

**Leh Old Town, Ladakh -
A Participatory Approach to Urban
Conservation, Community-based
Upgrading and Capacity-building**



A Report by André Alexander

TIBET HERITAGE FUND

Leh Old Town, Ladakh - An Integrated Approach to Urban Conservation, Community-based Upgrading and Capacity-building

A Project Report by André Alexander
International Tibet Heritage Fund
www.tibetheritagefund.org

CONTENTS

I Summary

II Background

II.I Ladakh

II.II Leh town

II.III Social data of target communities

III Problem areas identified

III.I Analysis of the decline

III.II Tensions between communities

IV THF's intervention strategy

V The Rehabilitation Model Lane

VI Detail report of the activities and results

VI.I Community-based improvement of living and sanitary conditions

VI.II Promotion of adequate and sustainable building technologies

VI.III Income-generation through vocational training, promoting women's roles in construction work

VI.IV Documentation of historic building structures

VI.V Strengthening of cultural identity in context of globalization

VI.VI Revival of traditional skills and local wisdom through exchange with other Himalayan communities

VI.VII First-ever training of Ladakhi painting restorers

VI.VIII Rehabilitation of housing for low-income communities

VI.IX Creation of a community centre for community meetings, cultural functions and training of community members for future income-generating activities

VI.X Contributing to a defusion of sectarian tensions between different communities by community-organizing and motivating them to work together to improve their living conditions

VII Further results and future outlook

The project in the Indian media



International Tibet Heritage Fund
Project office Ladakh:
Leh Old Town Initiative LOTI
Lakruk House, Stalam, Leh, Ladakh
1941010 J&K India

Project office China:
China: 4-405, No.8 building, Jiao Dong Xiao Qu, 100007 Beijing

Project office Germany:
Berliner Str. 68, 13189 Berlin, Germany

5.11.2005

Leh Old Town, Ladakh - An Integrated Approach to Urban Conservation, Community-based Upgrading and Capacity-building

Report of Project activities by André Alexander
All photos, drawings and maps by THF

The project implementing team consisted of:
Ms Diskit Dolker, Urban Planner and chief program officer (Ladakh)
Mr Konchok Rafstan, logistics manager (Ladakh)
Ms Stanzin Dolker, accountant (Ladakh)
Ms Larencuo, community surveys and documentation (Tibet/China)
Mr André Alexander, planning, supervision and project management (Germany)
Mr Tobias Jäkle, architectural surveys (Germany)
Mr John Niewoehner, engineering consultant (USA).

We are further indebted to the following individuals for support: Ms Suzy Hesse, painting conservation (Germany), Mr Daniel Hackauf (Germany), Ms Lucia Gratz, architectural surveys (Germany), Mr Almarindo Lopes, architectural survey (Portugal), Mr John Harrison, architectural survey (UK), and four students from Ahmedabad CERT, faculty of architecture: Ms Brinda Panchali, Ms Rashmita Jadav, Ms Rajeshwary Modi and Mr Arjav Desai.

Financial Support was provided by Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (Germany), Trace Foundation (USA), Stavros-Niarchos Foundation and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (Thailand).

I Summary of the Results of the Project

- 1 Community-based improvement of living and sanitary conditions
- 2 Promotion of adequate and sustainable building technologies (particularly in view of the fact that Ladakh is an earthquake-prone region)
- 3 Income-generation through vocational training, promoting women's roles in construction work
- 4 Documentation of historic building structures
- 5 Strengthening of cultural identity in context of globalization
- 6 Revival of traditional skills and local wisdom through exchange with other Himalayan communities
- 7 First-ever training of Ladakhi painting restorers
- 8 Rehabilitation of housing of low-income communities
- 9 Creation of a community centre for community meetings, cultural functions and training of community members for future income-generating activities
- 10 Contribution to a defusion of sectarian tensions between different communities by community-organizing and motivating them to work together to improve their living conditions

The Leh Old Town Initiative (LOTI) was successfully established and is currently undergoing the process of official registration in India.

II Background

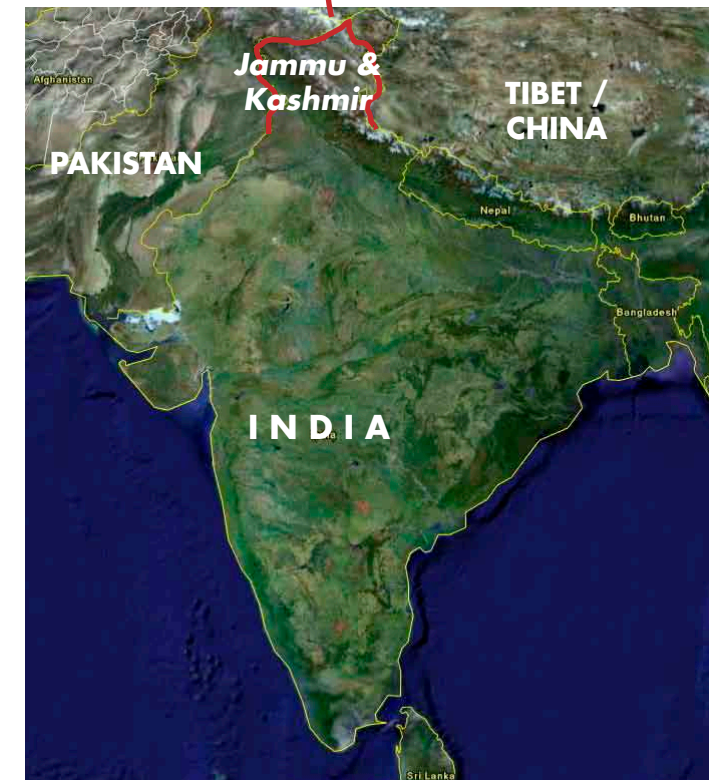
II.1 Ladakh

Ladakh is an ancient Tibetan kingdom that became part of Indian Kashmir only in the mid-19th century. Ladakh's unique cultural heritage is a blend between Tibetan culture, indigenous traditions and influence from the ancient Buddhist regions of Kashmir and Central Asia.

After Ladakh's neighboring regions of Kashmir, Baltistan, Kargil and Afghanistan converted from to Islam, relations with Tibet remained an important source of cultural inspiration. Economically, Ladakh retained an important centre at the crossroads of Inner Asian trade. The political developments of the mid-20th century put an end to all that. All roads to Tibet were closed after the Chinese take-over, and India and China fought two border wars after the Chinese army built a road through Ladakhi territory. The partition between India and Pakistan put an end to trade and even personal contacts between regions to the north and west, effectively locking Ladakh into isolation and bringing its economy to a standstill. The tri-partite 40-year conflict in Kashmir aggravated Ladakh's isolation. Society, culture and economy stagnated. In the mid-1960s, India built the first-ever road accessing Ladakh, and later regular flight links between Leh (the capital) and Delhi were established.

The semi-autonomy status granted to Ladakh in the 1990s, and the advent of tourism especially since 2001 (after the end of the Siachen conflict between Pakistan and India over an uninhabitable glacier in the north of Ladakh) provided a relief to Ladakh's economy. Yet the changes wrought by the advent of roads, television, electricity and mass-tourism provided opportunities mainly to families with land holdings or capital, and further threatened the cohesion of an ancient society surrounded by some of the world's most long-standing military conflicts.

Ladakh is also a fragile mountain eco-system, and source of some of the subcontinent's major waterways. Therefore, environmental management of settlements in Ladakh is of vital importance for India.

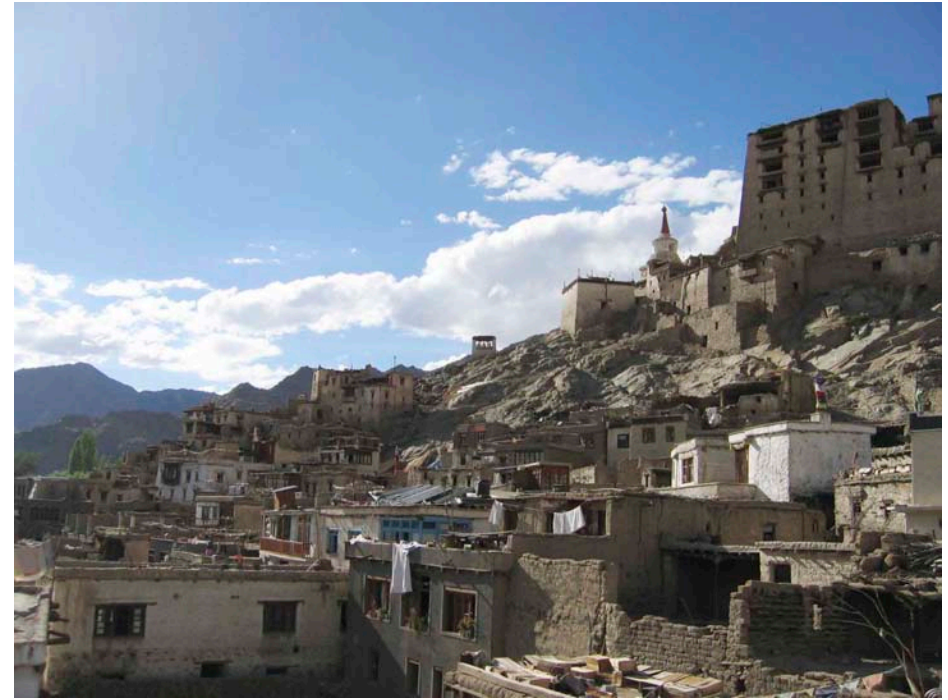


II.II Leh town

Ladakh's capital, Leh, is a city of some 25,000 inhabitants. The population almost triples in size during the summer tourist season, when people from all over India come here looking for work. To protect the rural Ladakhis from economic competition that they are not prepared for, the government has made it impossible for outsiders to acquire land, and even opening businesses or working requires permits and often a Ladakhi partner. Thus the Ladakhis are benefiting more from tourism than their cousins in Lhasa. However, 15,000 tourists wanting regular showers and flush toilets and producing mountains of garbage (water bottles, food wrappings, toilet paper etc.) are putting a severe strain on Ladakh's fragile economy.

Old Leh is dominated by the former royal palace, a nine-story stone structure erected around 1600 in the Tibetan style made famous by the slightly later Potala Palace in Lhasa, plus a number of Buddhist temples and monasteries from the 15th-16th centuries. Only a few Buddhist stone carvings arguably bear witness to the begin of Ladakh's recorded Buddhist history in the 10th century.

The old town, consisting of two hundred stone, mud and timber houses sandwiched between thick rammed earth walls, is located on the slope below the palace, still accessed by a number of ancient *stupa* gateways. After the changes wrought by the Chinese government on Lhasa, Leh is certainly the most well-preserved traditional Tibetan city in the world, and perhaps the most significant ensemble of historic Tibetan architecture.



Leh old town area - in the back the 17th century royal palace.

Leh from the south - to the left the fields, in the center the old town and in front the main bazaar area.

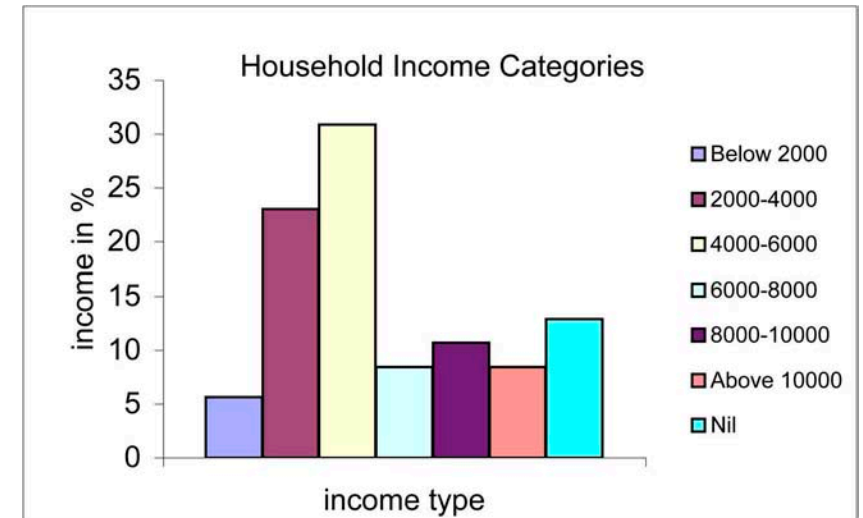


II.III Social data of target communities

In 2003-2004, THF conducted an extensive survey in the old part of Leh. We inventoried 178 historic or traditional buildings, and we also conducted an extensive social study, looking at family structures, income situation, gender balance, social structures and problems in the neighborhood.

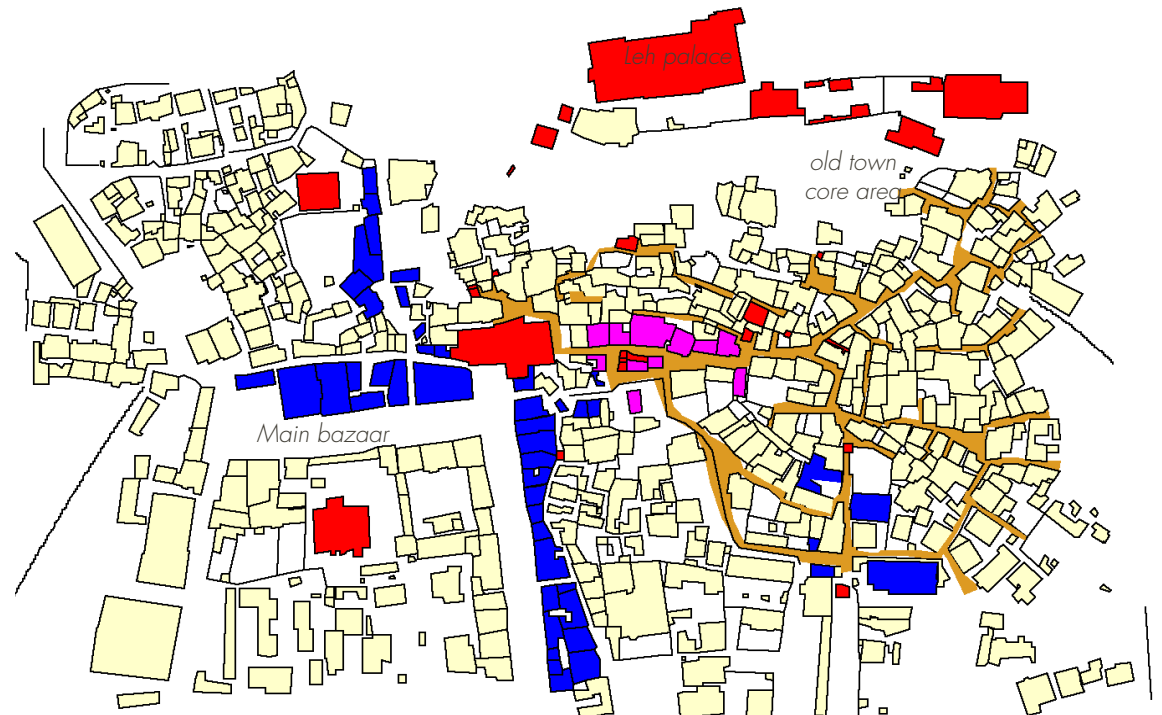
The total population of the old town, the project target area, is about 1500 people, out of which 67% are male and 33% are female. This reflects that about 30% of the population are male migrant workers. The table below shows that the average monthly household income lies below 5000 Indian Rupees (ca. 120 US\$).

While the proposed project clearly benefited the entire Ladakhi society, the immediate target group are low-income families in and around Leh.



Top: project community coordinator Ms. Diskit Dolker during social survey.

Right: project map of the old town area showing present land-use.



III Problem areas identified by the project

The main problem areas can be summarized as follows:

- 1 Poor quality of living conditions
- 2 Decline of old town, government inactivity
- 3 People without land are trapped in poverty
- 4 Loss of cultural identity due to migration and rapid economic changes
- 5 Loss of traditional skills that are no longer useful in modern economy
- 6 Tension between communities (esp. Buddhist majority and Muslim minority)

III.I Analysis of the decline

The old town has no water supply, and since the time of the city's founding, people had to climb downhill to fetch their water.

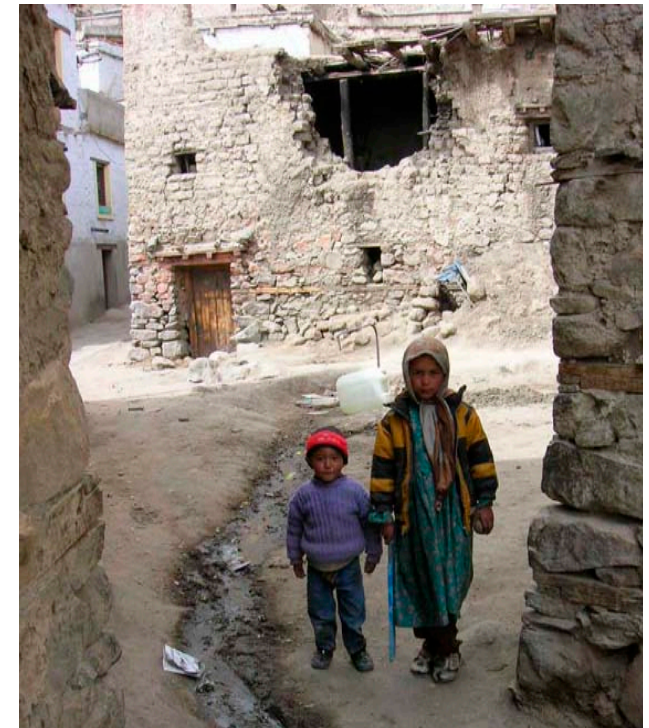
- ❖ Per person water need = 100lcpd water (PWD LEH) (Indian government goal)
- ❖ Projected water requirement in town = 150,000lcpd
- ❖ Only 5 taps (supplying approx 10,800lcpd) are there in the entire old town to cater the water requirement of the area, supplying only one 14th of the required amount

Drainage is a problem, there are only a handful of open channels that are frequently blocked (or frozen). Heavy rainfalls or a neighbor's washing day can trigger the flooding of one's basement. Over the past 15 years, most well-off families have moved away from the old town, especially those that owned land in the greener, well-watered parts of the valley. This was made possible because these families no longer depended on agriculture for their livelihood, having found better sources of income in the operation of guest-houses, souvenir shops, restaurants or internet cafés. The old town began a steep decline. The moving of wealthy and influential families accelerated the decline. While the new town has paved roads, garbage collection and sufficient water supply, no such services are provided for the old town. The former centre of the country has, in effect, become a slum. The inhabitants of this area are, roughly in equal parts, Buddhists, Muslims and migrant workers (mostly from



Top: every morning, the residents need to queue for water.

Right: a sewage system does not exist; many alleys do not even have drainage facilities. Some families have abandoned their homes and moved elsewhere.



Nepal and Bihar) (in overall Leh, as in overall Ladakh, it is generally believed that two thirds of the permanent population are Buddhists). This process has also caused a decline in the old composting toilet system, though it is still the only realistic way to deal with solid waste. In recent years more and more Ladakhis regardless of confession (i.e. both Muslims and Buddhists) have begun to publicly lament the decline of their former capital, witness to a history stretching back more than 11 centuries. Hoping to put our long experience to good use, THF offered to try and revive and rehabilitate the old town in partnership with interested communities.

III.II Tensions between communities

Because of our survey, we had data on every building and household, and felt like almost knowing everybody. The question was, did the people still know each other well enough to work together to turn the city around?

As we soon found out, among the many changes in society lamented by many Ladakhis is the erosion of the community spirit, long a dominating feature in Ladakhi culture. Every settlement had communal land and communal tools (including all the gear necessary to celebrate a marriage in due pomp and circumstance). And for construction projects, whether someone's home, or a Buddhist monument or a public road, everybody would join for as little compensation as some home-made beer and handfuls of dried apricots. In Leh, most of the old houses are built attached to each other sharing walls, or even vertically joint, with public access ways running underneath houses and people sharing sheds for animals. Public squares between the densely-placed houses were used for celebrations and processions.

These days, people fight bitter disputes over empty plots of land that lie between properties, and feud with their neighbours about physically separating adjacent houses. Improvement works on buildings and alleyways are routinely objected to by jealous neighbours. This social development has certainly contributed to the decay of the old town.

Tensions between communities have aggravated, over the last 15 years Muslims escaping from the Kashmir conflict have considerably enlarged Ladakh's Muslim minority. There have been occasionally violent conflicts

between the communities along sectarian lines (though not nearly as dramatic as, for example, the Gujarat riots where hundreds died).

IV THF's intervention strategy

The social data we obtained during our survey strongly suggested intervention to improve people's livelihood and living conditions. This was matched by a generally expressed desire by many community members to reverse the decline of the old town.

Technically, some aspects of improving conditions in the old town do present a challenge, especially building a drainage system into the sheer rock for a town that has nearly six months of sub-zero temperature winters. Mostly, however, the technical problems are fairly easy to solve. The houses are built in Tibetan fashion with sun-dried mud bricks around a timber frame on stone foundations. Local clays and soils are traditionally used ingeniously to create waterproof roof layers and dust-free plastered interior surfaces. The task would be to successfully identify and use the best of the traditional skills, which have slid into obscurity since the advent of subsidized cement and steel.

THF opted for an integrated approach, developed by the two THF founders, André Alexander and Pimpim de Azevedo, for the Lhasa Old City Conservation Program (Lhasa 1996-2000) and since refined through cooperation projects within a network of Asian NGOs.

1 We began intense lobbying of the various government bodies for investment into adequate infrastructure improvement. We (and most local community members) expect this to take a long time and slow in coming. From early on, all local government departments expressed their support for our activities, and made available official maps and surveys.

2 We designed a model to offer 50% co-financing for adequate rehabilitation of homes, on the condition that indigenous labour and indigenous skills are mainly used. Based on comparable work in Lhasa, we also offered improvements such as bath rooms with drains, bringing more light into the often dark houses (built when glass was not known or available), improving the composting pits of the traditional latrines and increasing the efficiency of traditional clay mixes based on our experience and the skills of the best traditional craftsmen.

3 Starting a training (and employment) program, at present we are training five local women in traditional construction skills, two local persons (one male, one female) as restorers, and another two as surveyors and draftspersons. This is aimed to give employment to those inhabitants of the old town who do not own land and have little education, and therefore giving them an economic perspective.

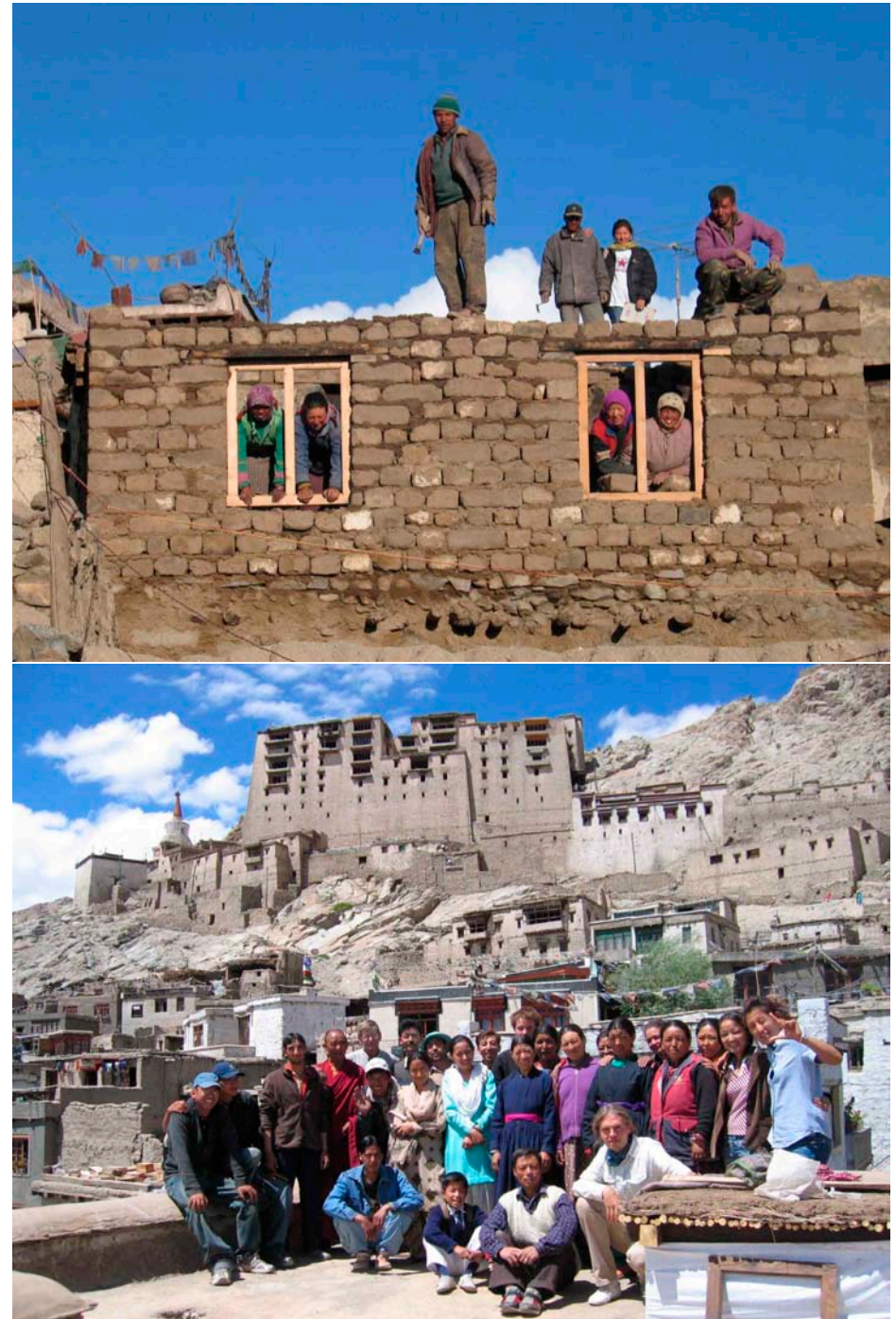
4 Choosing a model rehabilitation area. Based on the perceived need for intervention, willingness of the community and architectural importance, we would choose an area to concentrate different activities – home rehabilitation, infrastructure improvement, monument preservation. Completed works could then be used to demonstrate the feasibility of rehabilitating the area based on community participation and traditional skills. The completed works could be used by communities and NGOs to negotiate similar works from donors and government agencies. More directly, other communities could learn from the example and start to implement activities on their own.

5 Creating a Leh Old Town Initiative consisting of local experts and community representatives, to whom the project can be handed over in the future.

Assembly of a core team of skilled artisans

During two months in 2004, THF looked intensively for qualified local artisans that would form the core of a workforce and that could train other Ladakhis in traditional skills. Based on word of mouth, we went to many villages and interviewed many prospective artisans. THF finally hired a group of four artisans, Mr. Jamyang Tarching, Mr. Sonam Dorje, Mr. Tsering Dorje and Mr. Tsering Phuntsok. For carrying out the Guru Lhakhang rehabilitation project, they received further training by THF director André Alexander in traditional Tibetan building technologies relevant to Ladakh, and in restoration and building rehabilitation practice. In 2005, the skills and sensibilities of the artisan core group were further refined by training activities.

Top: the core team from left, top: Jamyang, Tsering Puntsok, Larencuo, Sonam Dorje. Bottom: Padma, Rigzin, Yangskid, Tsering Dolma. Bottom: workshop participants; far left: crafts organizer Konchok Rafstan, far right: Tibetan exchange program participant Ms Larencuo.



V The Rehabilitation Model Lane

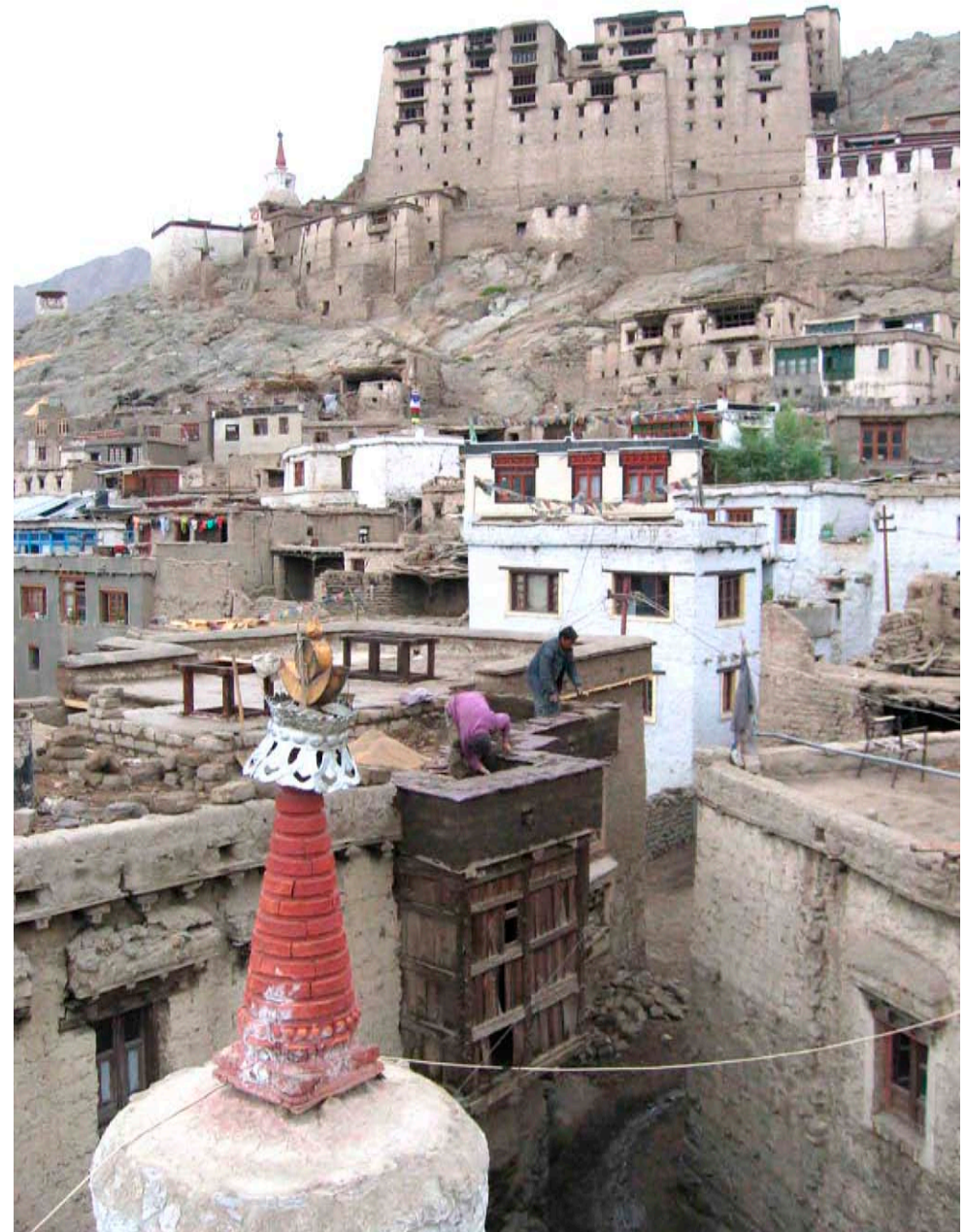
In 2004, we conducted extensive community meetings across the old town. Eventually we chose to support the Stagopilog neighbourhood community in upgrading their area, aiming to turn this area into a Model Rehabilitation Lane to demonstrate the feasibility of what we were proposing to do.

The Stagopilog area serves as one of the main access routes into the old town. Used both by locals and residents, it leads underneath an old *stupa* gate and past some of Leh's most beautiful (if dilapidated) historic homes. The lane has had no paving and no drainage. Stagopilog lies at the bottom of the slope on which the old town is located. A drainage channel from the neighbourhoods above ends abruptly at the upper end of the alley, emptying into it. As a result a constant stream of foul-smelling water runs down the unpaved alley, and pools of stagnant waste water regularly accumulate between the homes.

The Stagopilog community is very active and well-organized, they have an elected community leader, Mr. Namgyal. But the community was divided into two sections often at odds with each other, mainly (but not entirely) along sectarian lines.

Already, during our 2003-2004 survey, we were told that the community was troubled by the lack of drainage. In early 2005, THF organized a number of community meetings to start the Model Project. We learnt of several earlier attempts to solve the problem. Residents had begun to pave part of the alleyway, but they had miscalculated the slope and now rain and drain water was trapped between the houses, seeping into foundations. Soak-pits built years ago to absorb the dirty water had filled up with silt and garbage and failed.

Recognizing that there have been genuine attempts that failed because of lack of technical skills, THF next organized a very important community meeting. Bringing representatives from all affected families plus THF experts plus one government engineer together, drainage and paving for the area was designed jointly by the community and the engineers (who translated the community's ideas into drawings).



Work in the Stagopilog alley, one of the most important access routes to the old town. In front the gateway stupa.

Several difficulties had to be overcome. During the winter, the running waste water would freeze, and new waste water would freeze on top, and for most of the winter a layer of ice up to 40cm thick would cover the alley. The ground is partly rock, with a thin layer of top-soil, so that the drain could not be laid deep enough to prevent freezing. Since the nearest garbage collection point is far, a lot of solid waste like vegetable cleanings, packaging material etc would clog the drain, therefore it had to be accessible for cleaning. The government does send sweepers into the alleyways, who collect garbage in wheelbarrows.

Eventually, it was decided by all that the drain would be up to 70cm deep (or as much as possible to arrive at a necessary slope), and covered by removable metal grilles. These would let in rain water, but not bigger pieces of garbage. The point where the higher drain from the next neighbourhood leads into the new drain would have a special sieve that would catch the solids usually swimming in the waste water. THF proposed that the paving be made with slate stone, instead of the concrete tiles favoured by the Indian government. This was readily taken up by the residents, who all thought natural stone was a good material preferable to concrete.

VI Detail report of the activities and results

VI.1 Community-based infrastructure improvement

The biggest improvement in the current project phase consisted of draining and paving the Stagopilog alleyway (see illustration section for map). It was designed by community, and implemented by local community members, local builders and THF staff. The project covered the length of approximately 300 linear foot of covered drainage channel and approximately 4000 square feet to be paved with slate stone. The community members put in work for the drain digging and removing of soil, but many aspects of the work would have to be carried out by professionals or semi-professionals. The residents would be able to learn as much as possible about drain building on this stretch, which after all is only a first pilot project. For future drain projects, the contributions by

Community work clock-wise from top:

Diskit Dolker and André Alexander meet with the Stagopilog resident community (Sept. 2004).

Community members haul away soil (July 2005).

Skilled workers install drain and pave the alley (August 2005).

Community members and skilled workers work together building the drain (August 2005).



residents could increase considerably.

Work began on July 1 2005. The residents prepared by hauling away soil. This was organized in such a way that every family in the community would have to send one member. During the work, we also uncovered the truth behind some Ladakhi legends. Already during the 2003 survey, we were told that a huge rock lay buried underneath the alley since several hundred years. When Senge Namgyal, one of the greatest Ladakhi kings, built his palace around 1600, he had high-quality quarried stones brought from different parts of the country. One such rock arrived from the village of Basgo. However, the team carrying it arrived too late, and Leh's city gates were already closed. Therefore, it was dropped at the present spot (indeed just in front one of the old gates) and never used. Incredibly, the stone was indeed unearthed at that very spot, fitting the descriptions we had heard in every way. We decided to put the stone on top of the paving, placing it so that people gathering in the alley could sit on it if they wished.



September 2005 - community members and senior government officials debate about the soak pit issue.

A naked pipe with a tap at the end stood in a little square in the upper half of the alleyway. Every morning, the tap supplies water for about 30 minutes. THF have built a tapstand made of stone with a small basin area below around this tap, based on similar designs made by THF in Lhasa.

The project would have almost not come to pass – the drain ends in a soak-pit at the bottom of the hill, in front of a cinema. Nearby residents have requested the government for the past seven years to improve the soak-pit, which was overflowing and spilled into the foundations of their homes. This year, the government made vague promises to build a new



Before and after: local community women in the model lane during work; the new tapstand area has since become a gathering point.





Stagopilog alley with Sofi house and gateway stupa, April 2005.



September 2005, the alleyway has been paved and fitted with drainage.

improved soak-pit to complement our project. However, no action was taken. In the end, all the community members from the two communities (cinema area and model street, several dozen people) went together to the highest government official, the District Commissioner (DC) representing the provincial government, and handed in a petition. The residents argued that they had already found alternative funding (THF) to improve their area and demanded that the government now matched input to improve the cinema area (where THF's drain ends). The DC sent a delegation of different officials to the site, and miraculously, the very next day, a government bulldozer started excavating a new soak-pit. This showed the power of the organized community.

Water and Sanitation program expenses: US\$15.748,-

VI.II Promotion of adequate and sustainable building technologies

Traditional Tibetan architecture is well suited to the climate and geography of the Himalayas. The mud bricks and mud plaster absorb heat from the strong sunshine during the day and slowly radiate it during the cold nights. Mud is used in many layers to provide insulation for walls, floors and ceilings. External timber bands are used to brace the walls against earthquakes, and the internal load (ceiling structure) is so distributed that it will not kill residents even in the case of collapse. Many traditional buildings will be able to withstand earthquakes. Most of the new tall buildings coming up in the Main Bazaar area, by contrast, will not survive, and some their heavy pre-cast concrete elements are likely to kill people when they fall. Modern construction is also almost exclusively done by migrant workers who can cast concrete. Building in the traditional skills not only gives greater comfort and security to residents, but also requires the availability of local skills and so benefits the local economy. The recent (October 8) earthquake in Kashmir has caused only little damage in the Ladakh region, but Ladakh lies certainly in an earthquake-prone region. Further promotion of traditional skills and earthquake-protecting features (some of which could be incorporated also into modern buildings) is therefore advocated, and we plan to work together with the local autonomy government to establish a regional building code.

Right: thick mud plaster is used to create additional insulation layers. Walls are sometimes fitted with partly-timbered frames for structural stabilization.

Bottom: sun-dried mud bricks can be made on site without specialized skills. They are the cheapest building material but also have very good insulation qualities.



VI.III Income-generation through vocational training and workshops for skill improvements, promoting women's roles in construction work

THF integrated several local women from poor families into a medium-term training scheme. Of these, Ms Tsering Dolma has made the biggest progress in mixing mortar and applying plaster. The other local women in training - Yangskid, Tashi Dolma, Padma and Rigzin – have only picked up very basic skills so far, but their training will continue next year.

Three other women are being trained in specialised skills. Ms Yangdol, daughter of Tibetan refugees settled in Ladakh, has previously received basic training in surveying and drafting at TCV, and she received further training by THF so that Ms Yangdol could help to map old Leh for the project. In the next phase of the training she will be taught to document individual residential buildings to have plans and drawings for planning the upgrading activities. Ms Yangchen Dolma has been trained by a German restorer to clean and stabilize wall-paintings, and is currently busy working on two Buddhist monasteries in Leh. Her training has been planned to continue for the next three years, so that in the end she will become Ladakh's first qualified local wall-painting restorer.

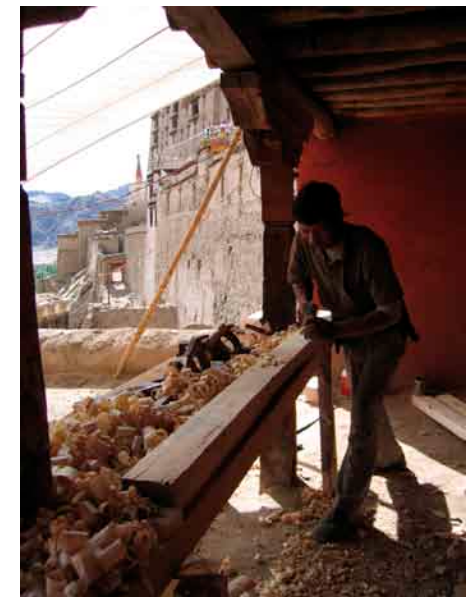
The men participating in THF's vocational training included Mr. Skarma Lotus (painting restoration) and Mr. Stobdan (architectural survey). Four people with some local building skills participated so that their skills would become refined. This will enable them to earn more money in the future, and also will supply the project with the specialised skills necessary for upgrading of traditional and historic residential homes. The participants were Mr. Tsering Dorje Hanupa, mason Sonam Dorje and carpenters Tsering Puntsok and Tsering Dorje. The refined skills included practices used in Tibet for upgrading and rehabilitating historic residential buildings.

Training activities and workshop expenses in 2005: \$3.824,-

Right: Ms Tsering Dolma, the most successful training participant, has become an expert in mud plastering.

Bottom left: Mr. Jamyang Tarchin, senior local construction expert is well-versed in traditional skills. He conducted skill-training on site.

Corner: Mr. Tsering Puntsok is a junior carpenter from Matho village near Leh, his skills were honed during specialized training by THF / LOTI.



VI.IV Documentation of historic building structures

Tibetan architecture, architectural history and art history are still relatively young fields of research. Little is known about styles and their evolution, and even major sites are still insufficiently documented. Events of the 20th century, such as massive destruction of historic Tibetan art and architecture, have dramatically narrowed down the chances of ever fully understanding the Tibetan building tradition. The rapid modernisation in both China and India, as well as the acceleration of mass tourism, are further threatening remaining historic structures.

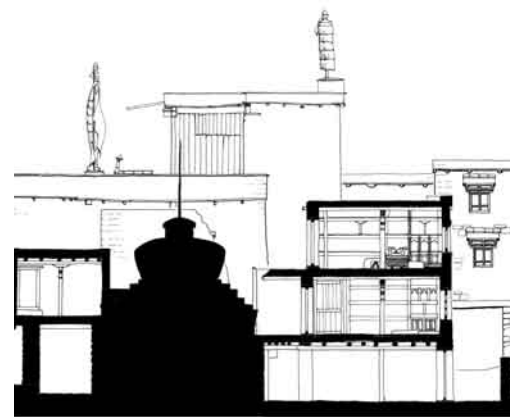
THF / LOTI plan to document the old city in detail. We have already created an interactive map and database containing photos of over 100 historic residential buildings, and survey documentation of 26 buildings.

In 2005, we had a survey team consisting of Tobias Jäkle (architect, Germany), Ms Lucia Gratz (architecture student, Germany), Arjav Desai, Brinda Pancholi, Rashmita Jadav, Rajeshwary Modi (architecture students, India), Almarindo Lopes (architectural designer, Portugal), Maria Durana (architect, Columbia/Canada) under supervision of André Alexander (Tibetan architecture expert, Germany) who had organised similar teamwork in Tibet. In 2004 John Harrison (architect, UK) also documented historic sites in cooperation with the project.

The entire team documented one cluster in the centre of the old town, consisting of the 14th century Jampa Lhakhang and seven residential houses, five houses and one stupa in the Stagopilog conservation model alley, as well as six other historic houses and four monastic sites. The 2005 team was also responsible for training one Tibetan refugee, Ms Yangdol and one young Ladakhi, Mr. Stobdan, as surveyors and draftsmen. The two trainees prepared area maps as well as documentation of the Guru Lhakhang and Lakruk houses.

Documentation expenses 2005: US\$ 7.000,-

THF / LOTI plan to extend documentation activities in 2006-2007 to eventually cover the entire old town area.



Top: Leh interactive map, sample building database page from THF website.

Centre: section through old town.

Right: drafting with candlelight during one of Leh's chronic power cuts.

VI.V Strengthening of cultural identity in context of globalization

As India is continuing its economic reforms, change is also felt among Ladakhi communities. Another strong catalyst of highly problematic and unsustainable change is mass tourism. Many fear that Leh might end up like the Kathmandu valley, plagued by pollution and disintegration of traditional society caused by huge disparities in income. Rehabilitation of Leh with local skills and done by local community members will give a huge boost to local self-esteem, and help to unite society.

VI.VI Revival of traditional skills and local wisdom through exchange with other Himalayan communities

Ladakhi culture and traditional society have been in decline ever since the borders to Tibet were closed five decades ago. Ladakh had to look to lowland India for cultural inspiration. However, Ladakh is geographically very different from the rest of India, and compared to India's 1 billion people, the small Ladakhi population of less than 100,000 is struggling to retain their cultural identity. THF has reopened one channel of exchange between Tibet and Ladakh by bringing Tibetan experts to Leh for workshops and training. We have also involved Tibetan refugees, many of whom possess traditional skills that Ladakhis have partially lost. This helps both communities – giving Tibetan refugees an economic perspective, and reviving ancient cultural links between the two regions.

In the first phase, Mr. Sonam Wangdu (Lhasa) and Ms Larencuo (Qinghai) were brought in. Both were involved in THF's Tibet projects. Sonam Wangdu is trained as an archaeologist and for many years served as consultant for identifying traditional techniques and practices necessary for rehabilitation on particular sites. He worked with the Leh team on several sites. Ms Larencuo was involved in projects in Qinghai, and has conducted some of the community surveys, being able to communicate much more effectively first-hand the expected effects of the project to overcome much scepticism.

Exchange expenses in 2005: US\$ 2.248,-

Right: Ladakhi artisans Tsering Dorje, Tsering Puntsok and Jamyang looking at illustrations of building technology used in Tibet provided by Sonam Wangdu (Lhasa).



Left and bottom: Tibetan-style parapet, an internal timber frame is used for stability, slate stone for rain protection. This greatly improves durability of traditional style roofs.

Bottom right: the parapet is fitted with Tibetan-style decoration. This style of decoration was widely used in Ladakh until the mid-20th century, when it was superseded by concrete-cast elements, and the traditional technique had become lost.



VI.VII First-ever training of Ladakhi painting restorers

Presently, there are no qualified local restorers of wall-paintings available in Ladakh.

In cooperation with Ms Suzy Hesse of the Erfurt University Restoration School, THF has begun a training program with two Ladakhi participants.

Ms Yangchen is a native of the Nubra valley and has joined THF's traditional building skills program in 2004. She had to quit because of health reasons, but has been very motivated to learn about mural conservation. Mr. Skarma, of Kaltsi village, has had formal training in traditional painting and knows the current painting techniques first-hand. He heard about the training program and applied to join.

The first training phase continued for four months, during which the two trainees were under constant supervision.

The following basic skills were successfully transmitted:

- correct approach
- basic infill of cracks
- "easy" cleaning (removing water and mud stains with cotton pads)
- adequate retouching of background colours

In the Guru Lhakhang, the two trainees assisted Ms Hesse in cleaning two areas of water-stained historic wallpaintings, and in filling in various cracks. They also retouched the modern paintings on the east-side wall. We also wish to thank the Delhi-based restorer Sanjay Dar for exposing our two trainees to his work for NIRLAC at Basgo.

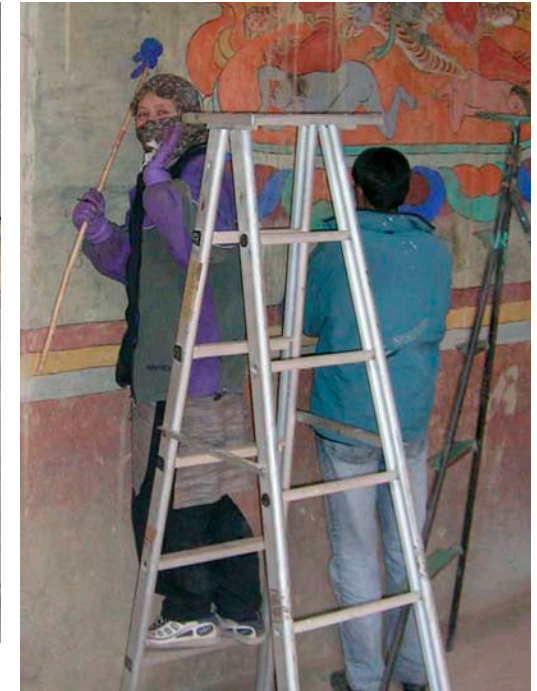
At the Jampa Lhakhang site, we had discovered two walls of early wall-paintings (perhaps 14th century) that had been painted over and partly damaged during partial reconstruction of the temple in 1957. Under THF supervision, Yangchen, Skarma and mud expert Sonam Dorje filled in several areas where great loss of plaster had occurred. In 2006, we will attempt to uncover these hidden paintings with a larger group of skilled restorers.

The restoration training is planned to continue for at least two more years, with an internship in Germany planned for 2007.

Costs for restoration training: US\$ 8.000,-



Top left: Suzy Hesse, cleaning and retouching a mandala on the east wall.



Top right: Ms Yangchen and Skarma cleaning a modern painting on the south wall.

Bottom: Skarma cleaning leakage residue from the east wall.



VI.VII Rehabilitation of housing for low-income communities

In 2004 and 2005, the project rehabilitated a number of homes in old Leh. Houses were chosen by priority, location and willingness of the owner to contribute. The THF model demands 50% co-financing from the owner. Where owners are not able to contribute in cash, they can contribute their labour. Many also had wood and other materials donated by relatives from farming villages.

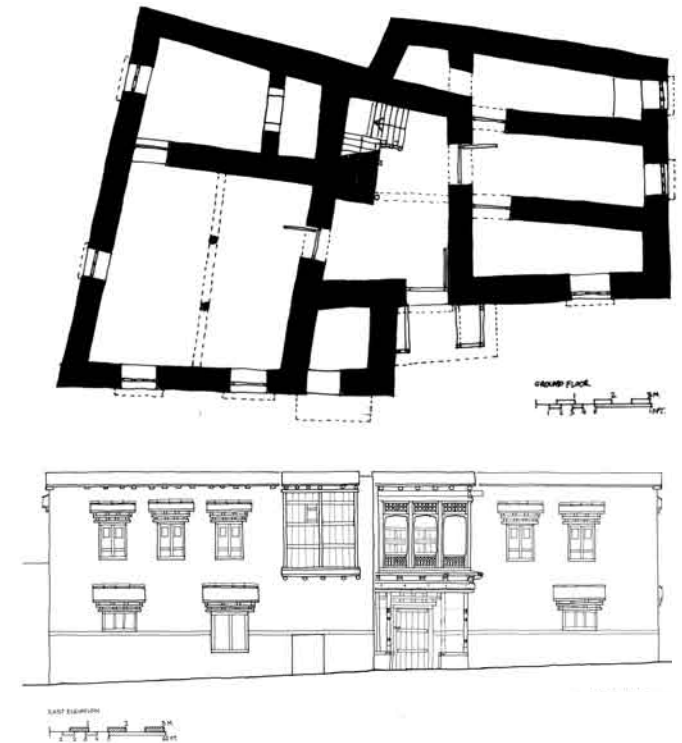
Sofi House

One of the oldest and architecturally important houses, it was built ca. 100 years ago by a family who had migrated from Kashmir to Leh. Today it is divided between three children of the family. For some reason, they have not cooperated between them in maintenance of the house for a long time, and two of the three had moved out. The building has two stories, and mostly store rooms on the ground floor. The roof was badly disintegrated, with extensive leakage. The owners' gladly took up the co-financing model of the project. The rehabilitation of this home became an important cornerstone of the Model Lane Project, to demonstrate upgrading of a historic residential building.

Work included reconstructing the roof with traditional internal water-proofing layers, and a new drainage system, repairs of wall cracks. The repairs that upgraded the building, for example by providing better insulation, included interior and exterior replastering, restoration and improvement of windows, construction of skylights to bring more light into the upper floor rooms and construction of a skylight to cover the previously open staircase. The toilet composting vault was concreted to prevent seepage, and fitted with an internal air circulation system to improve the composting process and remove bad smells. The kitchen was fitted with a sink connected with a drain that led into the street drain. A room used by the inhabitants for bathing was waterproofed and fitted with a drain.

The rehabilitation started at the end of April 2005, and was completed in early August. The owner organized a celebration, inviting all the neighbours and many officials. The head of the Ladakh local government, the Chief Executive Councillor, came with several important government officials. He said this was the first time in Ladakh someone

Sofi house, ground plan and east elevation, showing the 100-year old Kashmiri-style wooden balcony (THF 2004-2005).



THF team corrects deformations and settlement in the internal timber frame, using hydraulic jacks.



had invested in upgrading an old building, and was so impressed that he wrote a letter of recommendation.
Total expenses in 2005: US\$ 5.266,-



The Sofi house required a new roof. Mr. Sonam Dorje is seen here placing willow joists over the rafters, then applying the traditional layering of mud and clays. If done correctly, the traditional roofing method is very efficient and can last for a long time.



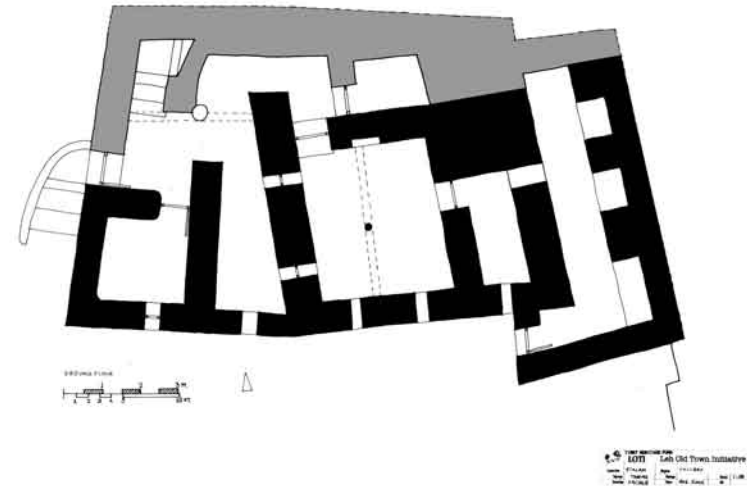
*Top: Sofi house, condition May 2005.
Bottom: work has been completed, August 2005.
Left: new kitchen sink and water-proofed bathing room with drainage facilities.*

Cholday House

The Cholday house is home to three generations of a single family, plus also for some additional aunts and nieces. So even during the repairs, the families continued staying there, just moving to the back area. The family's contribution lay in supplying all the materials and providing additional supervision of the workers. The house has three stories, with main damage in the northern part that was caused by a neighbour's demolition and reconstruction of his house.

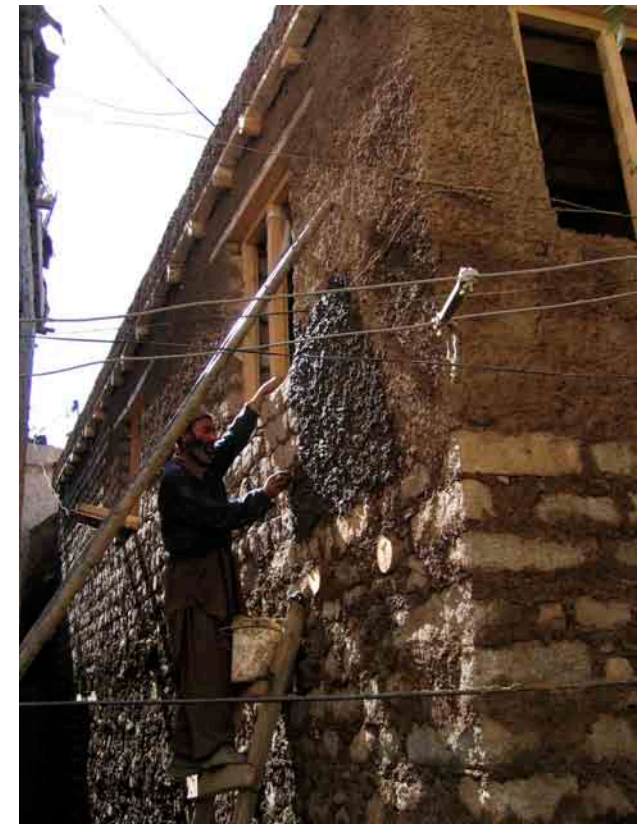
The north wall was reconstructed, the fallen ceiling in the area rebuilt, and additional windows were put in. The roof was waterproofed, and the disintegrated roof parapet (that protects the mud walls from rain) was rebuilt. The main work was completed at the end of 2004.

Total cost: US\$ 969,-



Top: Cholday house, ground plan. The problem area is shown in grey (THF 2004).

From left: the defect north wall of the house had to be taken down while the large family continued to live inside. Family members and a skilled mason then rebuilt the wall on very strong stone foundations.



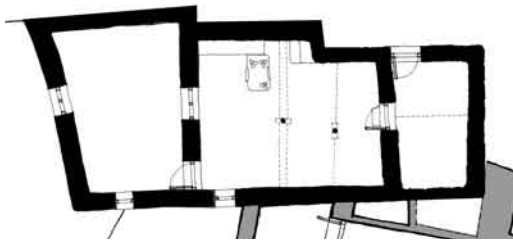
Hanupa House

Hanupa House is located widely visible on the ridge high above the town and so an important priority. It was also a very poorly-built home, erected ca. 150 years to house servants of the nearby Norchung family's mansion. The Hanupa family bought the house for 8000 Rupees (160 Euro at today's rate) 10 years ago. The family is very poor, and their contribution was made with both husband and wife working on site every day.

One of the walls had to be partly taken down because of a defect in the foundation, and was rebuilt much stronger and structurally sounder. All other walls were also strengthened. Windows were much enlarged, and additional ones put in, as the house previously had been very dark. It also had very low ceilings, we have successfully raised the ceiling. The house had no toilet and no drainage, we have built a composting toilet and fitted the kitchen with a sink.

The house was successfully rehabilitated August-October 2005.

Total expenses: US\$ 3.608,-



*Left, Hanupa house ground plan (THF 2005)..
Bottom left and top:
Hanupa house had
to be partly rebuilt
to make it structurally
sound.*

*The ceiling height
was raised to make
the house more
suitable for human
habitation. The
historic (and heavy)
19th century clay
stove was lifted
for this purpose by
wooden levers and
car hydraulics.*



*The new ceiling, recycled willow
joists over wooden rafters.*



Norchung House

Norchung House is part of a cluster of buildings on the ridge below the palace. It is one of the larger buildings in old Leh, four floors, and many remarkable architectural details. It is inhabited by a family that migrated to Leh several years ago to look for work. They have been unable to afford maintenance. The roof is leaking and the upper floor is basically not usable any longer because it was on the verge of collapse. THF/ LOTI prepared a rehabilitation plan and started with some emergency intervention measures by the masons and carpenters.

Total cost: US\$ 126,-



*Norchung house,
Section and south elevation
(THF / Harrison 2004-
2005).*

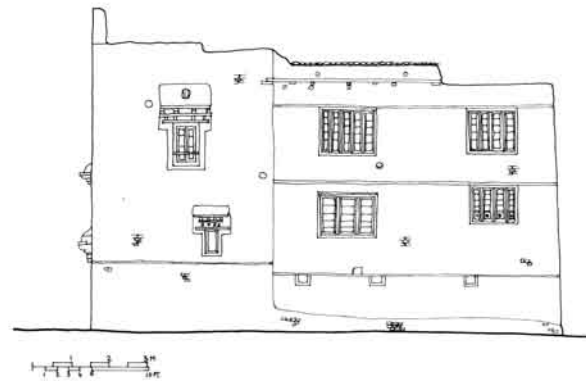
Located high above the old town (left of center in the photo), Norchung is not only home to a poor family from nomadic Nubra, but also an important monument.



Hor Yakandi House

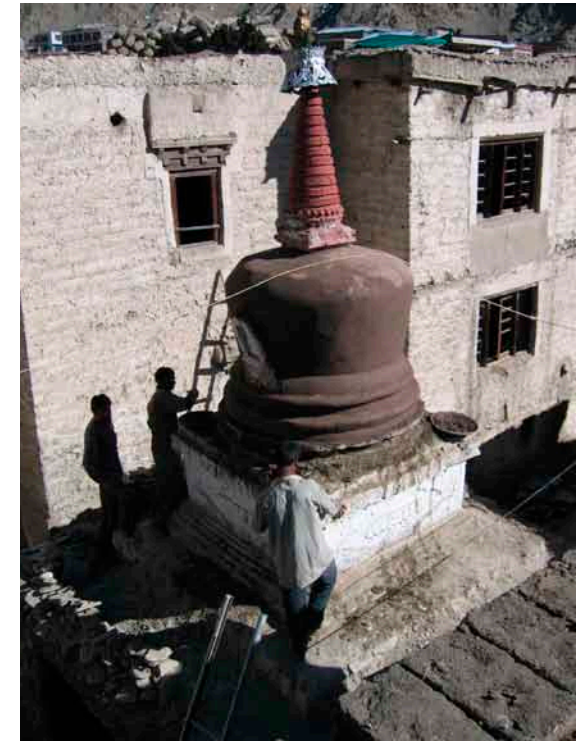
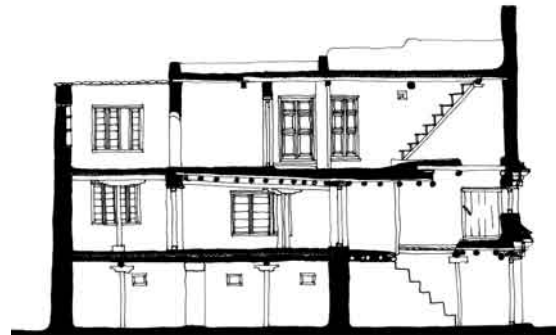
This house was built about 100 years ago by a Muslim family from north-western China (Yarkand). It was abandoned 20 years ago when the top floor had collapsed, as the family believed that the nearby stupa gate had an ill effect on the house and the family. It was found out that the house was taller than the stupa, which is widely believed locally to invite harm. So it was agreed with the family that the house would be rehabilitated minus the upper floor, so that it would be safe again for habitation. The house originally had four storeys and a functioning composting toilet. The northwall is close to collapse, and the internal timber frame suffers from numerous defects and settlements. Most windows have disintegrated.

Clearing of the site and drafting of a rehabilitation plan had begun in September 2004, and a contract with the owners signed, whereby the owners pledge to provide 50% of the costs. Work cannot start before THF raises funds for 2005.



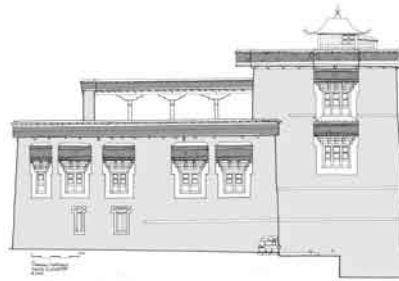
Left: Hor Yarkandi House, ground plan, east elevation and section (THF 2005).

Right: supporting THF's work in Stagopilog, local people restore the ancient gateway stupa (without any financial support from THF). In the back is the Hor Yarkandi House.



Jampa Lhakhang

This 15th century temple is one of the town's main Buddhist monuments. THF helped to repair the leaking roof, and prepared a rehabilitation plan for the entire site, which requires more roof repairs and cleaning of historic wall-paintings. Expenses for roof emergency repairs: US\$ 318,-

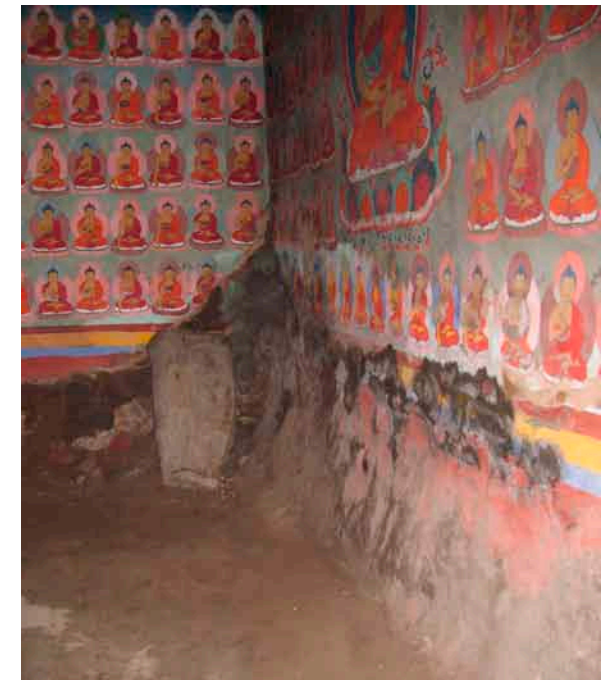


Clock-wise from top: Jampa Lhakhang, with the 14th century Maitreya statue, south elevation (THF 2005), work on the roof and roof parapet, repair of the northside interior wall and detail of the overpainted historic murals.

Chenrezi Lhakhang

This huge building was constructed in the 17th century as main monastic center for Leh. It contains a 16-pillar assembly hall, a four-pillar protector room, and a three-storey tall blank wall facing the town for display of the huge Gygu tangka during festival times. Event hough its importance has been overshadowed by the new Tsuklakhang built around 1980 in the main bazaar, Chenrezi Lhakhang remains one of the old town's major monuments and a popular focus point for local Buddhists and tourists alike. The construction a few years ago of a new access road to Leh Palace that runs just to the north of Chenrezi Lhakhang has aggravated water seepage problems. Rain- and groundwater are destroying murals and even damage the foundations. THF has excavated the foundations and built a drainage channel to protect the walls. The damage will be repaired next summer after the humidity residing inside the walls has dried.

Expenses for the drainage: US\$ 757,-



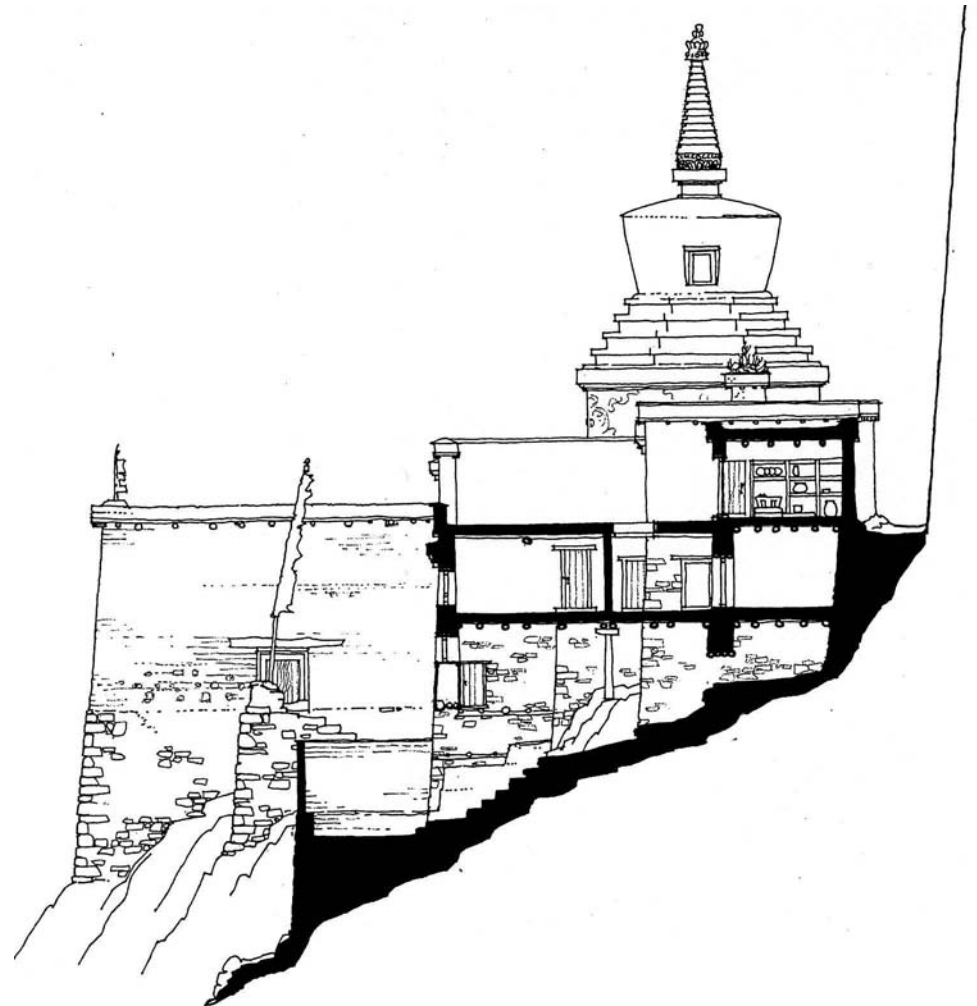
Chenrezi Lhakhang
Left: assembly space.
Top: south elevation.
Top right: two local workers
dig for a a new drainage
system.
Right: walls damaged by
humidity.

Lonpo House

This is the former home of the king's chief minister, built around the same time as the Leh Palace (ca. 1600). The family abandoned the house decades ago, and in the 1990s, it was donated to Chemrey monastery. Unfortunately, by that time, it had partly collapsed due to neglect. THF supported repairs of the collapsed part, and partial replacement of the interior timber frame.

Costs: US\$ 1.840,-

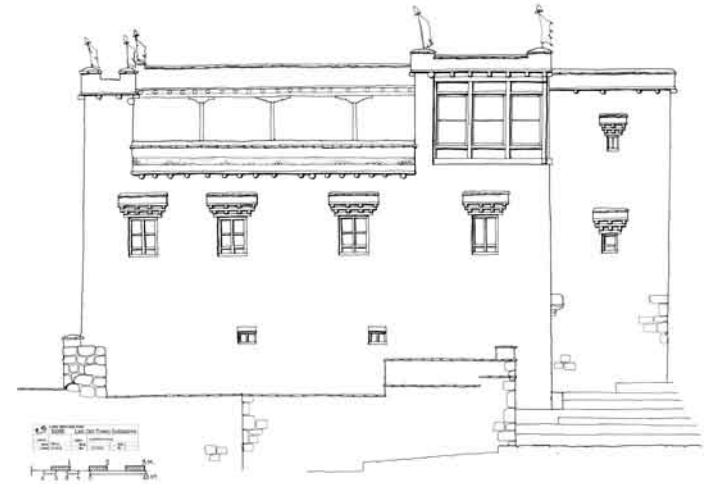
*Left: Lonpo House, repair of the collapsed central part.
Right: Lonpo House, section drawing (THF/Harrison 04).*



Lakruk House

Lakruk House is one of the great old mansion houses of Leh, located just below the Leh Palace - Red Jampa Lhakhang area. THF rented it to set up the local project office of the Leh Old Town Initiative. Some building repairs, especially in the roof area was undertaken, and a telephone line, power supply and computer were installed. Soon the project office became an important local focus point, where residents, government officials and monastic representatives came by with proposals, ideas and questions.

Total expenses for building repairs, setting up a project infrastructure and THF / LOTI administrative structure: US\$ 9.794,-



Top: Lakruk House, south elevation.
Right: Meeting on Lakruk House terrace.

VI.IX Creation of a community centre for community meetings, cultural functions and training of community members for future income-generating activities

On the ridge above town just below the former royal palace stood a deserted building threatened by collapse. This was the Guru Lhakhang, a chapel founded by 44 leading families of Leh around 1600 as centre for congregations, private religious practice outside of monasteries, and, most importantly, as place for celebration of local festivals. The original network of families had disintegrated over the centuries, disabling attempts at maintenance. THF found the roof and timber frame to be on the verge of collapse, with extensive rain damage.

THF proposed to rehabilitate the site as pilot project, so that the entire community and not just one family would benefit from the first activity. The pilot project would demonstrate the feasibility of what we were proposing, and we would demonstrate also how we intended to work, using only local skills and local labour, therefore also benefiting the local economy.

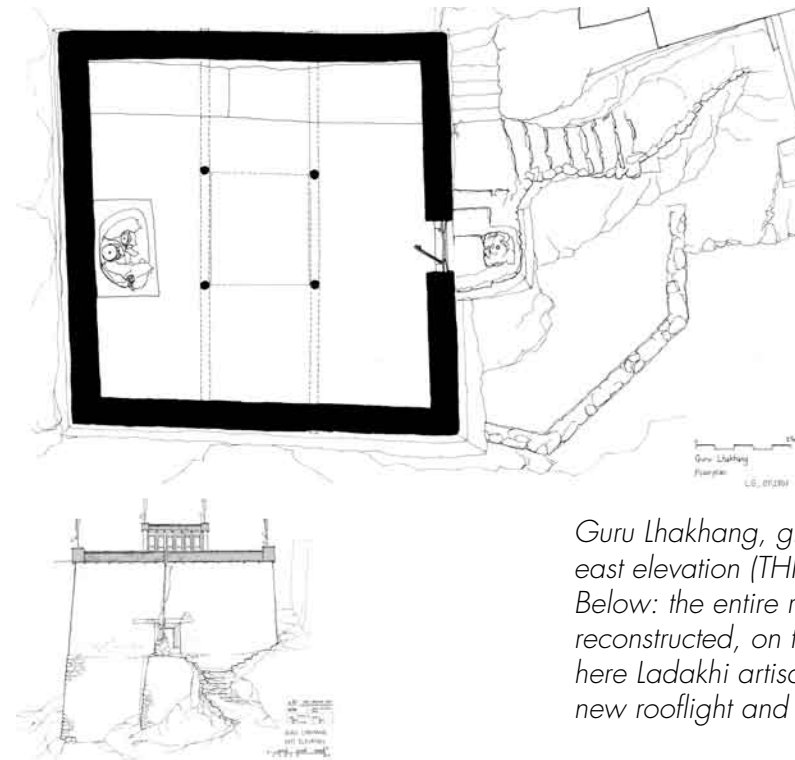
After rehabilitation, the site has been used by lay members of the community for congregations, and it was also extensively used by THF to conduct workshops and training activities.

Activities that took place in the Guru Lhakhang include:

Since there were fragments of badly damaged historic paintings on the walls, Ms Yangchen Dolma and Mr. Skarma Lotus were training here in basic techniques painting restoration. This was conducted by two German experts, Ms Suzy Hesse and Mr. Daniel Hackauf, who came as unpaid volunteers.

A drawing studio was also set up at Guru Lhakhang. Ms Yangdol and Mr. Stobdan were trained by an ASA volunteer, Ms Lucia Gratz, in surveying of buildings and production of measured plan drawings. The building also served to set up a tea kitchen for the workshops. Project-related community meetings were held at irregular intervals, in 2004 (when the rehabilitation of the building took place) eight times, in 2005 four times. Unrelated to the old town project, after the restoration local community members also held meetings twice a month.

THF build a new roof structure, including timber frame, roof layers and parapet. A damaged section of the north wall was repaired, and a



Guru Lhakhang, ground plan and east elevation (THF 2004-2005). Below: the entire roof has been reconstructed, on the picture shown here Ladakhi artisans work on the new rooflight and the parapet.



rooflight was added to bring more light into the building. The interior plaster was restored. A new tamped clay floor was made, the clay also functions as additional insulating layer.

The main activities took place May to November 2004, with more community and training activities taking place in 2005.

Total expenses for building rehabilitation in 2004:

US\$ 10.066,-

Expenses for work in 2005: US\$ 3.970,-



*Guru Lhakhang,
top: the reconstructed ceiling and
skylight; wallpainting restoration
workshop with Daniel Hackauf and
Skarma Lotus on the scaffolding,
cleaning 17th century murals.*

*Left: lay members of the Leh community
congregate in the rehabilitated Guru
Lhakhang, while work is still going on.*

*Right: Ms Yangchen has learnt from
German restorer Suzy Hesse how to
clean and re-touch wall-paintings.
She has also learnt how to fill cracks
according to internationally-accepted
standards and methodology.*



VI.X Contributing to a defusion of sectarian tensions between different communities by community-organizing and motivating them to work together to improve their living conditions

The community spirit in the project neighbourhood has been clearly enhanced. People are now used to meet and discuss problems, and even to perform physical labour together. The drain and paving completed so far have led to a significant clean-up of the area. With the road no longer smelly and dirty, we observed that regularly in the late afternoon, the women of the neighbourhood gather around the Basgo stone, sit and chat. Remarkably, these women are from three different communities – Ladakhi Buddhist, Muslim and Indian lowland migrants. Several house owners have donated pieces of their land for communal use (though some have admittedly resisted and prevented their land being used). Several obstacles were jointly overcome, or have led to revisions of the original plan.

Among the construction workers, we had observed with some sorrow that even during tea-break, Buddhist and Muslim workers would sit separately and hardly talk to each other. However, after six months of working together, the atmosphere was visibly more relaxed, with people of different faiths even joking together.

We believe more project activities can help to bring people together.
Cost for two local project community coordinators in 2005: US\$ 3.206,-



Buddhist and Muslim workshop participants during tea-break.

VII Further results and future outlook

The local head of government, the Chief Executive Councillor Mr. Rigzin Spalbar has visited the project and said that to his knowledge, this was the first such project to his knowledge where an investment was made to upgrade a part of historic Leh. He said that the local government would work closely with THF to work out a legislative and organizational framework for the management of the old town area, which would be a prerequisite to get more funding released from the government. Leh has no sewage system, and our drain will end in a large soak-pit in front of a run-down cinema hall. The Councillor of Public Works has promised to build an improved and larger soak-pit next year, to help clean up the area. The local Ladakh Autonomy Government (LAHDC) has pledged the modest sum of 1,5 lakh Rupees (ca. US\$3,500.-) for THF to co-finance similar improvement works around a cluster of Buddhist monasteries in the old town next year.

Most residents remain healthily doubtful about government promises, but the work completed so far has clearly made an impact. THF now has the owners of seven homes interested in co-financing building rehabilitation, and we will be discussing with other communities ways to improve drainage and paving in their respective areas.

Communities have learned that they can make things happen and make changes if they organize and work together.

For the immediate future, it is planned to expand the training program, so that some community members become experts in building upgrading. We also plan to bring together community members of different areas so that the experience gained in this year's improvement project will be transported and shared.

It will be necessary for the communities to obtain further funding in the next two to three years, otherwise the momentum will be lost. Without finances for community-based activities, the government is likely to return to its usual stance of indifference and neglect towards the old town and its many low-income communities.

The larger issues of water supply, sewage system and waste management loom on the horizon. Nevertheless, for our second full

project season here in a town where everybody seemed to have given up hope, it was a very successful year that had led to a visible improvement of the old town.

The project in the Indian media

The India-wide magazine, Outlook Traveller (Sept. 2005), has featured an article about Leh which praises THF's work (copies attached). The Ladakhi magazine, Ladags Melong, has published an article about the project in 2004.



The residents of Stagopilog host a tea party to celebrate the completion of the drain project.

Attitude Sickness

The perils of development have finally reached Leh, says
MUNEEZA NAQVI. *Photographs by* JITENDER GUPTA

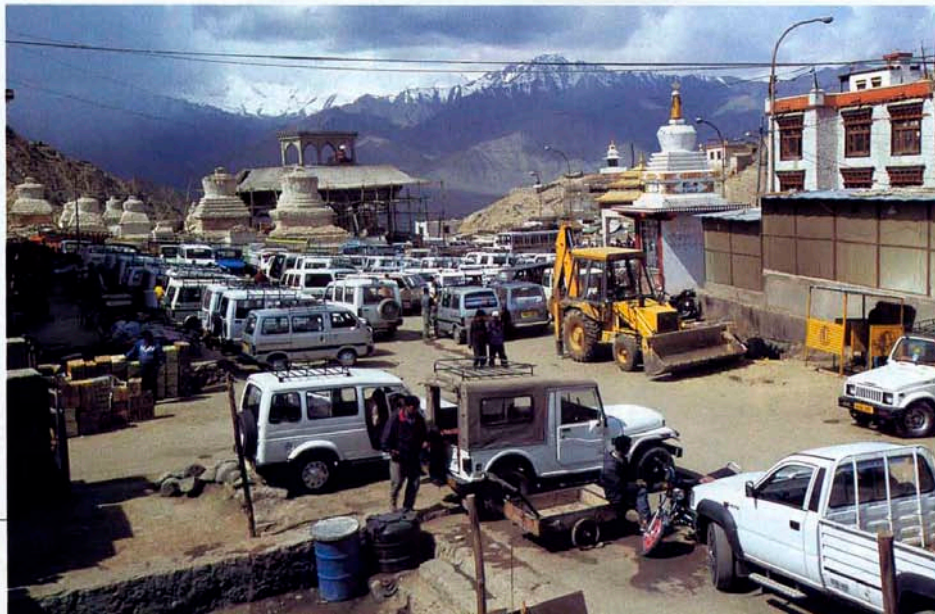
My walking companion tells me that there was a time when polo ponies cantered through Leh's Main Bazaar. He remembers walking past the old city gates built to protect this once-

proud capital of an independent kingdom. "When Pandit Nehru visited in the 1950s he watched a polo match right here." Today you'll find mostly STD booths, souvenir shops and the occasional speeding army jeep. And the Leh Abdul Ghani Sheikh describes sounds like a story from a hundred years ago. It's not that difficult to weave your own exotic fairy-tale around Leh. It begins with the thrill of the spectacular views of the Greater Himalayan and Zaskar ranges from the airplane—all bleak and spartan and yet breathtaking. And if you're visiting in the middle of the short tourist season, chances are you've left the blistering mid-40s heat of the plains behind. Plus the thin, rarefied air. You could be forgiven flights of fancy.

Crowded taxi stand in Leh; and garbage dump in Old Leh (right)

But Ghani Sheikh has spent practically his entire life in this town and I know better than to think that the vivid pictures he paints of the town he grew up in are part of an old man's yearning for the past. Tourist brochures describe all of Ladakh with the usual worn-out clichés. 'Roof of the World', 'Kingdom of Light', 'Little Tibet' and so on. But the fact is that people who care are already throwing about worrisome words like 'dreadlocks', 'Manali', and 'backpacker haven'. And like any other culture suddenly coming face to face with the shocking amount of easy lucre that tourism can bring in, Leh is a town that is struggling to cope.

This is a town that only barely came into any real contact with the outside world in the 1960s when the Indian government flooded the area with troops who, because of the continuing Chinese and Pakistani border conflicts, have never left.



In the mid-1960s, Ladakh's isolation was broken once and for all with the construction of a trans-Himalayan road linking it to the subcontinent. Then things really began to change. The Indian government worked at seriously drawing Ladakh into the framework of the national economy. In 1974, the region was opened up to foreign tourism. From a grand total of 527 tourists (27 Indians and 500 foreigners) in 1974, there's been a gigantic leap to over 35,000 travellers in 2004.

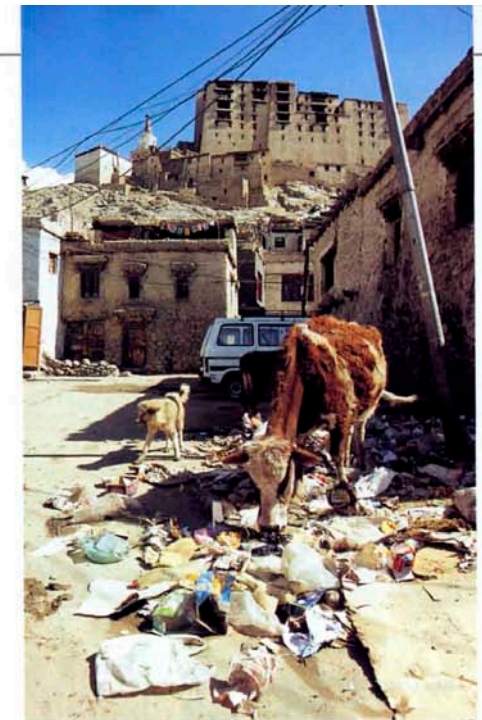
The army, the tourists and the Indian government have combined to subject Leh (and the rest of Ladakh) to the biggest change that it has ever seen. Local people who were initially hired for road construction later switched over to working in and running an endless number of hotels and guesthouses. Agriculture slipped to the background, and as a cash-based economy developed, consumption patterns began to change as well.

Development is always a complicated concept to put into practice and nowhere is this more apparent than here. Like in so many beautiful places in the world, tourism is Leh's biggest problem and also the source of its newfound prosperity.

Wander down the Main Bazaar or Fort Road past 'German' bakeries, Kashmiri carpet shops, more trekking agencies than there are people. Development here has meant that as of last year there were nearly 300 officially registered hotels or guesthouses—the bulk are concrete nightmares oddly at variance with the old-style mud and brick structures around them. A total of 4,500 beds in a town with a population that hovers around 30,000. And while the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Council is beginning to make the necessary polite noises about preserving some semblance of local architecture, the council's new office (currently under construction) is more suited to a galaxy far, far away than it is to Leh.

As Leh grows in all sorts of unplanned ways, a shift is also taking place in the once-agrarian villages of the rest of Ladakh. Subsidised supplies of wheat and rice have led to a shift in agricultural patterns and more and more poor villagers drift into Leh drawn to the promise of tourist dollars. Mercifully the weather isn't conducive to slums but a whole rash of ugly government housing is creeping up on the borders of the town to house this growing population. Urban planning is an alien concept (though a town planner from Jammu was expected to visit in June) and Leh has no infrastructure in place to support this influx. The result is evident—the rubbish piles that are everywhere on the streets drift into the little streams that people once used to drink from. It doesn't help that there is only just the barest minimum of staff available—25 people at the last count—to help keep the city clean.

Water supplies are the next obvious cause for concern. It's possibly the only town in the country where there is no organised system of water distribution to private homes. Public taps and streams are the source of water for most people. Traditionally Ladakhis used compost or dry toilets and respected the limited water available. Tourists don't quite



Tourism is Leh's biggest problem—the number of tourists has gone up from a grand total of 527 in 1974 to over 35,000 in 2004

share that feeling and hotels and almost all new buildings in Leh now build western-style flush toilets. Because there is no sewage system in place there's a genuine fear of the leakage from cesspits contaminating the ground water.

The most worrying part of unplanned development in Leh is the utter neglect of its old town. The area just below the looming Leh Palace consists of a group of historic and traditional houses and the area makes up Leh's old town. The city walls that Ghani Sheikh had described for me once protected the oldest area, and stupas marked the important entry points. As the city gained wealth from its strategic position at the crossroads of trade routes between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, the rich local families built grand homes and some of these structures still stand today. Ghani Sheikh points out Munshi House to me as we walk through the winding lane that leads off the bazaar, past the old bakeries and up to the Leh Palace. Comparisons are made with the architec-

tural style of Lhasa and Leh is often described as the world's best-preserved historic Tibetan city.

But the walk up is a sad event. The lack of water, poor sanitation and overcrowding means that through the summer months much of the old town resembles an open sewer. Most old homes have been abandoned either because of the filth or the fact that it's easier to make money by moving into newer parts of the city. Through these dilapidated old homes you can make your way to what was once the old mosque. This Tibetan-style structure is now an abandoned ruin, but if you look inside you'll find the remains of the pulpit. The windows are traditional low wooden ones and the mosque was painted in the Buddhist style without the use of any animal or human motif. The newer Indo-Islamic style mosque with its out-of-place towers and minarets seems to have upstaged the traditional little mosque completely.

But as tradition and what passes off as modernity clash, there is hope yet for Leh. And despite the current state of disrepair in the old town, it is here that one feels that there is much to be hopeful for. Having collected several beer cans and plastic bags on my way, when I finally huff and puff all the way up to the monastery near the Leh Palace, I find a small group of dedicated workers lovingly restoring a mural with Zen-like patience. ♦

New construction underway at the Main Market

Development is always complicated. Like in so many beautiful places in the world, tourism is Leh's biggest problem and also the source of its newfound prosperity



CAMPAIGN

Luckily for Leh, it's not too late and there are several dedicated local and foreign conservationists working to protect its unique culture and architecture.

Of the several NGOs at work here, the **Tibet Heritage Fund (THF)** is notable for the many initiatives it's taken to preserve the Old Town. Since 2003, when they first set up office here, THF co-director Andre Alexander has conducted a feasibility study and identified and documented 100 historic buildings, and compiled a social profile of the occupants. They have completed a pilot restoration of the 17th-century Guru Lhakhang. Among the other projects they are working on currently are the restoration of the Chamba Lhakhang (c. 1440), as well as creating a model conservation street in the Stagpolog neighbourhood. Here they are planning on restoring four historic residential buildings, and providing drainage, improving sanitation and paving the street with natural stones (rather than concrete plates used until now). The more crucial long-term project involves training young Ladakhis in wall painting, conservation, surveying and traditional crafts. There are

more details of their work (and an interactive map of the old town) on their website, www.tibetheritagefund.org

The **Namgyal Institute for Research on Ladakhi Art and Culture (NIRLAC)** was set up by Ladakh's former ruling family, to work towards the conservation of Ladakh's cultural heritage. Their conservation programme, which started in 2000, has been working with monastic and village communities to develop a sustainable method of conservation for the region.

Other NGOs active in the region include the **Ladakh Ecological Development Group** which works to promote ecological and sustainable development programmes which blend with the traditional culture. These include information, education, handicraft, agriculture and cultural preservation activities.

Student Educational Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SEC-MOL) was founded by some returning Ladakhi university students and their programmes include interaction with young people and local students. They publish a monthly news magazine called the *Ladags Melong*.



རིག་འཛིན་དཔལ་འབར།
RIGZIN SPALBAR

ལཱ་དྲུག་ས་རང་སྤྱོད་རི་སྒྲིབ་ལྷན་ཁག་གི་མཁན།
Chairman/Chief Executive Councillor

LADAKH AUTONOMOUS HILL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, LEH
LEH, LADAKH - 194101 (INDIA)
TEL : (O) 01982-252212 (R) 250299, FAX : 01982-253298
E-mail : cec_laahdc@yahoo.co.in riginz@yahoo.co.in

To whom it may Concern

This is to certify that an organization called Tibet Heritage Fund loti through its representative Andre Alexander has been working on conservation activities in Leh old town since year 2003. The organization has carried out some remarkable work of restoration like the restoration of Guru Lhakhang (Gogsum) residential building of Sofi House apart from compilation work of the existing historic buildings, monuments and landmarks. With the cooperation and collaboration of The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Leh (LAHDCL) the NGO will be carrying out further work such as restoration of monuments, rehabilitation of model historic alleyway including improvement of drainage, paving and sanitary facilities in the old Leh town that has been declared as Heritage Zone by the LAHDCL. With the joint efforts of the LAHDCL and Tibet Heritage Fund we endeavor to have a historic city, within the Leh city inhabited by the Ladakhi residents with proper infrastructure surrounded by historic buildings but provided with adequate facilities as to the requirement of the owners.

Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, Leh appreciates the work being carried out by the Tibet Heritage Fund particularly by Andre Alexander and welcome any assistance rendered to the NGO.

Date: 17.8.2005

(Rigzin Spalbar)

