

8. AN ETHIC FOR THE FUTURE?

Editorial introduction

The challenge of managing the processes of social and developmental change in Ladakh will require a wide range of technical skills. However, technological capabilities alone will not be sufficient. Ladakh's future leaders also require a shared ethical and philosophical vision. In this final section, three contributors from different backgrounds present their perspectives on what is needed.

Sonam Wangchok writes from a Buddhist background. He notes with concern the impact of changing social attitudes on Buddhist practice in Ladakh. For example, many younger monks are choosing to leave monasteries in search of secular employment. At the same time, he argues that contemporary changes are not a threat to Buddhism because Buddhism can accept ever-changing phenomena. In any case, many traditional values are based on myths and superstition. The task of the present generation is to take a pragmatic view both of past social values and of the 'corrosive forces of a materialist age', so that the Buddha's core message of wisdom and compassion can take firmer and deeper roots in Ladakh.

Muhammad Omar Gutu Nadvi, the maulvi of the Jama Masjid in Leh, writes of the need for relationships between people to be based on co-operation, trust, respect and goodwill. If that is to happen, they need to understand and respect each other's cultures and beliefs, particularly their religious beliefs. To assist this process, he has undertaken the task of translating the Holy Quran into simple Ladakhi language, together with Konchok Panday, a highly skilled scholar of Buddhism. He hopes that this project will contribute to common understanding and thus to peaceful co-existence and cooperation between different communities.

Robert Cook writes from a Western perspective. He notes that 'operational adjustments to our technological, economic and social systems' are necessary if we are to meet the challenges of

AN ETHIC FOR THE FUTURE?

'development', but at the same time calls for a new ethic to replace modern consumerist beliefs. In searching for a new ethic, he points to the emerging common ground between Western psychological thinking and Buddhist values. Ladakhi villages are noted for a sense of shared community purpose. Like Sonam Wangchuk, he suggests that it may be necessary for religion to be taught in a new way. However, if this is done, Ladakh may be able to contribute to the emergence of a more ethical socio-economic system that is truly sustainable.