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# Education in Ladakh: An Overview of the Interactions Between an Indigenous Community and Their Government.

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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# “Education in Ladakh:

## An Overview of the Interactions Between an Indigenous Community and Their Government.”

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Image of Leh Palace and surrounding  
buildings (September 2014)  
-Picture taken by author

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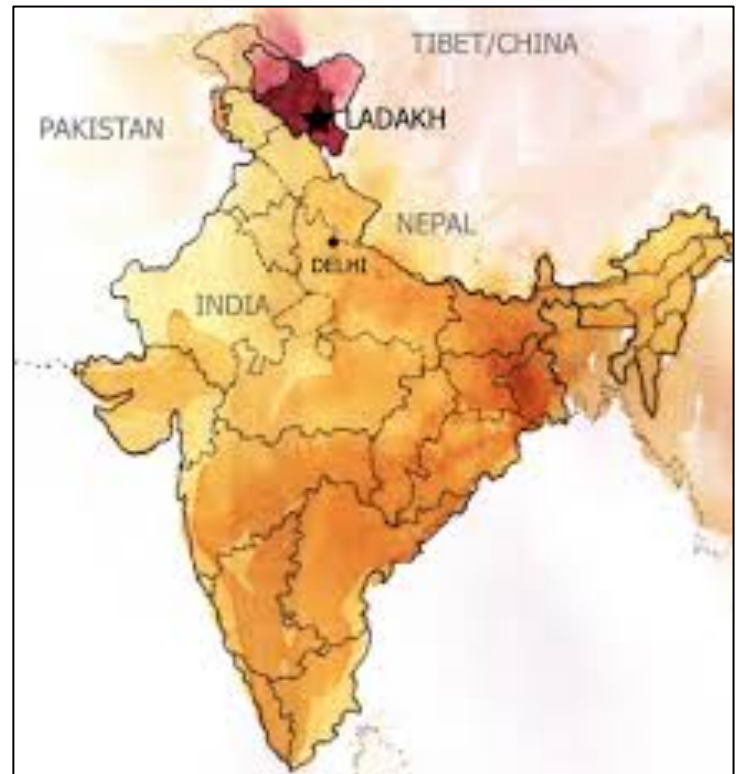
-An image of Leh's beautiful Shanti Stupa, which overlooks the Capitol.

### Acknowledgements

I would firstly and perhaps most importantly like to acknowledge my very generous and caring parents, Ann and Peter Stahl, who financially and emotionally supported this endeavor. Without their support throughout my experiences in education, I would not have been able to accomplish much, including this paper. Secondly, I would like to thank the students and staff of SECMOL for allowing me to be involved in their unique project. It was a privilege to have been able to stay on the campus and take part in the community that has been created throughout this foundation year. I would also like to extend a thank you to the various institutions that allowed me to conduct interviews during their busy workdays (Principal Eshey Tundup- Lamdon Model School, Tsewang Phuntsog- Chief Education Officer of Leh District, and Vice Principal Stanzin Kunzang- Druk White Lotus School). These individuals had no obligation forcing them to let me take time out of their busy schedules, but all three warmly welcomed me into their institutions with the kind, Ladakhi hospitality that I became familiarized with throughout my time in Ladakh. Lastly, I would like thank my good friend Stanzin Khatup, who aided tremendously in helping me make it to my appointments on time, even if it was not convenient for him, as well as giving me the push I needed when I was too nervous to follow through on my intended plans. I am unsure of how much work I would have been able to get done without your help.

## Maps

-This map illustrates the extreme Northern tip of India, where Ladakh is located. Ladakh was incorporated after the formation of the Indian National State, in 1947. (N.d. *Seabrightly*)



-This more detailed map shows the larger cities of the region, as well as the borders that separate it from neighboring countries. Ladakh's borders mostly consist of extremely high mountain ranges, which allowed it to develop its own culture. However, the region has seen many cultural influences due to its location on the ancient Silk Road. Its location between so many historical political powers has also meant that Ladakh has changed hands between several different ruling powers throughout history. (*Ladakh*)

## Abstract

The way an individual is educated has an incredibly large impact on the rest of their lives. The support, information, and opportunities they receive from a young age affects who they will eventually become as adults. In the most Northern Region of India, located on the old Silk Road, lies Ladakh- a place with unique peoples and a unique culture. After having been impacted by multiple different cultures, it is a region that has developed its own style of thinking and being. However, after the creation of the Independent Indian National State, in 1947, Ladakh has been incorporated into a homogenized nation state. India, with so many different cultures and languages to represent, has created multiple different boards of education that attempt to divvy up and educate different regions with different cultural systems.

Leh, being the capital of Ladakh, and the quickly expanding and developing hub of the region, was chosen as the location for this paper due to the easier access provided by this up and coming development (Figure 1). The region of Ladakh is relatively large and the population sparsely covers, what is often called, an extremely difficult terrain (Figure 2). However, in spite of the challenging terrain, Ladakh has managed to create an education system that covers the span of the region, providing education to students in every corner of the area. These schools include government funded facilities, privately funded institutions, as well as monastic and other religiously founded schools. The diversity of education found in Leh alone is quite astounding, which has its own history for being. This paper will attempt to spell out this diversity as well as explain how this diversity is/is not simultaneously maintaining the uniqueness of Ladakhi culture.

To conduct research for this project, I chose to live at SECMOL (Student's Educational and Cultural Movement Of Ladakh), which rests just outside of Leh proper, in a town called Phey. SECMOL is an NGO established institution, founded in 1988 by five young college students, including Sonam Wangchuk (who currently runs the establishment), where young Ladakhi students who are either attending college in the capital, or have been unable to pass a board examination in their government schools from tenth standard up, live to further their studies. The research was conducted over the course of just under a month (from November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 until November 25<sup>th</sup> 2014), which was the duration of my stay at the school. Research at the school was conducted through participant, as well as non-participant observation, which were further supported by research pulled from textual sources. Research for institutions outside of the school was gained through conducting interviews with different individuals representing the institutions.

**“A child is a flower.  
Let it bloom on the soil of love and affection.”**

**His Holiness The Dalai Lama**

**-Quote found on the wall of Shri. Eshey Tundup, Principal of Lamdon School**

The institution of education is one that defines and shapes who we are from our earliest memories. Education comes from our parents, in the home, at school, from books, our peers, and from our own experiences with our environment. Throughout the world, education has been used as a means of redefining, stratifying, and manipulating individuals to see the world in different ways. These different methods are driven by the motives of the controlling power the population lies under, such as a government. Many communities have fallen prey to redefining and restructuring of their education at the hands of the government, which can ultimately lead to the redefining of the people themselves. In a globalizing world, this has become the fate of many groups- a loss of culture, language and way of life that is overcome by a homogenized state identity.

The peoples of Ladakh have had a tumultuous political past. The region lies in a historical conflict area, sandwiched between the Indian subcontinent to the south (speaking Hindi, Punjabi, Kannada, etc.), the Tibetan plateau to the East (speaking Tibetan, or, now, Chinese), and the, now, Pakistani state located on its Western flank (native tongue being Urdu). The geographic location of Ladakh has meant that the peoples of the area have been influenced by multiple different cultures, having their lands switched between multiple different political entities throughout time. This past has created a unique group of peoples that is now tied to a state it had no political affiliation with previously. The inclusion of Ladakh into the Indian National State has meant that now the schools present within the region are controlled by an outside political entity, which dictates what kind of education the students in Ladakh are receiving. Being a completely separate (culturally and linguistically) group from the rest of the Indian sub-continent, this imposed education system has created issues within the region of Ladakh. This problem mainly surrounds trying to balance between educating students for an ever-changing, globalizing world, while still maintaining and instilling Ladakhi culture, values, and stressing an importance for learning and preserving a traditional language (Figure 3).

### The Early Government School Scenario Sets the Stage for the Emergence of Private Institutions

While speaking to individuals involved with the education system in Ladakh, no matter what type of system they are affiliated with, one hears the same phrase repeated over and over again- “The education scenario in Ladakh used to not be good.” This phrase is usually heard in regards to the education provided by the government from the early 1970s until recently. When speaking to different



individuals about government schools there appears to be a consensus that the education the government was providing through the Jammu and Kashmir board was insufficient, but is currently improving. However, what was the scenario that Ladakh faced in the early days of government education?

There are two boards of education found within Ladakh, one being the National Board, which is centralized in Delhi, and the other being the Jammu and Kashmir Board (J&K Board), which is centralized out of Srinagar. The government schools located within Ladakh fall under the J&K board, which sends out a centralized curriculum, with homogenized tests and teachers, who rotate around the state of Jammu and Kashmir, serving mandatory placements in different areas for two years. Their curriculum consists of math, science, social studies (referred to as “the arts”), Hindi, Urdu, and English, which the students are tested on in tenth, eleventh, and twelfth standards of their schooling. If the students are unable to pass one of these exams, they have to wait until the test is distributed the next year, to see if they are able to pass another time around and move on in their schooling. These subjects, and consequently their tests, are centered on ideas that are not necessarily present within Ladakh itself, for example in science, monsoons (example given by Padma, a college student at SECMOL) and elephants (example given by Kunzes, an employee at SECMOL) are foreign ideas described to students, all taught in a non-Native language. This creates an issue for Ladakhi students who have “a different dialect and language altogether [and]... face difficulty in associating the things written in their books with the things in their environment,” leading students to not fully comprehend the information they are receiving (Rehman, 4). In addition, the students are given this information by teachers who, again, are riding out a mandatory stay in the area that they are assigned in Ladakh. Many of these teachers are not prepared for the difference in culture that they will face when going to remote areas of Ladakh, and are especially not prepared for the different climate present within the region. For many teachers during this time, there was also an issue of receiving salaries on time because the government in Srinagar was distributing their pay, which led to a severe lack of motivation among educators in the area. This combined with a longing to be at home has created a problem with teacher attendance in government schools, in that the teachers often do not attend the classes they are supposed to be proctoring. Due to this issue surrounding the education system, many of the wealthier parents in Ladakh began sending their children to different regions of India in order for their children to receive a more competitive education. This meant that many Ladakhi youth were being separated from their families and thusly their culture, while those who could not afford to be sent to better schools were left to insufficient government schools and were often swept to the wayside. An easy solution to this issue would be to hire Ladakhi teachers, which was attempted, however this was problematic because many Ladakhis at this time were not well educated, so if an individual had completed only up to tenth standard, that was enough of a qualification to become a teacher in the area (Sanni, 5 Nov. 2014)



This educational climate lead Ladakhis to begin taking education into their own hands. One of the first private institutions created in Ladakh was the Lamdon Model School (Figures 4/5). The Lamdon Society, following the messages of Bakula Rinpoche, created Lamdon in the 1970s, a local supporter of education (Sanni, 5 Nov. 2014). Shri. Eshey Tundup, the current Principal of Lamdon, explained that the reasons for creating the school were, number one, the government schools were insufficient, especially for those students living in remote areas, secondly, the society wanted to educate Ladakhi students in Bodhi, and lastly, that if Ladakhis controlled their own school, they could instill their own tradition and culture in their youth (Tundup, 11 Nov. 2014). The Lamdon Society, a charitable foundation, initially raised funds by putting on community projects such as plays throughout Ladakh, and later found much of its funding coming from foreign sponsors/supporters as the society's reputation began to grow (this is where they find much of their funding currently, alongside the funds brought in by tuition from the student's families) (Tundup, 11 Nov. 2014). Once they had a sufficient amount of funds the schools were created, without much backlash from the government. One of the reasons for this lack of conflict with the government may be attributed to the fact that the school runs under the National Board of Education, which means that their school's curriculum is partially dictated by a board in Delhi, and their students have to take standardized tests (tenth, eleventh and twelfth standard) created by this board.

After establishing a base for their institution, they created schools throughout Ladakh, including branches in Shey, Nubra, Diskit, and their Secondary School located in Leh. Their students are usually granted admission in lower kindergarten and to gain admission the students and their parents are invited to the school in order for school officials to gain information about the family's backgrounds and to discern how much support the parents can provide their students throughout the course of their education (Tundup, 11 Nov. 2014). If a student and their family would like to be admitted from grade five on, they have to take a placement test to see if they will be compatible with the school and the progress the other students have made. The education provided by Lamdon includes the subjects of math, science, history, Ladakhi, Bodhi as well as English (including English literature), Hindi and Urdu. Their three-language policy, as explained by Principal Tundup, is that their students, up to grade eight have to study all three of these last languages, after which they decide whether to continue their education in English, Hindi or Ladakhi. Principal Tundup explained the reason for supporting Ladakhi language in their schools was because he believes (and inferentially the founders as well) language to be the root of the Ladakhi peoples' culture. He believes language is the main way to hold the tradition of culture and, as he stated, the Ladakhi people have a very good culture that the students must have instilled in the minds from an early age.

However, while trying to create an atmosphere conducive to cultural learning, the schools must also balance in modern education in order to prepare the students for the world they will be presented to upon twelfth standard completion.

For this reason, Lamdon stays affiliated with the National Board and complies with their curriculum and testing requirements. This National Board does create long term benefits for the students who are affiliated with Lamdon school in that, having been provided an education under this board creates better access to the national stream of higher education upon graduation (Tundup, 11 Nov. 2014). Another benefit to graduating from Lamdon is that due to their numerous foreign sponsors, many Lamdon students have the ability to participate in exchanges to countries like France, which is almost unheard of at other schools within Ladakh (Tundup, 11 Nov. 2014). Principal Tundup commented that he believed there was much benefit in students experiencing new systems because “children are the future of the world” and they need to know what values to draw from these new cultures, as well as what values to hold close from their own culture. This chance at experiencing a world abroad is also heightened for some Lamdon graduates who, if they are able, are granted scholarships, also mostly supported by sponsors, to study at institutions around the world, including America. However, what Lamdon has done to ensure that there is not a type of brain drain from the area, is to create a stipulation for these students receiving scholarships, that upon completion of their higher education abroad they must come back and contribute to their community, using the education that they received abroad (Tundup, 11 Nov. 2014). This has created a system in which, young Ladakhis can return and improve their community through a unique understanding of both Ladakhi culture and an international context, while the community does not lose all their motivated and outstanding youth.

Another theme that is found, included within the discussion with Principal Tundup, when addressing the benefits of attending private versus government schools is, accountability. As Tundup explained, as well as many others in interviews, with government schools all the funding comes directly from the government and all the services provided to the families and students is free of cost. This has lead to a lack of accountability amongst villagers ensuring that their schools are running properly, which includes the attendance of teachers. However with private institutions, parents are paying for the education the students are receiving and therefore are more motivated to check up on how their students are progressing and whether the teachers/schools are providing the type of education the parents are paying for. Principal Tundup added that one cannot force the government to do anything and this is why you have to own the place that you are in and take responsibility for what is yours. On top of this, Principal Tundup asserted that the government needs to begin building faith and trust with the people, which includes government officials sending their own children to government schools because if they do not want their children educated within their own system, why should the people of Ladakh?

Principal Tundup himself was involved with government schools for twenty-two years, when he started out as a teacher. His reason for leaving the government schools was due to his belief that the government creates too many rules and regulations within schooling. So, he believed that he could better support students, families, and communities at a private school. While he feels that the situation

within government schools has improved throughout the years after Lamdon was created, he also believes that parents continue to send their students to private institutions because of the prestige that they have built up over the years. Lamdon Model School is one of these well-known, prestigious institutions in Ladakh that continues to build its reputation through community involvement. The society continues to throw street plays and shows all over Ladakh that spotlight Ladakhi traditional culture. Through these dramatizations, they help relay important messages to communities throughout the region. Lamdon also provides health education classes to the surrounding communities, as well as providing access to dental and vision clinics to needy community members (these clinics are present within Lamdon's campuses).

### The Coming of the Student Initiative

With all of this dissatisfaction regarding government schools, five young Ladakhi college students (including Sonam Wangchuk, who runs the school now alongside Becky Norman) decided to create a Non-Government Organization run, alternative school named SECMOL (Students Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh) (Figure 6). SECMOL, established in 1988, is a place for Ladakhi youth, who were unable to pass one of their tenth, eleventh, or twelfth standard government tests (including math, science, one of the various languages, etc.- all the tests come separately), to live and continue their studies with a more centralized Ladakhi context. These "Foundation Students" spend one year at the school, which is located just outside Leh proper in the small town of Phey, on an isolated campus. It is on this campus that the students learn amongst their people, their traditions, while also gaining practical knowledge, such as cooking, constructing new traditional buildings using mud bricks, taking care of cattle- SECMOL currently has three jersey cows- (Figure 7), working in agriculture, how to economically insulate buildings, and so on (Figures 8/9). To aid the students in passing the exams they previously failed, SECMOL works to build on the information the students have previously received through localizing information by putting emphasis on examples the students have more experience with, introducing textbooks that include these local examples, as well as using local language (Sanni, 5 Nov. 2014). By the end of their time at the school, the students are, hypothetically, better prepared with the tools to pass the government tests a second time around (Ang-mo, a college student at SECMOL, commented that she believes around seventy to eighty percent of the students pass their tests after leaving SECMOL). Another important factor SECMOL has implemented in their structure is by creating power amongst the students to run their own school. The students are the ones making the decisions on how the campus is run, through elected student officials, they are the ones making the food (under the supervision of the head cook, Benoit), giving campus tours, collecting money from volunteers moving through the campus, maintaining the facilities, all while under the supervision and teaching of staff who are most, if not all, past SECMOL students. This creates an empowering, confidence building environment, which allows the students to feel more in power of the direction of their lives (this I

have witnessed for myself throughout my time at SECMOL). SECMOL has also created a college program, which allows students who are from regions of Ladakh, located far from the capitol of Leh, to stay on the campus and benefit from some of the opportunities the Foundation Students receive. As Kunzes, a thirty-one year old woman from Eastern Ladakh, who is one of the staff members at SECMOL (teaches basic English to foundation students) and a former SECMOL college student, explained, this program allows the college students to not waste their time and money in Leh. By staying at SECMOL for all four years (as most of them do), they do not waste their opportunity by spending too much time in the market or at friends houses, as well as avoiding the trouble of finding a place to stay or spending too much money on housing in town (Kunzes, 7 Nov. 2014). All of these students (currently there are about thirty foundation students- some foundation students have decided to leave SECMOL- and approximately fourteen college students) are provided the support to find the importance in education if they did not possess this value already, as well as the confidence to understand their abilities, which has the potential to be pivotal after failing a board exam.

A typical day at SECMOL (as I observed during my stay at the campus, although I understand that the schedule does alter throughout the year) involves the students waking up around six in the morning (or earlier if their assigned responsibility requires), attending a morning lecture, which is given by a teacher, a visiting lecturer, or Sonam Wangchuk when he is able, that is concluded by an introspection time, in which the students are all silent and are hopefully taking the time for themselves. After the morning lecture, the students have breakfast, which is followed by a “special class” at nine, provided by either one of the resident teachers, such as Rinchin, the campus head, or one of the volunteers staying on campus. These volunteers are a mix of individuals who come to stay at the campus to provide educational services, to aid in their own studies, as was my purpose, to complete internship requirements, or just as a unique experience to have along their travels. During my time at the school, these classes consisted of writing workshops, team-building games, chorography dance classes that the students would later perform, world history classes, discussions of world issues, and so on. Most of the classes are divided up between two groups (I was unable to discern out how they were divided), so while one group was attending their special class for an hour, the other group was tending to their assigned responsibilities. The responsibilities that the students are in charge of change every two months and cover everything from campus secretary, to milking cows, to being in charge of room assignments, as well as maintaining the campus’ agriculture. After special class/responsibility time, the students and staff have a thirty-minute tea break and then head to conversation class. Conversation class is also divided up between the two groups and each group has a fifty-minute period when they are divided up amongst the volunteers present on campus. The volunteers decide on a conversation topic, like marriage customs or cultural superstitions, which are then discussed amongst the small groups. These classes are unique in that they force the students, especially those who do not enjoy speaking in large groups, to work on their conversational English, which can be very difficult when there are no opportunities presented, while also exposing both the

students and volunteers to new ideas from different cultures. Once both of the conversation classes are over, everyone heads to lunch, after which the students have free time until three, which most use to get laundry done, or ride a bike up the campus road. After their free time, the students again split into their two groups and attend either a Ladakhi history class, taught by Stanzin Shara, a former SECMOL student, or, while I was there, a computer class instructed by a volunteer from Wales, Sue. After these classes, the students have another hour of free time, which the boys and a few girls use to play football until the sun goes down. Once the sun has disappeared, the two groups split again, while one group attends to their responsibilities and the others studying for an independent project of their choosing. The independent project topics are chosen by the students (topics varied from hockey, the theory of evolution, the moon, a chronology of Ladakhi history, or tectonic plates) some working alone and some working alongside a partner, which they have to complete a certain amount of research for and then present the information to their peers and teachers (presentations were in PowerPoint form, written in English and presented in Ladakhi) (Figure 10). Then at seven in the evening comes dinner, which is held in one of the main halls and begins with the students listening to local radio news in Ladakhi. After listening to the news and taking notes, the campus secretary pulls names of students from a bowl, who then have to present information provided in the news, in English. Once most of the students have had a chance to eat, two students, who have prepared a speech/presentation for the group, stand on a raised stage and present their topic in English. The other students are then expected to ask questions in English, whether out of interest or just to test the knowledge of the presenter. The group then sings a traditional Ladakhi song that changes every week. After the song is over it is time for another introspection period and then everyone heads to the evening activity in the big hall, which ranges from each housing group performing Ladakhi song and dance, to watching a documentary in English. Then finally it is time to sleep, to then wake up and repeat this schedule. This schedule is followed during the weekdays, while either Saturday or Sunday is taken as a free day, which is decided democratically by the students, while the other day is taken as a workday to keep up the campus' maintenance. This schedule allows the students to maintain a balance between completing their studies, gaining a sufficient amount of practical skills, while also keeping their campus running self-sufficiently.

### How SECMOL Changed the Game

After spending some time in Leh and discussing education in the area with different local people, one realizes that most have heard of SECMOL. It is an institution that has made its name throughout the region, as well as in the sub-continent itself. The very famous Bollywood movie, "Three Idiots," which I have been informed that every Indian has seen at least three times, has a school and a main character that is supposedly based on the school itself and one of the creators, Sonam Wangchuk. The reputation that the school has developed is generally positive and as Kunzes informed me, "many village parents want to send their

children to SECMOL.” The only slightly negative words directed towards SECMOL tend to refer to the confusion around events leading towards SECMOL’s impermanent closure around the early to mid 2000s and issues with different government boards in the area, as well as comments that the school used to be more efficient in earlier years. However, the individuals who spoke towards these issues did so reluctantly and without elaboration, which is either due to Ladakhi politeness or perhaps that the issues themselves are not large ones. So what has SECMOL done to create such a name for themselves?

One of the major leaps that SECMOL made was to create an almost entirely eco-friendly campus that is also incredibly self-sufficient. Most of the buildings on campus are built with traditional mud-brick walls and are south facing, which allows the buildings to regulate temperature and hold heat in the winter. Making the building’s windows south facing allows for the buildings to gain heat throughout the day, collecting as much sun as possible, which is much needed in the cold winters of Ladakh. When the cold really starts to set in, the students take large plastic tarps and create green houses outside several of the buildings, further increasing the temperature inside the rooms. The school also runs off of solar-power; the electricity is collected through a series of solar panels, stored in generators and mostly utilized only after the sun goes down (Figure 11). The food is also cooked on top of stoves, which have holes cut in them and a mirror attached below. These mirrors have sun reflected off of them from another larger set of curved mirrors, which are rotated throughout the day (Figure 12). Although these “sun stoves” are not utilized for cooking all food items, they cut out a percentage of fuels used by the school. The school’s water heater is also solar powered, so it takes the tap water the school is fed and heats up the water throughout the day. For this reason, if one desires a warm shower at SECMOL, it is best to make your attempt mid-day. Another solar feature the school has developed are small solar ovens located on top of the kitchen. These solar ovens, although not used frequently, can cook small biscuits and other goods for the school. SECMOL also utilizes their land to raise crops such as lettuce and cabbage. These fields, along with the campus’ trees, are watered by an irrigation system that brings the campus’ grey water down from the drains in the buildings above. The vegetables cultivated by the students are kept in a cool, underground room, which preserves them for months at a time, while the grains are kept in large, underground drums, which can be fed from tubes on the roof (almost like a silo system). In addition, the students also keep cows on campus, which eat the leftovers from meals, while providing the all the dairy needs on campus. One of the more interesting, eco-friendly features of the campus is the Ladkhi composting toilet. These toilets are raised rooms, located above dirt pits and once the pits become filled, the remains are used to fertilize the fields. These more traditional facilities use no water, which has become problematic to get in Leh, and allow for safe, efficient disposal of waste. All of these features allow the campus to run at very eco-friendly and cost efficient levels, while simultaneously teaching the students how to live by these efficient means.

Another feature of SECMOL that has boosted its reputation is the Youth Camp series that it has created. These Youth Camps are put on each summer and winter and each have different themes, such as hockey in the winter. Students are invited to come for the duration of the camp, as well as larger volunteer groups who utilize the camps for work. The students who come to the camps are usually government school students who are looking to get into SECMOL the following school year and some of the camps are provided for tenth standard students waiting for their test results of that year (Kunzes, 7 Nov. 2014). SECMOL tries to provide services to strictly government school students (there are no foundation students from private schools), but sometimes they will put on Youth Camps that private school students can participate in (Kunzes, 7 Nov. 2014). Students are able to come to more than one Youth Camp and the staff utilizes that time to give feedback and have interviews with the students who are interested in returning to SECMOL for a foundation year. Through the Youth Camps, not only are more Ladakhi youth benefiting from the services provided by SECMOL, but the school also gets to know potential students as well as spreading their name to more families throughout the Ladakhi community.

SECMOL, as explained earlier, also utilizes a volunteer system. If an individual (mostly individuals who are able to speak English) would like to come and stay at the school, they can contact the campus head and see if there is space for them at their desired time. Most likely there will be an available room and the volunteer can board, eat and teach on the campus, while only spending five hundred rupees a day. Although one can find cheaper room accommodations elsewhere in Leh, this provides the volunteer with an opportunity to get involved with part of the Ladakhi community, which might be difficult to accomplish for the every day traveler. The volunteer can aid with special classes if they have a unique skill set; volunteers in the past have taught the students how to play guitar, table tennis, and have also attempted to build better internet receptors. They live on campus, participating in the daily routines of the students, and getting to know the students on a more personal level. If there are too many volunteers on campus at one time, the school will contact other institutions in the area, such as the Phyang and Gydzin Monastery Schools, and see if they are in need of extra hands, so there is always work to be done. What this does to benefit SECMOL is to provide a constant stream of, not only extra income, but also English-speaking teachers, who are excited, involved, and bring new skill sets to the students, while not requiring any pay. These volunteers also bring donations to the school, such as the school's two guitars and ukulele, and give free advertising to their friends and family. Most of the volunteers that I spoke to during my time on the campus said that they had chosen to come to SECMOL after their friend or family member had urged them to, due to their great experience on the campus. This symbiotic relationship has created a system that SECMOL greatly benefits from, while creating a more unique and memorable experience for the traveler. I myself, being one of these travelers, found my time on the SECMOL campus to be a very rewarding and learning filled experience that was a support base for my research in the area.



The school also works in the area to boost awareness about issues Ladakh is currently facing, such as emerging environmental problems, while creating projects to start solutions. One of these projects is the “Ice Stupa” that SECMOL staff and volunteers have created in Phyang. (Figure 13) Ladakh, being a very cold region for most of the year, is home to several mountain glaciers and receives much snow at higher elevations (Figure 14). Although the Indus River runs directly by Leh and right through SECMOL campus, fresh water is becoming increasingly hard to get, especially with the rapid expansion of the capitol, and much of the area’s water comes from the melt off from these glaciers. However, with the issue of global climate change spreading, Ladakh is beginning to see their glaciers recede. Therefore, SECMOL initiated a plan to build an artificial structure that would store frozen, clean water throughout the winter, to be later used in the warmer seasons. The structure chosen for this glacier replicates the traditional, auspicious Stupa formation that one can find throughout Buddhist regions of the world. Choosing this style of construction appears to be not only efficient, due to its large and solid base formation, but also continues a familiar traditional Buddhist Ladakhi structure. Advertising for this structure is being attempted by creating internet websites, as well as by offering stays at different local institutions, like SECMOL and the Phyang Monastery School, with the stupa as the main attraction. Another project that SECMOL had started during my stay was to start creating a brochure, utilizing two Indian college volunteers, Abhipsha and Aaishanni, to promote the benefits of using Ladakhi composting toilets rather than the squat/sit toilets. These two volunteers, both media students in Pune, staying at SECMOL to complete an internship requirement, were told to create a brochure that emphasized to the community how Ladakhi composting toilets would benefit the land. With an ever-increasing tourism business (Ladakh was opened up to tourists in 1974) that has lead to an influx of seasonal workers from around India and Nepal, there has also been an increase in the usage of toilets that require water to flush. Leh, not having the proper sewage/plumbing infrastructure, has seen an increase in water pollution that was previously almost unheard of<sup>1</sup>. By creating these projects, SECMOL is benefiting the Ladakhi community while simultaneously boosting their reputation and advertising for the school (whether this be intentional or not).

Potentially one the most influential and beneficial projects that SECMOL created are the Village Education Committees (VECs). VECs was created under Operation New Hope (ONH) that SECMOL initiated in 1994 (Rehman, 2). ONH was created to work with the government’s education department to address “root problems... and to reform the education system mainly in the remote areas” of Ladakh (Rehman, 2). Under ONH, VECs was created to boost community accountability in their student’s government education (Sanni, 5 Nov. 2014). As explained earlier, in many communities who have their education provided by the government, schooling is free so parents of students were not taking an active role in keeping track of what their children were learning in school (sometimes due to

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<sup>1</sup> All this information was provided throughout multiple casual conversations about the Ice Stupa, the brochure, as well as signs posted in the toilets on SECMOL campus.

the fact that the parents were uneducated themselves) and whether or not the teachers were attending their classes. To fix this, VECs went into communities throughout different regions in Ladakh and created boards of elected community members who took on the responsibility of making sure the schools were running efficiently, including taking teacher attendance (Sanni, 5 Nov. 2014). This created accountability within communities to aid their youth in education and provided a further commitment to building education. Through VECs, there were also teacher training programs set up to make the teachers more aware of “creative, child centric and activity based teaching methods” to allow children to take more interest in their primary education (Rehman, 2). This was a pivotal move to make because it is within primary education that children find their interest in continuing their education. VECs also provided “localized school textbooks and teaching/learning methods,” which allowed students to have more contextualized learning (Rehman, 2). Developing this change was very important, as Kunzes explained to me, because government schooling can be very difficult for Ladakhi youth, especially in primary school. The difficulty, as she explained, comes from the fact that these students have previously learned everything they know in Ladakhi, but between their first and third years of government school education they learn everything in Urdu/Hindi and then after five years, the students have to begin struggling with English. Kunzes believes that the first thing these students should be learning is how to understand themselves and their people/language before moving onto another set of ideas; before learning about elephants and monsoons, they should be learning about yaks and glaciers. By following this pattern of education she believes that students would be better developed and have an easier time with their education. The creation of VECs not only helped to develop and promote a new way of conceptualizing education in the area, but also allowed for SECMOL to build relationships with communities all over Ladakh.

When it comes to the students themselves, however, SECMOL has rethought and reimagined how to better provide education for those on their campus. One thing a visitor learns quickly about the students at SECMOL is that they have a lot of confidence. Not all students are ready to immediately jump into a conversation, but it does not take long for them to begin asking questions like, “what is the weirdest thing you have ever eaten?” (a question posed to me by Foundation Student TT) The students that I met at SECMOL only had about one hundred days left at the campus, which means that they had already gone through the majority of their time at SECMOL<sup>2</sup>. These Foundation Students had spent an entire year working on their conversational English with foreign strangers, getting up and making speeches in front of groups in English, and some even having to give tours to visitors in English. All of this push towards interaction and putting oneself out there allows the students to build up confidence in who they are, while building a vocabulary that can be used after leaving SECMOL (Kunzes, 7 Nov. 2014). As Norbu, a Foundation

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<sup>2</sup> Traditional Ladakhi time schedule means that people work throughout the summer, while winters are left to stay inside out of the cold- SECMOL follows this schedule

Student, informed me during a conversation class about the equality of men and women, “coming to SECMOL is a means of increasing confidence.” (Figure 15) He explained to me that before coming to the school he was very shy and did not enjoy speaking in front of large groups of people (presumably he meant even in his Native, Ladakhi tongue). However, now Norbu is one of the most charismatic and outgoing students at the school- always carrying his part in conversation class, asking questions, and interacting with the volunteers. It is noticeable when one stays at SECMOL that the students on that campus are special and have been greatly impacted by the confidence building set up of the school.

SECMOL is an institution, which has aided in the change that needed to be made to education in Ladakh. It boosted an understanding in the area that Ladakhis needed to begin taking action into their own hands, while simultaneously challenging the government to make the changes themselves. The school has provided an environmentally-conscious campus that aids the area’s youth in continuing their education, while providing the platform for finding the confidence and motivation needed to continue on with their studies. If you ask students on the campus if they believe they will continue with their studies, most students will tell you that they plan on continuing as far as they can with the hopes for a better future. For example, during a conversation class on the topic of marriage, some of the students were explaining to me that in their villages there are some couples marrying at, from their perspectives, very young ages. (6 Nov. 2014) These couples, as the students explained, were getting married at as young as fifteen and when I asked why they spoke about this negatively they explained to me how if an individual enters into a union at that young of an age, they generally discontinue their education and begin working to support a family. To quit schooling at this age meant to the students that they would have a lack of opportunities in the future; without an education it is hard for an individual to find a job and one will most likely end up in the occupation of their parents, such as farming. This perspective displayed to me the value placed on educating oneself and the drive of the students on campus to provide a better future for themselves. This interest from the youth, who were brought up in the Ladakhi community and have a deep understanding of the region’s culture, will be extremely important for Ladakh’s future. By creating a group of young people who are motivated to better themselves, ensures the future of local leaders who will then set an example for others in their area, thereby, hopefully, setting the stage for an improved Ladakh. By this I mean that local issues will be dealt with by local leaders, who have the cultural knowledge to create practical solutions with (again hopefully) the area’s/people’s best interest in mind.

### The Government School Dilemma

The face of government education in Ladakh is multi-faceted and confusing. There are many different stories and opinions on government education that are constantly changing, especially when talking to individuals of different generations or those who have been involved with Ladakhi education for varying amounts of

years. Despite this confusion, there appears to be a general consensus, as explained previously, that the “education scenario of Ladakh’s past” was insufficient. However, this statement is usually followed with the positive outlook that this scenario is gradually improving. As explained previously, the problems with the government education system varied from a lack of funding, a lack of teachers, uninspired curriculums, language barriers, etc.<sup>3</sup> Even though there has been much dissatisfaction expressed with the government’s education system, the Indian government has done an impressive job at covering Ladakh with educational facilities. Despite the harsh terrain the region presents and the perceived “economic backwardness” the government has been able to cover Ladakh with school buildings, so much so that “the number of schools outnumber the villages in the district” of Leh (Bhasin, 55). After using this term “economic backwardness” as a characteristic of the region, author, M.K. Bhasin, provides the statistic that Leh has “110 villages or 98.2%” of its existing areas which “have educational facilities.” This information is very outdated (M.K. Bhasin’s research was formally presented in 1992), but is still very representative of the current situation. Leh district is one of the regions of the Jammu and Kashmir state with the most educational facilities, which amounts to approximately three hundred and thirty five government schools<sup>4</sup> (Rehman, 2).

These impressive figures of the sheer number of educational facilities in Ladakh on the surface appear to be a great accomplishment by the J&K government, in which they overcame the hurdle that Ladakh’s environment created. However, through research, one can find an emerging argument on whether the quantity of facilities also reflects the quality of the buildings themselves, alongside the education provided inside the facilities. Although the government has spent a very large sum on increasing the number of facilities in Ladakh<sup>5</sup>, many of these facilities have been reported as not suitable for learning. Even though the information is out of date and the facts might have changed, Bhasin found in their research that many government facilities had inadequate “furniture, science equipment, lighting and heating arrangements,” as well as a lack of proper drinking water (Bhasin, 58). Although a good education can be provided without the presence of good equipment, healthy, clean drinking water is a must, but more importantly, in a place like Ladakh, with its very harsh, seasonable cold weather, there is a serious need for

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<sup>3</sup> Another negative, potentially controversial issue that was spoken about rarely throughout my time in Ladakh is the presence of corporal punishment. Some of the students, during fairly casual conversations, explained how in their school they would be hit (from how it sounded, the blows were aggressive) or would have to stand in front of the class and stand “chicken” for displeasing the teacher (chicken refers to standing with your head between your knees and your arms wrapped around your legs). Even though this was an issue described to me on multiple different occasions, I do not want to address it because it is a controversial topic and I do not have the information to discuss it properly.

<sup>4</sup> This information was taken from a paper produced in 2013- however the statistic of the number of schools in Leh district came after other statistics pulled from a 2011 census, so it is assumed that this number of 335 is recently collected data.

<sup>5</sup> “For 1997-98, Leh district alone was allocated 45,297,000 rupees” to develop the districts education (Mellor, 11).

proper heating systems. On top of the questionable facilities, the issue of whether quality education is being provided is one that needs to be addressed. When I first arrived at SECMOL campus, I was informed that the student's schedule was being abruptly changed due to the J&K Board announcing their decision to push back the dates that they would issue the standardized government tests. The reason for this decision, although there were some disagreements, was due to the disastrous floods of September in Jammu and Kashmir that greatly affected the capitol, Srinagar. For the students, this decision meant that the numerous hours they had dedicated to preparing for the tests were then rendered moot. Some individuals at SECMOL informed me that the local government had requested that the J&K government still send the tests to Ladakh, since the region had not experienced the floods itself and the tests were already prepared. However, the government refused this request and the students now have to take their tests in March, which alters their seasonal routine of resting in the winter. What this decision initially elaborates on is the way in which the region is arbitrarily governed by an outside power that does not seem to put much consideration into Ladakhi ways of working. But, after some thought, it also illustrated to me the importance placed on these homogenized, standardized government tests. The reason for the students being at SECMOL was because they were unable to pass their previous tests, which means they are unable to move along with their education. These tests are what the students are focusing so heavily on throughout the year and play a very impactful role in their experience with the institution of education. So, returning back to the theme of quality- does quality education consist of teaching students a set of information in order to get them to pass a test?

To find out how Ladakhis conceptualize "quality" education, I decided to include this question in several of my interviews. When Kunzes was posed with the question of quality vs. quantity in education, she responded first with the fact that there are many schools that cover Ladakh, adding on the idea that because there are so many schools and most people in different villages send their kids to government school, that most new parents will do the same because it is the norm. However, she then responded with a question of her own- but what are they learning? Kunzes explained that students at government schools, as she had experienced, were just learning information from books and not how to take care of responsibilities and improving life, as the students at SECMOL were doing. Even though this could be seen as a script given by a SECMOL staff, who might not have that high of an opinion of government schools, this sentiment is shared among many. The Principal of Lamdon, Eshey Tundup, when asked the same question, responded that quantity and quality are both important when it comes to education, but he expressed his belief that even though the government was spending an increasing amount of money on schools, that the output, produced by students, was not reflecting this input. When speaking to Detchen, a twenty one year old SECMOL college student from Eastern Ladakh, she also expressed her belief that during her time in government schools, students were only working at memorizing for the test and not doing their work practically, which she believes is more beneficial. The head of SECMOL campus and former student, Rinchin, also expressed to me, casually, on a

hike up the mountain behind the school that in her government education, she felt that she did not learn anything applicable to higher education<sup>6</sup> (9 Nov. 2014). I also discussed this topic with a local friend that I made on a previous trip to Ladakh, named Sanni. Sanni is a Zaskar native, in his early 30s, who now lives in Leh and is very knowledgeable on local issues<sup>7</sup>. In our discussion, Sanni prefaced his comments with the insight that there are problems with education everywhere. Whether he meant this on a global scale or was conceptualizing everywhere to be a top-down structural issue, I am unsure of, but as he continued, Sanni explained that the government does not design the curriculum they distribute with the thought that it could impact a child's life. It appears to Sanni that they create their curriculum based on the desire to have students place all of their focus on memorizing information and then reproducing it on a piece of paper; in Sanni's words, "students at schools are not studying to study, they know they have to get a job and pass a test." This emphasis placed on testing by the government was further exemplified when Ang-mo, a college student, informed me that if less than fifty percent of a teacher's students are passing the standardized tests, that teachers have their salary cut. This is a very good incentive created by the government to ensure that teachers are covering all of the material that the government has required and drilling it into their student's heads.

After receiving all this negative information regarding the government schools, the institution had been fairly demonized in my mind and I was very interested to hear what someone involved with government education had to say. Well into my stay in Ladakh, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to sit down and speak with the Chief Education Officer of Leh, Sh. Tsewang Phuntsog. Tsewang Phuntsog, a Ladakhi man, originally from Leh, is in charge of all the government schools located within the Leh district of Ladakh (Figure 16). Ladakh is split up into different districts and zones, which are then controlled by different administrative heads. Tsewang Phuntsog is under the control of both the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (this government body will be elaborated on more later in the paper) and the J&K education board. His duties require him to make sure the schools in the district are running smoothly, for example, by keeping track of the government staff and making sure their jobs are getting done, according to both government's requirements<sup>8</sup> (Phuntsog, 19 Nov. 2014). Phuntsog began our meeting by explaining a flow chart he had readily available at his desk, which neatly outlined the chain of command the government has created to regulate education within the state. For example, he explained to me how he is under the control of the Director of School Education in Kashmir and also assisted by the zonal education

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<sup>6</sup> Rinchin now has an undergraduate degree in zoology and a masters in social work

<sup>7</sup> Sanni also appears to be quite involved at SECMOL, knowing many, if not all of the students, and has a sister who is the English Literature teacher at Lamdon, which seems to enable him to further connect himself with collecting local knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> Phuntsog is the only employee in his office that has to answer to the J&K government. All other employees are under the direct control of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Council. (Phuntsog, 19 Nov. 2014)

officer, which is another offshoot of regional organization created by the government. This system appeared to be very bureaucratic in nature, having a very clear and defined chain of command. Once going through the chart, the department head then explained how the different grades of government schools were set up- first through fifth standard are organized into primary schools, sixth through eighth into middle schools, through tenth is considered higher secondary, and eleventh and twelfth are named principal higher secondary school. After this, the conversation started to address the major questions concerning government schooling and Phuntsog began with the ever-present comment, “the total education scenario was not good a decade ago.” This scenario, he explained, was the reason for the emergence of the private schools in the area, but as he continued it began to become clear that things are changing. To emphasize this change, he offered up the statistic that Leh district now has a literacy rate of eighty percent, which is a great improvement to the previously low statistic<sup>9</sup>. Some have questioned whether literacy is a true marker of education or not- author, Rehman, states, “Literacy means being able to read and write while education means the ability to acquire knowledge.” (Rehman, 2) Nonetheless, this increasing statistic shows that something right is being done in the area.

After sharing this statistic, I asked the head of the department how he conceptualizes quality education. The answer he provided was very diplomatic, yet respectable; he knows that they have a set of norms that have to be followed within government education, but he would like to see more important, place specific subjects added to the curriculum, such as preservation of the environment (Phuntsog, 19 Nov. 2014). Based on his recognition of the norms in place, I began addressing the questions surrounding the problems I saw with having an outside government dictating education. From this conversation, Phuntsog informed me that Ladakhi language is taught in schools up to tenth standard and then it becomes optional to Hindi and Urdu. He also explained that up until seventh standard, the students are tested with “home exams,” which are created and distributed by the district, after which the tests are distributed by the J&K government. Whether this limited amount of control enables the district’s education office to create tests better suited to Ladakhis, or whether they decide to seize this opportunity), I was unable to determine. After this I inquired about the issue regarding teacher attendance, or lack there of, within the government schools. First he recognized that many of the teachers are dissatisfied with their assignments to Leh and that many do not want to come/stay. Then he informed me that up until tenth standard, most of the teachers come from the district itself, after which they are in need of two hundred principals and lecturers, but are only provided with around ninety from the district; it is at this point that they require outside help in providing teachers. If these teachers are reported as not attending class, the office then “takes on contractuels.” (Phuntsog, 19 Nov. 2014) The department is also utilizing boarding schools to help mitigate this issue, among others. Boarding schools were introduced to Ladakh in 1979-80 and continue to be utilized throughout the region to provide

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<sup>9</sup> This information coincides with the statistics found in Rehman’s paper



education in remote areas (Bhasin, 56). The population of Ladakh is fairly scattered, so the government decided to implement central schools, which provided housing for students coming from far distances. By creating these schools the government cut down on the number of teachers the districts required, while providing education, board, food and facilities free of cost (Phuntsog, 19 Nov. 2014). These twenty-four hour supervised facilities have proved very beneficial, with student's exam scores on the rise (Phuntsog, 19 Nov. 2014). They have become so beneficial that Phuntsog told me the government is trying to start up more boarding schools throughout the district.

Whether I was provided with entirely correct information or not, Chief Education Officer Phuntsog was able to convince me that the demonization of government schools that had occurred in my mind (which I will admit began before returning to Ladakh) did not encompass the whole truth. Government schools appear to be developing their system in a beneficial manner and Phuntsog believes that the main reason parents still send their children to private schools is due to the increasing economic status of Ladakhi families who want to send their students to prestigious institutions (private schools appear to have been able to better their reputations while the government schools took their time working on providing sufficient education). This meeting allowed me to reevaluate some of my earlier interviews, especially those with former government school students, and notice information that I had disregarded previously. For example, even though Ang-mo expressed her interest in homeschooling her children when she started a family, she also did not speak poorly of her former government school and even said that she enjoyed her time there. At first, I attributed this, to the information she provided about her father's occupation; Ang-mo's father is employed by the Indian Army and she has a desire to become a police officer. With this information and a negative perception of government schooling, I made a possibly incorrect inference that this positivity she attributed to government schooling was due to an instilled pride/respect for the Indian government by Ang-mo's father. However, I realized that this perspective was also shared by other SECMOL college students in their interviews- Detchen, who attended government school for all years of her base education expressed her positivity towards her government school, while Padma, a twenty year old college student from Eastern Ladakh, who attended a government boarding school from seventh standard through twelfth, described how she discovered her interest in math and science through her boarding school instructors, whom she liked very much. These last three individuals all recognized separately that government schools used to not be very "good," but that the situation has improved over the years. This improvement could be attributed to the fact that the government has placed Ladakhis as the heads of local departments, which make decisions affecting local communities. I had not expected the Chief Education Officer to be Ladakhi and I believe, from our conversation, that Phuntsog allows his Ladakhi upbringing to positively affect the decisions he makes for his district.

## Where to go to School?

So far, the discussion of schooling in Ladakh has centered on only one private institution, one NGO, and government schools. However, the reality is that in Leh district itself, there are so many different types of institutions parents can choose to send their students to. These schools range from religiously motivated establishments, to different forms of government created schools. All service the district, while many have included boarding sections to provide facilities for students coming from far regions of Ladakh. To choose from this incredible amount of schools has the potential to be overwhelming for parents who have the desire to send their children to school at a location other than their local government school.

One of the most prevalent forms of alternative schooling in Leh district are institutions created with a religious purpose. The main type of religious school that one will find in the area is Monastery Schools. These Buddhist institutions are created to service young monks who have chosen, or whose families have chosen, the path of monasticism or for students whose families are unable to take care of them and/or have been orphaned. At the Gyzzin Monastery School, located in Phey village, just down the street from SECMOL campus, I was able to participate in providing English classes, along with two other volunteers from SECMOL, to students who desired extra class during their day. There were two groups that had been split up between perceived English ability by the other volunteers before I arrived. With each class we would choose a new topic, such as the water cycle, that would aid the group in learning new vocabulary to use in conversation. The students at the school learn English,<sup>10</sup> Philosophy, which is taught in Tibetan, Hindi, and Tibetan language.<sup>11</sup> (5 Nov. 2014) Although I know they are required to learn other subjects than just the ones that the students provided me with, it was surprising to me that when we placed a world map in front of the more advanced group, they had trouble identifying the different continents (the students in this group ranged from about age sixteen to eighteen). However, to the students credit, when reviewing the difference between there, their and they're, the students could use all three correctly, which some college level students are unable to do. Another interesting piece of information learned from the students was that many of the young men in the classes had been sent to the school by their parents and one young man, Tenzin, expressed his wish to not stay and be a monk. This broke the over-romanticized ideas that I held previously about monks- that as a collective, they are all deeply involved and dedicated to their religion and this dedication is what made them choose to become monks, on their own. However, even with this expressed dissatisfaction, it would be interesting to know what would have happened to some of the students if the monastic school system did not exist.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> English teacher is Tibetan

<sup>11</sup> Tibetan teacher is from Zanskar (Ladakhi)

<sup>12</sup> There is also a Monestary School in Phyang village, which has a Gompa attached to it and is much larger than the school located in Phey.

Another well-known institution in the Leh district is the Druk White Lotus School, in the town of Shey<sup>13</sup>. Established in September of 2001, the school was founded by His Holiness Gyalang Drukpa, on a traditional Buddhist base, in order to maintain student's cultural identity, while providing quality education (Jigmet, 24 Nov. 2014/ Sanni, 5 November 2014) (Figure 17). The school has seen an increase in fame since the producers of the movie, "Three Idiots," decided to use the school to film one of their final scenes<sup>14</sup>. The school is run by Vice Principal Stanzin Kunzang, who joined the school's staff at the beginning of the 2014 school year and now oversees approximately eight hundred students that attend the institution (Jigmet, 24 Nov. 2014). As with SECMOL, the Druk White Lotus School has created a campus that utilizes eco-friendly, traditional architecture, as well as solar power that generates the campus' energy. The architecture of the campus has led the school to receive many architectural awards (Jigmet, 24 Nov. 2014). Just as with other private institutions, the students and their parents have to go through an application process, at a specific time of year, in order to be admitted to the school. Druk White Lotus School provides boarding facilities, since some of the students come from as far as Zaskar and there are approximately four hundred students who live on campus throughout the year (Jigmet, 24 Nov. 2014) (Figure 18). I was fortunate to have the opportunity to receive a tour of the campus during one of their school days. Upon arriving at the school, I was able to witness the morning assembly, in which the students gather in the central area of campus, organized by class/housing, and recite a morning prayer (Figure 19). I was then taken on a tour of the campus by Jigmet, a Ladakhi woman and former SECMOL foundation student, who is also the cousin of the current SECMOL head, Rinchin. On our tour, Jigmet first lead me to the "infant" boarding area, where students as young as three years old come to stay at the school. All students who board at the school are placed in a housing unit with a housemother, who watches after the students and ensures that the rooms are being maintained. The school falls under the J&K board of education and while discussing the standardized testing that is required of the students, Jigmet informed me that the school only teaches up until tenth standard. Due to a lack of students who wish to complete eleventh and twelfth standard, the school has decided to stop educating after tenth and Jigmet explained that if a student wants to continue on with their education, they usually attend a Government Principal Higher Secondary School in Leh to complete their base education. This was a surprising reality to learn after hearing so many positive comments about the school and seeing first hand how dedicated to providing good education the school appeared to be. I had assumed that most of the students, who have parents that would pay for them to attend a private institution, would also be pushed by their parents to continue on with their education. However, what the school does provide, in maintaining their purpose of preserving and teaching culture, is to instruct all subjects in Ladakhi throughout all levels of education (Jigmet, 24 Nov. 2014). This, combined with teaching for

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<sup>13</sup> Shey is approximately a twenty-minute drive from the capitol of Leh.

<sup>14</sup> The school has received so much attention from Indian tourists in the area, that the school had to create a second, more grand gate, as well as hire new staff dedicated solely to providing tours of the campus during peak tourist season.

standardized testing, providing computer classes, etc. better prepares the students for the rapidly changing world around them, while maintaining a sense of cultural identity.

On the side streets of Leh, a local Moravian church has established a coinciding Moravian Mission School. This is a surprising establishment within the community seeing as how the majority of the population is either Buddhist or Muslim; one does not hear much of a Christian presence in Ladakh. However, when casually speaking with a friend, Jigmet, an individual whom I was acquainted with during my last stay in Leh, informed me that he attended the mission school in his youth. When I inquired about the religious aspects of the school, he informed me that there was not much religious influence by the school at all; the most they ever did was say an "Our Father," which he struggled to remember the name of. When I returned to SECMOL campus after hearing about this school, I asked Becky Norman, who helps run SECMOL, about this confusing lack of religion in a mission school. She replied with an exclamation of, "of course there's no religion taught in the school," and then elaborated that if there was religion/conversion being pushed on the students, the Buddhist parents would have a serious problem with the institution. This is quite interesting seeing as how, historically, mission schools have been used by Christians to push their morals ideals on different groups, as well as a tool of conversion. However, this is not the case in Ladakh. What this might exemplify is the desire for Ladakhi parents to send their children to private institutions, whether this be due to the prestige of the institution, increased chance at English fluency, or more individualized attention (with many other possibilities), while simultaneously having no desire to alter their traditional value system. I believe that this example well represents the strong connection that the older generations of Ladakhis have with their culture.

Located just outside of Leh, on the road out to Choglamsar, the Muslim community has created their own private, religious institution called, Imamia Model School. Although I was unable, due to time constraints, to collect much information about this school, during my conversation with Sanni, he informed me that these types of religiously separated institutions develop a religious disconnect at an early age. By this, he described how having separate schools, like Imamia, set up the divide between Muslims and Buddhists at an early age. Sanni, being a Buddhist himself, did not express this concern over Buddhist schools establishing this divide as well, only the schools teaching Islam. The conflict between Buddhist and Muslim in Leh itself does not appear to be that intense of a problem, although there have been issues in the past. However, when one travels outside of Leh, into areas such as Zanskar, Stanzin Khatup informed me, that the tensions increase. In addition, I think it is important to note that at SECMOL, there is currently only one Muslim student, and I have heard frequently that the school rarely has Muslim students apply. Having a lack of information and knowledge on this subject, I do not want to make any incorrect assertions or inferences on what these tensions mean in a greater context, especially with education, however, it is an important issue to make note of. But, aside from these afore mentioned schools, Leh district also possess a branch of

the Delhi Public Schools, Army Public Schools, a Siddhartha School, located in Stok, and a branch of the TCV school system<sup>15</sup>.

### What Does This Mean for Ladakh?

With the presence of all these different institutions, one thing becomes clear; the people of Ladakh are trying. When they found themselves dissatisfied with the education the government made available to them, the Ladakhi people decided to take matters into their own hands. The type of community action to better the people's situation has set an example for indigenous communities everywhere. Ladakhi people have begun to shown the foreign superpower that gained control of their lands that they will not rest with insufficient provisions. This is exemplified by the creation of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), in 1995 (Mellor, 13). The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council was created after the area attempted to gain union territory status from the Indian government, but instead was granted an autonomous form of government (Sanni, 5 Nov. 2014). Once granted autonomy, the Ladakhi people set up their own "self governing body, which works at the grassroots level for the development and progress of [Ladakhi] society." (Rehman, 3) Through the LAHDC, Ladakhi people are able to elect their own representatives within their own centralized government, have their own deputy collector, are no longer forced to travel all the way to Srinagar to have plans approved (such as assembly meetings), among many other benefits (Sanni, 5 Nov. 2014). Even though this governing body and other elements of society are still controlled by the Jammu and Kashmir government, the creation of the LAHDC has made it so Ladakhi people have more immediate control over the decisions made in their area. When one drives around Leh and its surrounding areas, there are signs everywhere for different offices the LAHDC has created, such as "the department of rural development," (located by Lamdon Higher Secondary School), "the Department of Animal Husbandry," (located on the drive up to Leh's main gate), "the Department of Tourism," (located by Leh's college) a department designated for developing the poultry business in Ladakh, among many others. The LAHDC also aids in providing health care for the community, which I discovered when I had a bout of illness in Leh. Each family has booklets distributed by the organization, which keeps track of the individual's medical past that is brought to each visit with the hospital. The creation of this centralized government also means that most government employees in the area fall under the control of the LAHDC. This is an important feature when it comes to education, in that the teachers in government schools, as well as those in the local education office, as Tsewang Phuntsog explained, are Ladakhis hired by Ladakhis<sup>16</sup>. This allows for a greater control by Ladakhis of their own place, which mirrors the previously shared sentiment of

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<sup>15</sup> Again, due to time constraints, I was unable to gather information on all of the listed schools, but I believe it is important to mention them in order to illustrate the many, varying types of educational institutions in Leh district.

<sup>16</sup> However, as a reminder, Phuntsog did explain that after tenth standard they have to start looking elsewhere for teachers due to a lack within the district.

Principal Tundup that “you have to own your place and take responsibility for it.” The way in which the indigenous population of Ladakh has begun to reclaim their place, I hope, will only yield benefits in the future of their people.

With all of this positive, empowering change being made in Ladakh, there is also a disconcerting mentality that is present within the minds of many Ladakhis, specifically those of the younger generation. It is an idea that I was first introduced to in my Native Studies program that has been present in indigenous communities all over the world that have been infiltrated and overcome by outside powers; it is the idea that their people and place are “backwards.” Up until coming to Ladakh, “backwardness” was a term I had only read about in books or discussed in class, always stressing the negative impacts of using this term to define others. However, during my first visit, while conducting an interview with my friend Padma, a SECMOL college student who was aiding me as a translator on our journey in northwestern Ladakh, informed me that she perceived her region as backwards. Padma comes from the Eastern region of Ladakh, near Pangong Lake<sup>17</sup> (Figure 20), and grew up in a family of nomads. Her nomadic parents, as traditional people, move from place to place, tending to the animals that are their livelihood. Padma, being the eldest of her two siblings, was the child designated to receive the traditional knowledge of her people (Padma, 5 Oct. 2014). To hear this idea coming from such a bright young woman, who displays much pride in who she is and where she comes from, is troubling. On another occasion (10 Nov. 2014), I was working with a group of three SECMOL foundation students during a conversation class and as the topic began to run dry, I asked them what they would like to talk about for future topics. The last student to speak was Tashi Dolkar, a very bright, outgoing student and an avid hockey player; her choice was, “why Ladakh is backwards.” Her response immediately took me off guard, and not knowing what to say, I retorted that Ladakh is not backwards and that this was, as I saw it, a bad way of thinking. However, not having the proper cultural knowledge to further delve into the topic and the fear of running into a problematic conversation that could potentially be filled with miscommunication and misunderstanding, I let the comment slide. These two situations, as well as several other comments made by young people in Ladakh have really stuck with me and made me wonder what kind of impact this perception has on identity.

This perceived backwards nature of a community tends to emerge when foreigners begin establishing their presence in an area, bringing with them new technology and new value systems. This infiltration began when Ladakh was incorporated into the Independent Indian State in 1947, which changed the course

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<sup>17</sup> Pangong Lake is located directly on the border between Ladakh/India and China. Approximately one third of the lake rests in India, while the majority belongs to China. The lake is another area, which has seen increased amounts of tourism due to the filming of “Three Idiots” on its shores. When I visited there was even a “Three Idiots Café,” which was the only establishment open after the completion of another tourist season. (I was there for the month of November and tourist season only lasts until around mid-October when most owners close up shop.)

of its history. Then Ladakh was opened up to tourism in the 1970s and since the region had its doors opened, there has been an incredible influx of new populations moving through the area<sup>18</sup>. Leh has seen its size expand rapidly with the hasty building of concrete guesthouses to accommodate tourists (Figure 21), the movement of seasonal workers in and out of the city, as well as an increase in houses built by those migrating to the city permanently. This expansion is easily seen if one walks up to Leh palace and spots the new houses being built next to the road/in the hills up to the monastery above Leh. As previously mentioned, this sudden influx has created infrastructural issues, especially concerning clean water. However, as Helena Norberg-Hodge illustrates in her book, "Ancient Futures-Learning From Ladakh," this change has also brought about a rapid alteration in the Ladakhi culture and people. Norberg-Hodge was one of the first outsiders to visit Ladakh, following its opening to travelers, and as she explains throughout her writing, "the abrupt changes that have taken place in Ladakh... are a reflection of a global trend." (Norberg-Hodge, ix) This global trend is one that stresses the importance of progress. The type of progress that is determined to be successful and efficient is done so by industrial societies, which are looked upon as more developed. Progress is often seen as an inevitable force of a global/technological evolution, but as Norberg-Hodge discovered, this mind-set is only a product of industrial societies, who desire to replicate and perpetuate themselves by spreading an "industrial monoculture." (Norberg-Hodge, 1-2) This monoculture has its roots deep into capitalism, which promotes individualistic habits, trends towards heavy consumption, and desire to acquire ever-larger sums of money, all of which are polar opposites of what I perceive as traditionally Ladakhi (Shakspo, xvi). So, when outsiders come to Ladakh, wearing designer jeans, expensive hiking jackets, and carrying the latest cellphone, this is what the youth desires as well<sup>19</sup>. When young people see these foreigners there is a potential for them to begin to view their lives as "primitive, silly and inefficient," due to a "one dimensional view of modern life, [which] becomes a slap in the face." (Norberg-Hodge, 97) Through her time in Ladakh, Norberg-Hodge "gained insight into the intense psychological pressures that modernization brings," and one can notice the effects for themselves (Norberg-Hodge, 94). When walking through the bazaar or spending time at SECMOL, it becomes evident that the youth are abandoning the traditional attire of their culture and gravitating towards "western" style of clothing<sup>20</sup>. This trend runs deeper than just with clothing, however. The occupations that young Ladakhis strive for shy away from traditional forms of employment, such as farming, and tend to lust towards jobs in the trekking business, or other jobs outside Ladakh. This is not to

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<sup>18</sup> Helena Norberg-Hodge has asserted in her belief in writing that the decision to open Ladakh to tourism was a move made by the Indian government "intended to place Ladakh firmly on the map as Indian Territory." (Norberg-Hodge, 92) This assertion may be entirely correct due to the conflict area in which Ladakh lies.

<sup>19</sup> Writer Nawang Tsering Shakspo, however, has asserted his belief that much "cultural maintenance" has been enacted in order "to make money off of tourists." (Shakspo, 257)

<sup>20</sup> Students at SECMOL informed me that young people do not usually start wearing traditional clothing everyday until they are married.



say, however, that tradition and culture need to be stagnant; Ladakh is a place, which has experienced much cultural change, due to its location, and “has been exposed to the influence of other cultures” throughout the past (Norberg-Hodge, 91). But, the type of change developing in the region is one that might not be desirable in terms of maintaining a strong connection to cultural identity.

The emergence of the backwards mentality, could also be attributed to government school education. The Indian Government produced a document in 2014, titled, “The Indian Standard Classification of Education,” in which they defined education as, “the process by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values... and behaviors across generations.” (ISCoE, iii) India, as common knowledge, is one of the most rapidly growing countries in the world. It is heavily stressing the improvement of the country’s infrastructure, along with the development of technologies, all while following the industrial model of progress. Through education these values and attitudes are being “deliberately transmitted” to Ladakhi students who attend schools dictated by the government. The Indian government deciding to implement their own standardized “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, 5) Rather than growing up within a learning environment, which promotes the preservation of traditional ways of life or thinking, most young Ladakhis are being educated in a system, which stresses foreign, homogenized, modern ways of thought. On one hand, this could be seen as extremely beneficial for students who desire the opportunity for life outside Ladakh, in that, this type of education is preparing them to be able to compete in different job markets. The world is globalizing and, as stated previously, some might see eventual change in Ladakh as inevitable. However, there is another side to reality; the government’s decision to modernize Ladakhi education has “created a greater competition for jobs and an increase in unemployment rates.” (Norberg-Hodge, 114) It has created a system that has distanced youth from their parents/grandparents, a generation of young people who are unable to read their traditional script, and the gradual breakdown of a community. What is most disheartening, perhaps, is that it may have also aided in creating a generation of Ladakhis who “think of themselves and their culture as inferior,” and who are thusly “robbed of their self-esteem.” (Norberg-Hodge, 112)

So, how can this issue be solved? Ironically, I believe that this identity issue can be solved through the very system, which may have helped create and perpetuate it; it could be solved through education. A person’s identity is fluid as well as “dynamic;” it is a life process that involves “changes with time and place,” feeling connected “with different group of people,” while figuring out which “of these groups are more important [to] us.” (Ngonpo Manual, 24) But the most important thing about identity is that we figure it out for ourselves. Problems and difficulties can arise when “someone defines [another’s] participation/association with a group... or assigns” another person “to a group that [they] do not feel [they] belong to.” Problems are also created when an identity, “which has formed [an

individual] in the past” that they consider as important, is not recognized (Ngongpo Manual, 24). True identity cannot be forced on an individual, which is why it is up to everyone to define who they are. So, in regards to education, I believe that there needs to be more tools provided to students to explore who they are. Instead of the government presenting students with “standardized universal knowledge” for them to memorize and reproduce on a test, they need to be provided with the tools to comprehend this knowledge and question it. If societies continue to just replicate the same knowledge over and over again, how will we improve and find new solutions to world problems? The youth of Ladakh need to understand that by growing up in such a unique culture they have so much unique information and insight to provide the world. If they are given the tools to create their own, true identities, Ladakh and, hopefully, the world will receive a whole new generation of leaders who have the ability to produce new thoughts. As Principal Tundup correctly asserted, “children are the future of the world,” and Ladakhi youth need to be free to understand what is valuable from their own culture and to not feel pressured to replicate what is unfamiliar to them. As Norberg-Hodge asserts, the goal of a new form of modernization in Ladakh “would be to promote self-respect and self-reliance thereby protecting life-sustaining diversity and creating the conditions for locally based, truly sustainable development.” (Norberg-Hodge, 160) During my interview with Chief Education Officer Phuntsog, I asked him directly what he thought of this trend of thinking about Ladakh as backwards. He immediately redirected the question to me, asking how I felt about this word. I told him that I believed it to be an unproductive and destructive word that should not be used to describe anyone. Phuntsog then explained to me how he does not see Leh district, his home, as backwards; he sees it as one step ahead. After explaining the bounds he has seen the district make in regards to education he explained that the Ladakhi people have a rich culture that they want to maintain. He informed me that Ladakhis are everywhere- Southern India, Korea, and America- and that they have the same ability to compete in the job market as people from other regions. To hear this positive outlook on Ladakhi culture from a Ladakhi leader, who is directly involved in making decisions for the future of government education, leaves one feeling that the future of Ladakh is in good hands.

### Conclusion

In summation, one could spend years studying education in Ladakh and still leave information uncovered. As I stated at the beginning of this paper, the education system in Ladakh is quite confusing with all the different institutions available and one could take several different approaches when trying to make sense of all them. Ladakh is an incredibly unique geographic area that is home to an equally incredibly unique group of people. Ladakhis are a group who have established a way of living with an extremely harsh land, but have done so in a way that their communities and peoples have prospered. They have their own farming techniques that utilize land-friendly systems, which took groups in the West until the mid 1900s to figure out. They are a people who possess vast amounts of

knowledge that will disappear if different systems are pushed on them and overpower tradition. When it comes to education, although there was a reversal on the demonization of government education that occurred in my mind, I still believe that the institution needs to be reimagined. This is why it is important for institutions such as SECMOL to continue in the future. There are so many different types of knowledge and way of knowing in this world and when an institution can recognize this, along with its value, it is important that it is supported. To have one single, homogenized system of knowledge forced on a group, who has developed their own system of thought throughout time immemorial, will yield no benefits. It is up to the communities, themselves, to decide what changes they want to see made and what aspects of their culture they want to maintain. This, I believe, is how culture truly develops throughout time- by changing with the people and for the people's benefit.

### Appendix

-A relevant piece of information that I was unable to find a place for in the body of my paper was the election campaigning that I witnessed during my time in Ladakh. I am unsure of what campaigning is like elsewhere in India, but it was constant and appeared fairly aggressive to me. There were two candidates running against each other, both with sets of car caravans, who would drive around Leh blasting campaign messages from microphones on the roof. The candidates had very large, building sized posters of their faces around town and I saw many people wearing masks of Modi's face around town. It was quite interesting to see the intense focus the government placed on campaigning in Ladakh, although again, I do not know if this occurs everywhere at election time.



Figure 1 (top left)- Image of the main gate of Ladakh's capital, Leh.

Figure 2 (top right)- Image taken on the flight from Delhi to Leh; displays the high, snow peaked mountains, which surround Ladakh.

Figure 3 (bottom left)- Ladakhi women in Nubra Valley performing a traditional dance in traditional clothing.





Figure 4 (top left)- Sign outside Lamdon Senior Secondary School.  
Figure 5 (top right)- Lamdon's Senior Secondary School campus from outside the main gate.



Figure 6 (middle left)- a section of the SECMOL campus.

Figure 7 (middle right)- the youngest of SECMOL's three jersey cows.

Figure 8 (bottom left)- Foundation Student, Yangchen, holding SECMOL's new kitten

Figure 9 (bottom middle)- Foundation Student, Choten.





Figure 10 (top left)- Foundation Student, Jigmet, giving his independent project presentation on local flora and fauna, in SECMOL's big hall

Figure 11 (top right)- In the bottom right corner is SECMOL's powerhouse, located on the cliff above the Indus, which stores generators that are hooked up to the school's solar panels.

Figure 12 (middle left)- The large, circular panels of mirrors, which reflect down into the school's kitchen.

Figure 13 (middle right)- Image of an ice stupa model created in Ladakh (*The Monk*).

Figure 14 (bottom)- One of Ladakh's glaciers located on the trek from Phyang to Nubra Valley.



Figure 15 (top left)- Foundation Student, Norbu.

Figure 16 (top right)- Sign outside the Education Department of Leh. The blue sign is an example of those created for departments under the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council.

Figure 17 (bottom left)- An image of the upper Druk White Lotus Campus

Figure 18 (bottom right)- An image taken outside Druk White Lotus' "infant" boarding quarters.







Figure 19 (top left)- Students at Druk White Lotus School leaving their morning assembly. The assembly area is the circular structure on the left side of the image.

Figure 20 (top right)- Image taken of Pangong lake, facing towards the end located on the Chinese border.

Figure 21 (bottom left)- Image showing the central Gumpa overlooking the new side of town, which consists of many of large, concrete guesthouses.

(bottom right)- SECMOL's three cats.



### Glossary of Terms

***Bakula Rinpoche***- (May 1917- November 2003) was a reincarnate lama who enabled Ladakhis to “realize the importance of modern education.” (Shakspo, 252)  
When one flies into Leh, they land at Kushok Bakula Rinpoche Airport.

***Bodhi***- related to Buddhist traditions, refers to the Tibetan script used in the area.

***Centralized***- in the context of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, centralized refers to the bringing back of power to the source of the people. Rather than having their governmental powers exist far from the area, the people of Ladakh are bringing back some of the power to the center of their community.

***Globalization***- in the context of this paper, this term refers to the rapid spread of an industrial monoculture, which desires the rapid growth of capitalism and thusly, technology, infrastructure, as well as a spread of “Western development.”

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-There are other discussions referred to throughout the paper, which are not cited, due to the casual nature of the conversations; however, I have tried to include the date, within the paper, of the ones that I have the correct dates for.

### Image Citation

*Ladakh*. 2006. *Ladakh Development Foundation*. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.  
<<http://www.ladakhdevelopmentfoundation.com/ladakh.asp>>.

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<<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/ice-stupa-artificial-glaciers-of-ladakh>>.

-All other images, which have not been cited were taken by the author, on a personal camera throughout the course of two trips to Ladakh (late September 2014- mid October 2014; November 3<sup>rd</sup>- November 27<sup>th</sup> 2014).

\*\*As a note- my syllabus, for this project, required that I use/cite ten scholarly sources within my writing. However, I have only used eight due to a belief that these would be sufficient. I felt that my time spent with individuals of the area and their supplemental information deserved more attention within my paper than other's writings.

## Suggestions for Future Research

Ladakh is a place with a lot to discover for an individual who knows nothing about the people or the culture. With this said, anyone reading this paper, who becomes interested in conducting research in the area, needs to keep in mind this fact that they do not know anything about Ladakh or its people. I had visited the area for about three weeks prior to spending my ISP period in Ladakh (approximately a month) and I went into my ISP with several assumptions about what I would find. I had assumed, ignorantly, that everyone had the same negative opinion on government schools, which just is not true. So, for anyone headed to Ladakh I would say the main thing to know is that you do not know. However, Ladakhi people, on the whole, are extremely hospitable and welcoming and generally tend to aid you in whatever way they can.

In terms of research, my first desire, in regards to building on this paper, would be to visit all the schools I was unable to. Without the previous knowledge of all the schools in Leh, it was difficult to divide up my time amongst the institutions. After visiting all the schools, I would continue visiting time and time again (if allowed to) and attempt to talk to more individuals, including teachers and students, to gain a more well rounded understanding of the institutions. Although I was able to be forming ideas about some of the schools after just one visit, I think it would be beneficial for future research to develop a fuller picture of each institution.

Another interesting topic that I was unable to properly touch on, due to my paper taking an altered direction, would be what kind of influence the army has on schools in the area. Ladakh and Leh itself has an incredible army presence, which does not go unnoticed when visiting the area. I received information on how the army helps out communities with education by creating schools, as well as providing transportation for students. This has led them to have a positive presence/reputation in many areas. However, from the sounds of it, many young men do not commit to their studies, as the girls do, with the knowledge that they can find a benefit filled, well-paying job in the army. Unfortunately I was able to place a focus on this element of education in Ladakh and this has the potential to yield very interesting results.

In addition, a good focus could be on the theme of backwardness, which was touched on at the end of this paper. It is an issue across the globe and research conducted in Ladakh could be used to compare with other communities around the world, with the potential to shed light on possible solutions. It could also be interesting and beneficial for the community to have a researcher come in and discuss the ideas surrounding modernization, possibly shedding light on how modernization is not always a good thing. A project that could build community confidence has the potential to affect lives in a very positive manner.

However, if I were to return to Ladakh, which I hope I do, my research would center around the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council. This centralized, Ladakhi created government really made an impression on me, especially regarding the amount of work that they cover. My research would most likely focus on how the organization operates, what kind of obstacles they face, if any, why this form of government was created/who made the decision for the government structure, as well as how the do/do not place Ladakhi interests at the forefront. With this type of research, I believe that one could utilize the Ladakhi's model as an example of self-governing for other Indigenous communities, in other countries.

In regards to contact information, I have two sources. For SECMOL contact Becky Norman, a former SIT student, who now helps run the campus. You can visit their website- [www.secmol.org](http://www.secmol.org) or contact at either [info@secmol.org](mailto:info@secmol.org) or [saicampus@gmail.com](mailto:saicampus@gmail.com). Their current number is 91 1982 226120 and their address is PO Box 4, Leh, Ladakh 194101 J&K India.

I was also provided with a contact, which I did not utilize. It is for the Phyang Monastery School and the woman who run the volunteering at the school, Kelly Klein. You can visit their website at [www.volunteerladakh.org](http://www.volunteerladakh.org), reach them by email at [info@volunteerladakh.org](mailto:info@volunteerladakh.org), or try their current number- 91 9596749529.

-This is an image taken of myself by one of the other volunteers who was with me throughout my time at SECMOL, Abhipsha. The picture was taken with my camera, by the Indus River, which flows directly next to SECMOL campus. We would take walks down to river during our down time.

