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Ladakh: Land of High Passes

PART II
Development: Whose Choice is it Anyway?

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"These Westerners come here and tell us we should keep our traditional clothes and eat our traditional food, while they live their Western lives and take photos of us," a development NGO worker said to us with more than a trace of resentment. We were discussing Helena Norberg-Hodge's book about Ladakh, *Ancient Futures*. The worker's statement reflects the discomfort that many Ladakhis feel about "alarmist" calls for their cultural preservation.

Norberg-Hodge, as I mentioned in my last newsletter, was a Swedish linguist who came to Ladakh in 1974 and started both The Ladakh Project and The Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDG). *Ancient Futures* calls attention to the drastic change that has occurred in Ladakh over the past two decades, and the rapid loss of one of the last surviving self-reliant societies. Norberg-Hodge discusses the link between modernization and the destruction of ecological balance along with traditional values and life styles. She questions the core of "development" as a uni-dimensional view of progress based on accumulation of wealth and centralization of goods and services. Western-style development, Norberg-Hodge argues, changed the "non-monetized [Ladakhi] economy based on a direct relationship with local resources" into an economy dependent on international finance markets and multinational corporations, an economy that creates both psychological and material dependence on the outside world.

The aim of the Ladakh Project is to expose Ladakhis to the negative aspects of developed countries, and to show them that the West, having gone through industrialization and development, is now seeking the spiritual and psychological happiness that Ladakhis have traditionally had. Tired of materialism, independence and technology, growing numbers of people in the West now seek spirituality, interdependence and a stronger link with nature. Ladakhis should know, Norberg-Hodge argues, that the West is not as glamorous as the television shows make it out to be, and the cycle of development in the West is beginning to come full circle.

LEDG's goal is to "promote ecological and sustainable development" that is compatible with traditional ways of life. The organization provides information on the pitfalls of the conventional development model, while proposing ecologically sound ways to improve agriculture, and appropriate technologies that utilize locally available resources. While none of these goals is inappropriate, many Ladakhis feel that LEDG's work, the methods utilized, and the paradigm that Norberg-Hodge is promoting in particular, are as imposing and insensitive to the

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desires of Ladakhis as the old paradigm it sought to replace.

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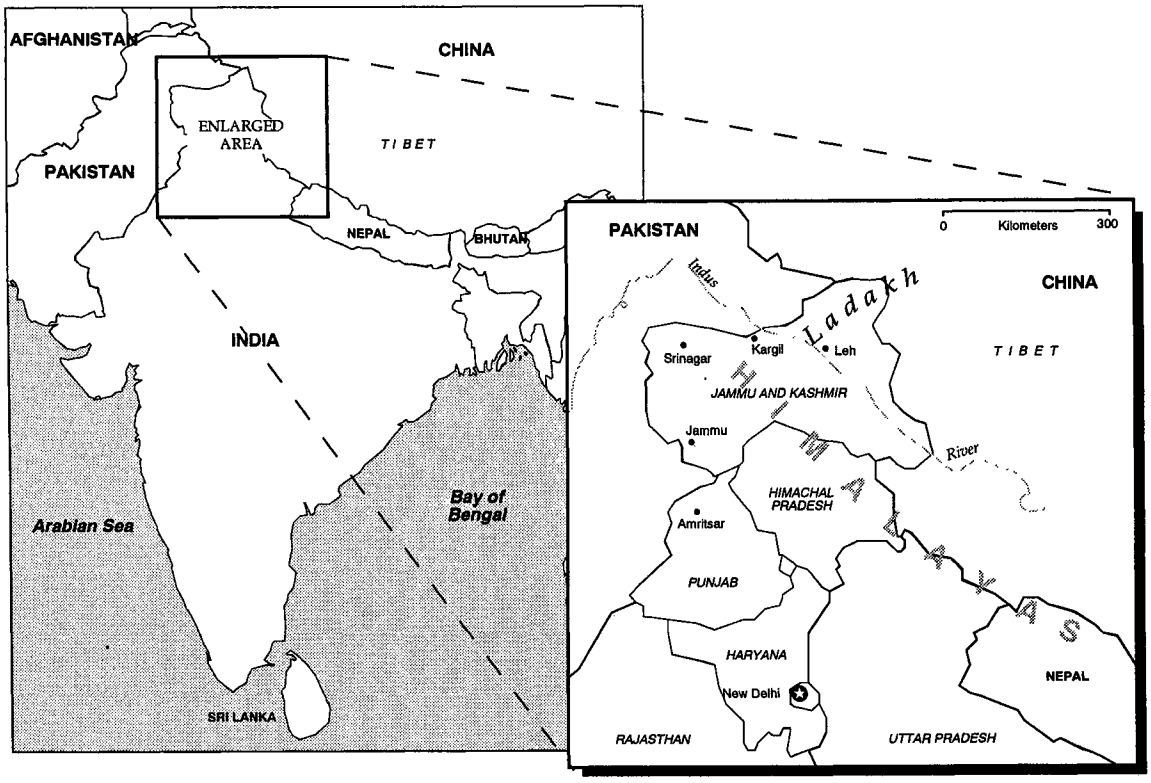
Since 1942, when Harry Truman defined huge parts of the world as "underdeveloped," people have been seeking to understand the meaning of development. In fact, many have determined that the word and all its connotations should be abandoned, that "the idea of Development stands today like a ruin in the intellectual landscape [whose] shadow obscures our vision." (Wolfgang Sachs in *The Development Dictionary*, 1992). In spite of Robert McNamara's (then President of The World Bank) push towards the "dethronement of GNP" as the primary measure of a country's development, GNP has continued to be used to measure well-being and progress; increasing GNP has become essentially synonymous with increasing development and "improvement." An acknowledgment at a report of the 1969 UN meeting of experts on Social Planning and Policy clearly stated, "The fact that development either leaves behind, or in some ways even creates, large areas of poverty, stagnation, marginality and actual exclusion from social and economic progress is too obvious and too urgent to be overlooked." Yet, the majority of the development world has been unable to find (or perhaps unconvinced as to the need for) another measurement to replace GNP.

In the 1980s and 1990s, development began to focus on dissolving and re-examining some of the efforts of the previous decade that were beginning to show their cracks. Suddenly, grassroots participation, integrated approaches, and the formation of NGOs over the government agencies of the 1960s and 1970s were heralded. Current reports that try to quantify the state of the world, such as the Human Development Report, are attempting to create indices that measure far more qualitative issues such as gender discrimination and women's empowerment, but these are still subordinated to economic factors. Still, it is slowly being acknowledged that perhaps GNP does not imply happiness, opportunity for the masses, or spiritual well-being.

Alternative thinkers like Norberg-Hodge rightly point out that the conventional development paradigm has been forced on countries around the world; and that acceptance of it is a pre-condition for financial assistance, and indeed, for acceptance into the international community. Technologies such as TV, radio, cars and roads have made it that much easier to spread one single world view to the remotest corners of the globe. That being said, when traditional societies begin their inescapable trajectory toward collision with the modern world, should it be—can it be?—controlled, mediated by Western "purists" who say, "Don't make the same mistakes we did. Learn from us; use us as your sacrificial lamb, and keep your purity." It seems to be an issue that is emerging in every domain, from population to environment to consumption. The development worker's reaction to Norberg-Hodge's views on the loss of culture is an expression of the North-South debate that has been ongoing for many years: With whom does the responsibility lie for "preserving the world"? And whose choice is "development" anyway?



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Conventional development efforts are often compromised because they do not consider two fundamental factors: grassroots participation or listening to the voices of the "beneficiaries" of development, and sustainability. Those who have been involved in development can cite numerous examples of big and small efforts that have completely ignored the desires and needs of the beneficiaries of those efforts. As far back and extreme as some of the proselytizing missionaries of old, to current large-scale programs that are run in a vacuum from central cities, incorporating the voice of the people into development decisions has been sadly neglected.

So, too, has sustainability, that has become common development jargon only in the last decade or so. Sustainability arose as an issue in response to previous infrastructure development programs which, five years later, left trails of recently built empty schools and clinics (later closed for lack of staff and supplies), brand new toilets used as store houses for rice, and hand pumps and wells unutilized because they had broken down and no one could fix them. Yet, while sustainability has become part of everyday development-speak, there is still little agreement on its definition. Economic sustainability? Environmental sustainability? Managerial sustainability? Most often, the sustainability that organizations are pushed to strive for is economic. A common explanation for this is that since many development projects receive outside funding, donor agencies push the organization to achieve economic sustainability because donor funds need to be freed up in the near future. A more subtle, but probably equally valid explanation is that economic sustainability fits nicely into a GNP-progress driven notion of development. The sustainability that Norberg-Hodge is concerned with is that which addresses Ladakhi society's ability to survive on its own and to preserve, with its survival, its traditional ways of living and respecting the earth.

It is one thing to recognize the absence of grass roots participation and sustainability in development policies and programs. It is another thing altogether to offer an alternative paradigm that incorporates both of these factors. Norberg-Hodge and LEDG have tried, but as if in reaction to the conventional model of development, their strategy appears to have taken up the cause of *sustainability* in the name of the people, but has not taken into account the *actual voice* of the people. In fact, there is often conflict between sustainability and what people want; often, people will want those things that can allow them to "progress" even if the sustainability of the "progress" is questionable. The development worker quoted earlier emphasized how difficult it is to get people interested in educational sessions about health or ecologically sound agricultural techniques. "They just want us to give them food or clothes or money—something that will improve their lives *today*."

Is it appropriate to continue to ask "newly developing societies" to turn back on the path which has been so clearly laid out for them by none other than the "developed" countries? Moreover, is a situation being created wherein even the alternative paradigms are being imposed as Western dictates again? Edward Said in his classic book *Orientalism* quotes Lord Cromer, England's representative in Egypt in the late 19th century, to demonstrate the inevitability of this tendency in the East-West relationship: "It is essential that each special issue should be decided mainly with reference to what, by the light of Western knowledge and experience tempered by local considerations, we conscientiously think is best for the subject race..." (p. 37). While the distinction between "Western" and "Eastern" has blurred considerably in recent decades, this delicate issue of balancing education with imposition and the struggle of a dominant external power influencing a developing society continues to be as fiery and alive as ever.

Ladakh at a Crossroads

Many of these issues are vividly visible in Ladakh today. Ladakh was thrown into contact with the modern world in the early 1960s when the first roads were built and Indian Army troops from all over the country flooded the area. People probably began, as far back as then, to sell some of their agricultural yields and to buy some outside products with cash. The old system of barter and work exchange stayed strong, but money had already become a part of life. The formation of schools in the late 1960s and 1970s, using curricula taught all over India and not particularly appropriate for this geographically isolated mountainous people, began to take Ladakhis away from agriculture and toward blue-collar city jobs (of which there were few). Finally, tourism and all its trimmings provided the impetus for people to begin to structure their income around the lucrative tourist industry, and to begin to charge for the hospitality that had once been a defining characteristic of the culture.

Still, when organizations like LEDG try to promote maintaining traditional culture, disparaging those Ladakhis who have "joined the mainstream" by wearing Western clothes or opening a guesthouse, many Ladakhis feel resentful. "How stupid to expect Ladakhis to be exhibits," said Akbar Ladakhi, one of the five Executive Councilors of the Leh Autonomous Hill Development Council, newly inaugurated on September 3. "We cannot deny Ladakhis the benefits of roads, sanitation, health."

Norberg-Hodge is idealistic, romanticizing the traditional way of life in Ladakh, argue many. "We are not the beautiful people that Helena and Andrew Harvey (author of *A Journey Into Ladakh*) make us out to be. We need to survive in some of the harshest conditions in the world. We are human, like anyone else. It is survival of the fittest," said our guest house owner. He believes that the focus on loss of culture is inappropriate in its superficiality. "Just because we wear pants instead of *gouchas* does not mean we have lost our culture. Why do they focus on

these externalities? We are still very much Ladakhi." While he believes there are changes occurring, he feels that they are necessary and have not diminished the positive aspects of traditional life. He cites the fact that their family still follows the *phaspun* system where families are grouped together for life, and the families help each other for all major life occasions—births, deaths and marriages. We saw an example of this when we attended a funeral in Leh. The funeral had been organized by the grieving family's *phaspun* and all details, from the provision of *gurgur chai* and *halva* for all guests to the arranging of monks and the cremation details, were taken care of by the *phaspun*. The family was left just to mourn the loss of their family member.

The skepticism felt by Akbar Ladakhi and our guest house owner might be partially a reaction to the unfairness of having representatives of the modern world suddenly turn around and tell them, in ways that may seem to them reminiscent of colonial times, that the Western way is not the best. After all, the GNP, wealth-accumulation culture still remains the dominant one, and will naturally wield the most influence on developing societies. Culture is constantly in the making — cultures develop, change, shift over the years, decades and centuries. Some change is inevitable and must be accepted. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the message of sustainable development, on looking at the world in a view of accountability to future generations rather than one which looks at tangible immediate benefits, is not a particularly popular message. Since Ladakh's exposure to the modern world, Ladakhis' emphasis on materialism seems to encourage the short-term perspective. Everything from the educational system to the nuclear family structure encourages individuals to be independent rather than interdependent, to measure progress according to economic wealth rather than spiritual happiness.

The issues around Ladakh's cultural preservation have been compounded by Ladakh's status as part of the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Although J&K state receives development grants from the Central government on the basis of its area, it in turn has chosen to allocate the funds solely on the basis of population. So, even though Ladakh's area is larger than that of both Jammu and Kashmir provinces, its population is equivalent to only 2% of the state's population, and therefore it receives only this proportion of the state's development funds. More importantly, Ladakh has always been subject to development plans that have been conceived of at the state level by people who have little knowledge of Ladakh or its people. Its specific issues and concerns were, for the most part, ignored as evidenced by the fact that Ladakh had not a single Ladakhi representative to the State Cabinet, no degree college, and no importance given to the Ladakhi language or the Bodhi script. In fact, not only was Ladakhi taught merely as a subject in school, but Ladakhis had to study in schools where Urdu (the state language) was the medium of instruction. In 9th grade, however, the medium of instruction switched to English and the all-important examinations given in the 10th standard were also in English. Ninety percent of Ladakhi students fail this exam because of language difficulties, are ineligible to go on to higher education or to qualify for coveted government jobs, and thus end up both isolated from traditional farming and from opportunities for the "educated."

Ladakhis are hopeful that Ladakh's specific issues will be addressed through the formation of a new Ladakhi body, called the Leh Autonomous Hill Development Council. Inaugurated on September 3, 1995 after lengthy discussions, negotiations and compromises with the J&K state government, the Hill Council will effectively put planning and implementation of development efforts for the Leh district* into the hands of a 30-member council of Ladakhis, 26 of whom are elected from Leh's consitutionalities and 4 who are nominated by the Government of J&K. The former Deputy Commissioner of Ladakh (an appointee of the state), previously responsible for development, holds one of these four seats.

"The Hill Council is a mechanism for the devolution of power," said Thupstan Chhewang, the Chief Executive Councilor of the Hill Council. "Before we had no say in citing our priorities. Although we had a development board, it had no statutory power." Akbar Ladakhi, his beautifully lined face turned towards the window, hands folded in his maroon goucha, added, "There were errors in omission committed by the J&K government which forced us to find a solution that allowed us to make, implement and monitor our own plans... We must have the feeling of owning our own development work." According to Rigzin Jora, another of the five Executive Coun-cilors of the Hill Council and the former head of the Ladakh Buddhist Association: "We demanded a mechanism because things were planned in Kashmir and then transplanted. There has been a complete failure of the system over the last 40 years; now we need a system where people can have a say in their future, where the people of Ladakh are providing their own governance."

Now that the Hill Council has been created, it will have to work to keep the balance between self-sufficiency and dependence on the modern world. Chhewang, a former board member of LEDG, is well aware of the consequences of "modernization" but also agrees that Ladakhis cannot be denied the benefits of development. "We cannot keep Ladakh as it used to be; it is not realistic. But we must work to develop some of our strengths, to develop power and non-conventional sources of energy that will allow us to cultivate more land, to utilize local resources," he said.

Agricultural Decline

One of Chhewang's priorities is to encourage local agriculture. As Ladakh has gravitated towards "moderniza-

* A similar body has been proposed and approved for the Kargil district of Ladakh, but is yet to be implemented.

tion," several factors have converged to severely compromise the status of agriculture. First, the migration of young people from villages to cities has created, as in Kerala and other agricultural societies around the world, a shortage of labor in the fields. According to Chhewang, the current education system creates a sense of shame about earning a living through agriculture. It prepares young people exclusively for blue-collar jobs in the cities, and does not give importance to agriculture. Moreover, as the "money culture" seeps into Ladakh, there appears to be an undeniable change in people's perceptions of their "needs" Nazir, a medical secretary at the Leh Nutrition Project spoke of this change: "Before, people did not need much. They were happy to live on what the land provided. Now, people want to send their children to school... They want to have bigger houses, earn more money, buy a motorbike. The needs are greater and the land is not enough to support this." Nazir's young, handsome face was strained as he told us that people are not as happy now as they used to be. Competition based on amassing material wealth is increasing; corruption too is on the rise. "People want more, so they will take money under the table," he said. "We need to be able to read and write because agriculture does not provide enough; but once we can read and write, our expectations change, and we don't want to work on the land. But what choice do we have?"

The second factor contributing to the decline of agriculture is the decreased size of average land ownings. Whereas in the olden days, joint families lived together, working on the land and sharing the profits of the harvest, now families have begun to split up the land. Gyazo, a 30-something Ladakhi educated in Delhi, gave us his family as an example. His father had held a large piece of land which had been passed on to him through his father. The land was given to Gyazo and his three brothers, who in turn decided to carve up the land and each be responsible for their own piece rather than harvesting the piece as a whole. "But why didn't you keep the land whole and farm it together as did your forefathers?" I asked Gyazo. He shrugged. "Well, it's difficult. If we were just the brothers, it would be one thing. But when the brothers get married, then the wife comes, and the family prefers to have their own piece of land." This notion of nuclear over joint families, even when the families live right next to each other, bears a great deal of significance socially and economically. Gyazo feels that his brothers will, in turn, split the land between their sons, making it even smaller and more unprofitable to farm. Once the land proves unprofitable, it will be converted into cement, perhaps a guesthouse raised or some other commercial activity begun. With smaller pieces of land that often cannot even provide enough food for a family, and the need to hire labor as young people move to the cities, agriculture has become an expensive activity.

Third, the increase in subsidies provided by the J&K state government for imported grain, rice, sugar and other foods have made it less cost-effective to grow one's own food. Chhewang believes that while it may be ideal to eliminate subsidies completely, this is not realistic in the near-term. "There is understandable resistance to getting rid of subsidies," he said, referring both to the J&K government as well as to the dependence of Ladakhis on these subsidies. Chhewang hopes to introduce alternative crops that can make agriculture more attractive, and then to supplement incomes through development of handicraft industries. This, he feels, will also be important in addressing the growing unemployment rates in Ladakh.

A fourth factor has been the erosion of land that has occurred with the mass introduction of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. "It is tempting for villagers to use pesticides and chemical fertilizers because the government subsidizes them and because for the first year or two, yields are high. However, people are beginning to see for themselves the negative impacts like hardened soil and decreased taste of barley and other crops," said K. Pandey, the Director of Education and Information at LEDG.

Chhewang believes that in order to make agriculture a viable occupation again, not only must subsidies be reduced and alternative crops introduced, but also a "sense of dignity around manual labor must be created that will encourage young people to go back to the fields." He would like to see the educational system incorporate elements of improved agricultural techniques, growing methods, information about fertilizers and chemicals for agricultural purposes. Another way to incorporate agriculture into the educational system, says Chhewang, would be to use the harvest season (during which time there is school) as a practical training session for which children would work with their families in the fields and receive school credit. This would allow children to have continued contact with agricultural work during the recognized schooling system, and families to have the benefit of their children's labor.

Appropriate Technology

Introduction of appropriate technologies that will be culturally and physically appropriate for Ladakh's unique environment has been a key focus of several NGOs in Ladakh (including LEDG). The most successful have been those that villagers actually want, such as the solar cell panels developed by The Social Worker Research Group. SWRG has been extremely effective at making this technology available to villagers and villagers, in turn, seem to have freely accepted it. Throughout our trek, we saw these solar panels on roof tops, and once even a shepherd girl carrying one on her back to take home. Ladakh's climate of 320 days per year of intense sunshine makes it possibly the most ideal place in the world to introduce solar technologies. The solar panels are used to provide lighting inside houses, thus allowing the days to become longer, with more time for daily activities.

Another successful example has been the hydraulic ram

pump that was installed by LEDG at Thikse Monastery. The pump, using the power of gravity, lifts and channels water from the stream below the monastery approximately one mile in distance and over 100 feet in height. The monks had been able to plant several trees in the newly irrigated area, and were thinking about trying to lift the water even more so that it could go directly to the monastery.

However, too many other technologies are driven by theories of sustainability and the attractiveness of using local resources, rather than by the needs and desires of the people. Most of these have not been successful. For example, LEDG developed a solar oven, but the oven takes far longer to cook rice than cooking over a fire. In addition, other things which can be made in the ovens, such as baked bread and cakes, are not staples in the Ladakhi diet. It appears that the *idea* of a solar cooking oven took precedence over an analytical assessment of its usefulness in the local context. LEDG has also not been particularly successful in promoting the Trombe wall. The Trombe wall, named after its French designer, theoretically keeps a room warm through its unique design of a double layer of glass attached to the outside of a south-facing wall, painted black to absorb the sun's rays. The ceilings and walls are insulated with straw, and on the inside of the wall, in each of the four corners are small holes that allow cold air to circulate out and keep hot air in. In practice, we saw few of these in the villages and the one we did see had been incorrectly installed ten years ago and had not worked since. The family had thus returned to using their traditional source of heat, a stove in the middle of the room. The LEDG staff member accompanying us acknowledged that there have been several problems with follow up and maintenance of Trombe walls, and they have not been widely accepted.

Finally, there are still other technologies which have enormous time-saving benefits, but negative side effects. One such example is the thresher. According to a Ladakhi Foreign Service officer we met, the thresher allows a family to thresh in one day what used to take one month. However, the barley remaining after threshing which is normally fed to the animals, has proven to be too soft, therefore not providing the necessary roughage for livestock.

Designing, introducing and making available and affordable appropriate technologies is never easy. Technologies that improve a villager's ability to work longer in the fields, or reduce the physical labor involved in carrying water from far away are bound to be more successful than technologies which utilize a local resource well, but for whose use there is no particular demand. We were disturbed by several stories we heard about villagers being encouraged to use technologies that did not suit their lives or needs, and also by stories of the "idealism" of appropriate technology overtaking the "realism" of that technology. For example, we were told of an instance where one organization was encouraging villagers to build a canal for a ram pump out of the traditional material (mud) rather than the modern one (cement). While the theory of using locally available materials was appropriate, the villagers who were building the canal argued that the canal should be made out of cement because mud erodes too quickly, especially given the increased rainfall that Ladakh experiences these days. However, at the organization's insistence, the villagers built the canal with mud, giving up significant amounts of their own time for building. Some months later, the canal was destroyed by rains and had to be rebuilt again (with cement, this time). This story, and a few others, emphasized to us the need to constantly listen to the beneficiaries; if it is truly to be *their* canal built with *their* labor, they must be able to have the final say in how it is to be constructed. In addition, it pointed out the danger of an organization being too involved with the idea, rather than the practicality, of using traditional methods.

Even appropriate technologies, it should be pointed out, bring substantial change to traditional culture. Richard Critchfield, in his recent book *The Villagers*, provides an important insight into the power of technology when he writes that no political ideology—not Marxism nor totalitarianism—has been able to radically change village culture in the same way that simple technologies like reapers or threshers have. These technologies change the economic determinants of village life, just as solar technologies change the amount of work that can be done in a day, the number of hours women stay out in the fields and children may be left alone, the amount of grain that can be harvested and sold, and numerous other previously held "truths". Even alternative paradigms of development must acknowledge change as an inevitable part of life.

There is no question that Ladakh has many local resources that can and should be utilized. It is to the credit of organizations like LEDG and SWRG that experiments are ongoing to use these natural resources. However, work needs to be done to ensure that the technologies do not just become exhibits, that they do not meet with the same fate as those government-constructed latrines that are now being used to store rice. The introduction of technologies must be dependent on the *needs* of the villagers rather than the *desires* of the NGO. Whether it is in the area of appropriate technology or in the area of other "development", it became increasingly clear that beneficiaries' voices are most important.

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Since the 1940s, when the world was divided into "developed" and "underdeveloped," one paradigm of development has prevailed. This paradigm, based on GNP growth and material wealth, has arguably contributed to a worsening of conditions for the majority of people in developing countries. People like Norberg-Hodge are right to look for alternative paradigms that allow communities like Ladakh to retain aspects of its life that promote socie-

tal self-reliance and interdependence among its members. The difficulty, however, is to ensure that promoting alternative paradigms of development are not done out of a reaction to what has happened in the West. If done this way, well-intentioned alternative models can end up being as "colonial" as that which they intended to replace. Developing countries often argue that the burden of the responsibility for preserving the earth always falls on them, whether it be in the area of conserving the scarce remnants of rain forests, controlling pollution, or checking population growth. Look at population growth, they argue. Even though the majority of population growth comes from developing countries, it is also true that a baby born in a developed country such as America, has more than ten times the environmental impact as a baby born in India. Developed countries, they say, with their consumptive patterns, are in fact the real culprits for many of these problems. Once developed countries have done what they want and improved their standards of living, then they put restraints on developing countries doing the same. And at the same time, they continue to live life with little regard to reducing consumption patterns.

This issue is as controversial today as it was two decades ago. Just as one development paradigm should not be forced on a community, neither too should a "no-development" paradigm. People must continue to question the old and the emerging paradigms, to be in tune with the issues of the society which is in transition. What is interesting is that societies in the past often accepted the traditional GNP-based development model without questioning; today, however, as new models are being suggested, societies like Ladakh are questioning and this questioning must be listened to. Whether or not it is ultimately "better" for a society like Ladakh to revert to many aspects of its traditional ways can only be determined by Ladakhis themselves. It is unrealistic to expect a society to avoid the pitfalls of Western-style development based solely on the advice of outsiders rather than the experiences of the society itself. A society must be allowed to determine for itself how it wishes to "develop," what aspects of the modern world it wishes to accept.

A friend of ours who traveled with us in Ladakh believes that through education, outsiders can halt the blind following of the traditional development paradigm in societies like Ladakh. As much as I would like to agree, I cannot help but remember that even Buddha had to be a prince before he was able to see that spiritual satisfaction was missing from his material world. In our own lives, how many of us have ever refrained from doing something simply because someone told us that it was a "bad" idea and would have a negative impact in the far-away future? In fact, many times that advice reinforces our determination to do just that very thing. Concerns like environmental protection are absolutely critical, yet they are also a luxury. With millions of people in developing countries struggling to put food on their table, it is understandable that there is resistance to this message. Nor is the resistance coming solely from the poor in developing countries; scores of highly-educated individuals in the West continue to consume resources with a view to making their own lives easier and more comfortable rather than with a view to preserving the earth. Even development professionals who have been given the evidence of the detrimental effects of the traditional development model have not been able to change that paradigm.

This is not to say that education about various models and experiences is not essential. In order for Ladakhis to make choices that are as informed as possible, they must be provided with information about what the rest of the world is doing. However, Ladakh is not an inert community; it is a community, as Norberg-Hodge herself points out, with a vibrant culture and resourceful people. Gandhi's belief that we should keep the doors and windows of our house open, but not let the West wind blow us away seems particularly appropriate for the Ladakhi context. Ladakh is a society built of human beings making choices and participating in their society's direction. Its right to independence of action should not be underestimated by other countries.

As I listened to Ladakhis discuss development, I became increasingly convinced that the most important factor in any development effort is listening to those who will live with the consequences of development. Education about one's own perception of the consequences is important, but it must be recognized that those consequences may be different if the actions are taken in a different context or culture. It is not at all clear that just because this traditional form of "progress" has created certain issues in the past, that those issues will necessarily repeat themselves here in a different context. Nor is it certain that even if the Western model of progress does repeat itself here, that this will be a catastrophe.

Critchfield, in *The Villagers*, says, "It is not true that just because old village culture is in danger—and it does seem to be in danger all over the world—that we necessarily face some kind of cultural catastrophe. It certainly means a great change in the general human condition...We are on the threshold of evolving new cultural patterns, but no one can confidently predict what they might be." Critchfield then quotes Professor McNeill who studied under the famous anthropologist, Robert Redfield: "This is a very deep transformation of human life. I would rank what is happening now with man's transition from a hunter and gatherer into a settled farmer." If we can begin to think of cultural change as McNeill later described it, as "much more of a process of random experiment than selective survival", we can start to think about Ladakh's upcoming experiment with its own alternative development paradigm as the beginning of a positive, self-determined future. ❑