

Ladakh and the ChangPa¹



Cashmere goats in Ladakh

The Past

A tough life without any room for romantics. Today, some ten thousand years after sedentary agriculture started complementing nomadic hunting, the importance of traditional societies not only decreases all over the world, but is even seen in many countries as an obstacle of progress and prosperity. In today's so-called developing countries, traditional societies – and their traditional and land-based economy – play only a minor if not negligible role in the national economy and in their societies. Pastoralism practiced by nomads or semi-nomads is rapidly disappearing all together. This is visible all over the world, in Yemen, Morocco, Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to name only a few, and eventually in Ladakh, too. Pastoralism and agriculture are the backbone of traditional societies, and the latter in turn constitute the foundation of prosperity of great civilization.

The Present Situation

Natural resources management out of balance. Whereas in the past (up to about 30 years ago) a certain balance of natural resources use and protection has been maintained on the Changthang plateau by the Changpa, new developments (alphabetization, tourism, city development of Leh, transport facilities, alternative job and learning opportunities) have almost everywhere negatively impacted indigenous natural resources management² resulting in a neglect or loss of the land-based economy and a gradual disappearance of the traditional lifestyle – at different degree

¹ Extracted from: The Future of the ChangPa, the Changthang Plateau and Ladakhi Pashmina, 16th IALS Conference, Heidelberg/Germany, April 2013

² Pashmina production and socio-economic changes in the Indian Changthang: Implications for natural resource management, Tsewang Namgail, Sipke E. van Wieren and Herbert H.T. Prins Natural Resources Forum 34, (2010) 222-230

from village to village. It is, therefore, crucial to differentiate between the different natural resources potential of the individual villages or Changpa camps when developing sustainable farm/pasture models for the survival of the Changpa.

Though the Government continues to assist the Changpa in satisfying their basic needs such as food, education and health, the traditional life of the Changpa did not improve significantly, some 50% of all Changpa settlements being still today without electricity; most settlements experience potable water shortages; and schools are usually far away. Where animal husbandry is the only source of income, people cannot earn a decent living, particularly as long as the Changpa remain only suppliers of raw 'material' such as animals and pashm³, and do not attempt to process their 'raw products' in situ, for example by spinning and weaving during winter. The ongoing rural exodus of people living in marginal areas of limited natural resources will without any doubt continue, even if the urban life in Leh does often not meet the migrants' expectations.

Wherever the income from livestock husbandry including pashmina production is supplemented by agricultural production, such as fodder and fruits, and especially by income from tourism, the Changpa manage to afford a decent living, keep a constant population level (or even increase it, as it is the case of Korzog), and are less attracted to migrate than in other, less privileged villages. This does not, however, imply that such a multiple income from different sources could be taken for granted: climate vagaries, degrading pastures, the competition for pastures by wild animals, fluctuating pashmina prices, and high energy costs make traditional and land-based economic activities vulnerable and much less profitable than urban activities in the 'new economy', for example in government agencies, in the Army or in the tourist sector. These uncertainties are superimposed by an unpredictable political situation: the massive presence of the Army in Ladakh may quickly decrease once India agreed with its neighbors on international borders, tensions would decrease, and some ten thousand soldiers might be withdrawn.

The *Ladakh 2025 Vision*⁴ Documents draws a rather bleak picture of the land-based economy: "..... it is in a general state of decline in the entire Ladakh region today. People are leaving the sector in droves, and things have come to such a pass that there is now a shortage of local workers in the villages during the agricultural season. Even the residents of Changthang have started washing their hands off this sector".

The main problems associated with the land-based economy are as follows:

- Excessive reliance on the outside world for critical needs such as food. Up to 60% of the region's food requirement is met through the PDS (Public Distribution System).
- Lack of irrigation facilities.
- Deteriorating natural resources base leading – among others - to fodder deficits.
- Hard physical work and low enumeration in agriculture and livestock husbandry activities.
- Job opportunities in tourism, government and army.
- Lack of coordination of developing activities among Government departments.
- Lack of participatory planning among stakeholders.

³ Cashmere ("wool")

⁴ LAHDC, 2005: Ladakh 2025 Vision Document – A Road to Progress and Prosperity, Leh, Ladakh

The Vision Document concludes that “the land-based economy sector has so far not received the importance it deserves”.

The Future

Demanding resilience and flexibility but also political will. At a first glance, the future of the Chang-pa looks rather dim: in spite of a unique natural resources base, and the doubling of the number of cashmere goats in only 10 years⁵, their income and living standard did not increase significantly, tempting the young generation to look for alternative occupations in Leh or even outside of Ladakh. Pastures continue to suffer from overgrazing, wildlife continuous to be threatened, and tourism further derails the land-based economy due to ‘Western’ influence – in spite of the Ladakh 2025 Vision Document, now already eight years old which rightly demands a strategy of self-reliance rather than self-sufficiency. In more detail, it demands to

- ❖ strengthen Ladakh’s traditional system of agriculture and livestock production;
- ❖ incorporate appropriate scientific technology for increased productivity;
- ❖ built human resources among the local population;
- ❖ promote land-based entrepreneurs;
- ❖ enter untapped land-based sectors, and improve quality in existing fields;
- ❖ organize a sustained marketing initiative;
- ❖ encourage the use of modern scientific methods in the land-based economy;
- ❖ preserve pastures;
- ❖ protect water, trees and soil; and
- ❖ encourage co-management among all stakeholders.

These are laudable intentions, all helpful to enable the Changpa the continuation of their traditional life; albeit only through adaptation to ‘modern’, community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) in order to sustain the resources of the Changthang plateau which once facilitated their traditional – and sustainable - life style.

Suggestions

A pragmatic solution to overcome the prevailing constraints regarding the future of the Changpa and the Changthang plateau is proposed. Focusing on the most important Changpa activity, main pillars of the attempt to sustain Changpa tradition (and thus support the land-based economy) are:

- ✓ sustainable production of Ladakhi pashmina (*leyna*),
- ✓ increase of the *leyna* value chain in situ, and
- ✓ Direct marketing of *leyna* fabrics in European countries.

This would be fully in line with the spirit of the Vision 2025 Document, and could be achieved following an integrated approach supported by the LAHDC⁶, the State of Jammu & Kashmir, and the Indian Government.

Sustainable production of Ladakhi pashmina (leyna). Sustainability of pashmina production is compulsory in a fragile environment such as the Changthang plateau. Many suggestions to achieve sustainability are made elsewhere and need not to be

⁵ From 110,000 goats in 1997 to 227,400 goats in 2005, Leh Statistics Handbook, 2006

⁶ Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council

repeated. Priority, however, has to be given to the limited carrying capacity of the marginal pastures which may require a temporary drastic reduction of the number of grazing animals, including pashmina goats. Those Changpa affected by decreasing the number of pashmina goats, must be financially compensated and assisted in improving their pastures for future use. Sustainable pashmina production is achieved through a combination of pasture preservation/improvement/management (by rotational grazing), intensive fodder production (through irrigation), and affordable veterinary services. Stock breeding assistance provided by the Government would further enhance the quality and productivity of pashmina goats.

Increase of the pashmina value chain⁷ in situ. The first attempt to increase the pashmina value chain was carried out some eight years ago when a Chinese pashmina processing plant was installed in Leh and operated by the *All Changthang Pashmina Growers Cooperative Marketing Society Ltd.* - albeit with limited success: Many Changpa did not deliver their pashmina to the Cooperative because of different reasons, the traders from Srinagar did not buy the processed (cleaned) pashmina (because in the past processing was done by hand in Srinagar), and the processing plant is difficult to operate (maintenance, high energy costs, reliability). A simple feasibility study (focusing on technical and economic feasibility) of the plant's operation would help to decide if plant operation should be continued or the plant sold. In the latter case, the Changpa would have to scour and clean the pashmina by hand which would be rather time consuming, labor intensive and costly, but would protect the excellent fiber quality of raw Ladakhi pashmina (*leyna*) and provide a competitive advantage in its marketing (see below).

The next important steps in value chain increase in situ are spinning and weaving, both which the Changpa have not done either in the past, but which can be learned with willingness and corresponding patience. It is difficult to understand why there has been hardly any progress in introducing pashmina spinning and weaving in Ladakh when knowing the pashmina value chain: Adopting a value of one kilogram of raw pashmina of 25 US\$, the value increases to 50-70 US\$ for pure pashmina, to 100-150 US\$ for pashmina yarn, to 200-250 US\$ for whole sale pashmina fabrics, and to 500-600 US\$ for retailed pashmina fabrics. Who among the Changpa would refuse to learn weaving when he can earn 10 times more with the sale of a woven pashmina fabric than with the sale of raw pashmina?

Direct marketing of leyna fabrics in selected countries of Europe. Assuming that the Changpa are willing to engage in pashmina value chain increase in situ through the production of pashmina fabrics (for example: scarfs, shawls, blankets) hand-made of genuine Ladakhi *leyna*, only direct marketing to small outlets (for example: well-known hotels, boutiques, and fairs in selected European countries) will achieve a good price. *Leyna* must become a registered trademark known for quality, transparency and fair trade: Quality manifested by purity, diameter less than 16 micro meters, well hand-spun, and woven on a hand-loom. Transparency given by detailed information about the complete production cycle of the pashmina fabric, from the goats to the herders to those who comb, scour, dehair, card, spin and weave. Fair trade characterized by sharing adequately production costs and profit at each step of value increase. *Leyna* fabrics are not mass products; they are individual pieces satisfying a niche market, sold to people who are willing to pay a higher prize when quality, sustainable and human production methods, and fair trade are guaranteed.

⁷ A good example of the pashmina value chain is given by Frauke de Weier, 2007: Cashmere Value Chain Analysis Afghanistan, USAID, Kabul



Pure Cashmere

Conclusions

In spite of the gloomy outlook manifested by negative impacts on traditional societies through globalization, climate vagaries and uncontrolled tourism, there are still sufficient natural resources and opportunities on the Changthang plateau to support a traditional, albeit modified lifestyle of the Changpa. Fewer Changpa, settling permanently in favorable (even remote) locations will in future populate the rural areas, preserving their traditions but at the same time taking over the role of conservationists and attracting sensible tourists interested in the cultural and natural particularities of the Changthang plateau. Those (then urban) Changpa who preferred to migrate to Leh, would assist the (rural) Changpa in processing and marketing their products all over the world (and not only in India) and keep family bands in tact in a symbiosis of rural and urban lifestyle.

In order to embark on a sustainable planning and implementation process for the realization of the measures suggested above, the following three steps (in chronological order) need to be considered:

1. Establishment of a Changpa Task Force comprising the most important stakeholders (maximum 12 members);
2. Agreement on identified needs, persisting problems and possible solutions (and eventually approved by the Government); and
3. Preparation of concrete projects solving the persisting problems (according to agreed priorities and available budgets).

Except for events not under control of the Ladakhi, the known resilience and tenacity of the Changpa will let their culture survive in a decent manner – if assisted carefully, prudently, and respectfully.