaten in Ladakh) made by grounding roasted barley, it also used to make Tibetan porridge with butter tea.

Tulku – (Tibetan term) see Rinpoche

Dorje – (Ladakhi term) Ritual object (usually accompanied by a bell) held in the right hand by a monk during prayers and other religious ceremonies.

Kamma – (Pali term) The effects of a person's deeds that determine consequences in his lifetime or in subsequent lifetimes.

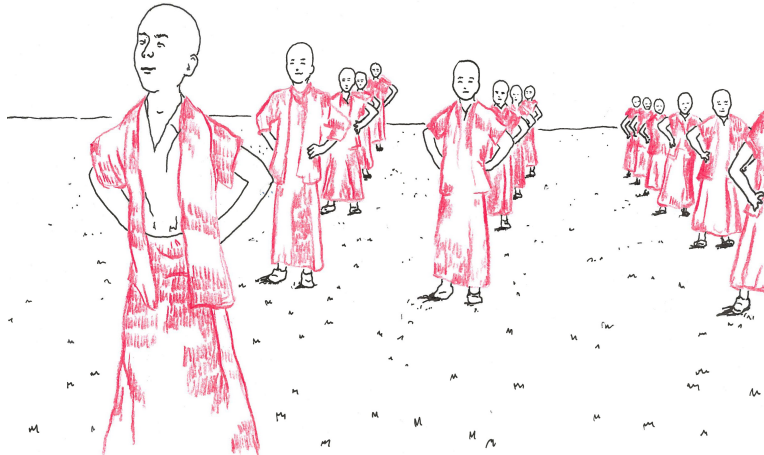
Karma – (Sanskrit term) see Kamma

Appendix Two

Imagery¹⁰⁰



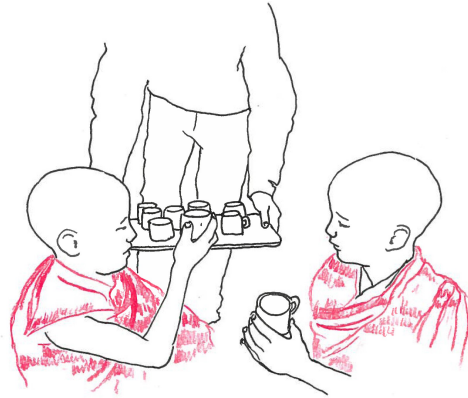
Reading and hanging out in the field during the summer camp. Children preferred lessons in the open, as compared to classrooms.



Morning assembly marks the beginning of school hours

100

Imagery is based on photographs taken during field work and used instead of original photographs in order to protect the identity of my informants. A heartfelt thank you to Kristine Hovemoen Solli for these drawings.



Child monks are highly respected in their society. During festivals and ceremonies for example they are served food and beverages before the lay folk, often by adults.



Adult monk helping a child monk getting dressed for a ceremony



Child monk helping his friend to get dressed for a ceremony



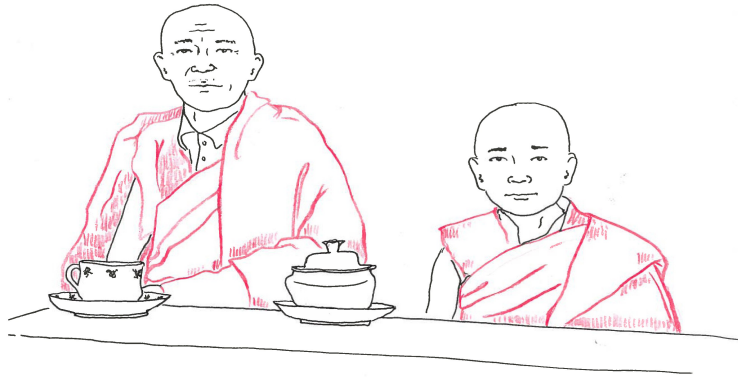
Dressed and ready to participate in a ceremony- I



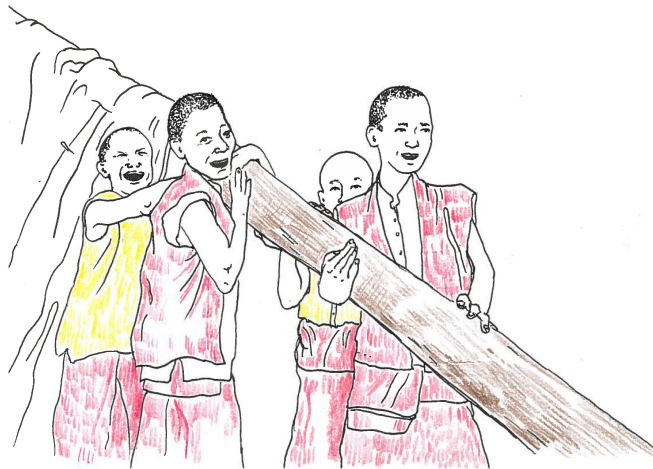
Dressed and ready for a ceremony to start – II



Helping each other read prayers during a community ritual



A rinpoche child monk seated in his designated place next to a rinpoche adult monk during a festive ceremony



Building the tent for the English summer camp



This playful picture was taken during a neighbourhood walk. The child monks shared seemingly strong bonds of friendship, brotherhood and affection with each other. The sangha is an extended family for the monks.



Tourists photographing children without consent



Symbolic religious hand gestures during daily prayers in school



'Cool' hand gestures while 'hanging out' in the field on the weekend



Drawing 'cool' temporary tattoo designs with pens was popular among fourth and fifth graders