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BI ANNUAL  
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LADAKH  
CHAPTER

# SHERIG MELONG

REFLECTIONS ON CULTURE

## ENDANGERED PETROGLYPHS OF LADAKH

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One of the largest continuous networks of pre historic rock carvings in India, if not the world, is slowly disappearing. The 60 kms stretch along the Indus river is dotted with petroglyph sites dating back to the Bronze and Iron ages. Rivalling the well known rock art site of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, these rock carving shed light on ancient cultural linkages between India and Central Asia predating the famed Silk Route. Petroglyphs, (an image created by removing part of a rock surface by incising, pecking, carving or scratching) etched over 5000 years ago by some of the earliest inhabitants of Ladakh provide a rare glimpse of Ladakh's prehistoric past depicting images of animals, humans and symbols. It is from these boulders, located along the banks of the Indus and other rivers, that we learn of early cultural routes that linked Ladakh with Central Asia.

These links with Central Asia are confirmed with historic rock inscriptions carved in

Chinese, Sogdian and even Tocharian dated from the end of the 1st millennium AD. In addition we find rare inscriptions written in ancient Indian scripts of Kharoshti, Brahmi and Sarada that shed rare light on the history of Ladakh through the first millennium AD. The earliest Tibetan inscriptions of Ladakh were written down in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century or early 9<sup>th</sup> century at the apogee of the Tibetan Empire by army officers.

While there is evidence of early destruction of rock inscriptions, what is of worry in recent years is the rapid pace at which these carvings are disappearing. The destruction has not been intentional but rather arises primarily from a lack of awareness on the significance of these sites followed by the lack of adequate legislation that can ensure their protection. As roads are widened, new roads laid and construction reaching its peak, the boulders are being blasted – sometimes to make way for roads but more often to generate material for construction. In the





*Ancient Kharosthi inscription documented by Francke at Khaltse that no longer exists*

span of a single generation, Ladakh is losing several hundred generations worth of history that will never be recovered.

The earliest known destruction of a historic inscription is perhaps the famous Kharosthi inscription first documented by the Moravian missionary A.H Francke in 1909. This inscription mentioned the name of the Kushan ruler Wima Kadphises II and threw light on Ladakh's links with the Kushan empire. The boulders were threatened with destruction even then. Francke records "We arrived in Khaltse just in time to prevent the boulders containing the oldest inscriptions of Ladakh from being broken. There are several rocks near Khaltse bridge bearing ancient Kharosthi inscriptions, and one with an ancient Brahmi inscription. A new bridge was under construction, many boulders, some with interesting rock carvings and inscriptions had been blasted; and the boulder with the Brahmi inscription had already been marked for blasting."

Fortunately, Francke documented some of these inscriptions for today there is no trace of them - they have vanished possibly destroyed at the time of the construction of the bridge.

In more recent years, there has been an alarming increase in the number of known carvings that have been destroyed. The most recent destruction, was documented by Martin Vernier, an archaeologist, who first visited the Lungnak valley of Zanskar in 1999 documenting one of the largest precincts of petroglyphs in Ladakh - 825 found at a single location in the village of Zamthang. The site is dominated by a large, dark reddish slab which bears 285 hunting and chasing scenes as well as animals, humans and

representations of masks similar to engraved images found in Central Asia. These can be dated from the Bronze and Iron Ages (2500-300 BC). A Tibetan inscription from the site was documented in 1990. This peculiar inscription is one of the most ancient testimonies to the presence of Tibetan army officers originating from Khotan (Xinjiang, China) in Ladakh in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Vernier returned to Yamthang, in summer 2011 to discover that the large slab had been destroyed to make way for a learning centre – to make matters worse, the carved boulders had been used as building material for the school.

The case of Zamthang highlights the urgent need to generate awareness among village communities living near petroglyph sites as well as funding institutions on the immense significance of these sites. By linking the safeguarding of these heritage sites to the contemporary life of village communities it may be possible to preserve petroglyphs for the future.

Heritage education for school children need to promote



*Petroglyph precinct in Zamthang, (Zanskar) over which a school has been constructed (Inset) Mascoids from the precinct used as construction material for the plinth of the school building. Signage for the school overwritten over a petroglyph boulder. © Martin Vernier*

#### WHAT ARE WE DOING TO PRESERVE PETROGLYPHS?

The Convenor, Shri Tsering Angchok (Hornak) and Executive Committee member, Shri Thupstan Norboo met with Shri Rigzen Spalbar, CEC, LAHDC and discussed the plight of rock carvings and petroglyphs across Ladakh. CEC expressed his concern over the destruction of petroglyphs. INTACH will now work closely with the LAHDC and communities residing near petroglyph clusters to develop petroglyph precincts. This will be promoted through heritage walks to generate awareness on this facet of Ladakh's most ancient heritage.

INTACH in collaboration with TEDAHL and RASOL has also prepared a pamphlet for the BRO to be disseminated to its dispatches across the region. With the aid of diagrams, the pamphlet enables easy identification of petroglyphs.



better understanding of Ladakh's ancient past. Creation of petroglyph precincts promoted through heritage walks and tours can help generate incomes for village bodies and make the preservation of such heritage sites economically viable. But more critically there needs to be adequate legislation and regulations that ensures the protection of these historic remains. It is only through a combined strategy of adequate legislation and awareness building that the future of this 5000 year old heritage can be ensured.

Ladakhi scholar, Tashi Dawa who has been documenting petroglyphs for the past 15 years, laments the rapid destruction of many sites that he has documented. Most recently, a small precinct of boulders before the bridge to Stakna were destroyed as a private road was laid to the left of the bridge. Boulders surviving on the right of the bridge, are testament to the unique carvings found in this particular site. The destruction of the Zamthang and Stakna sites follow earlier known destruction of petroglyph sites in Alchi, Khaltse, Taru and Yaru Zampa (en route to Chilling).

Road laying and widening are crucial in Ladakh for both strategic reasons as well as for linking remote hamlets with the district and block headquarters. However, today with the mapping of petroglyph clusters it is possible to identify major clusters and develop strategies for protecting these



Stone contractors breaking stone near Domkhar. The rapid upsurge in construction has created a huge demand for stone.

© Martin Vernier

boulders. Heritage regulations to protect Ladakh's cultural and natural heritage can guide development projects in the region to ensure that there is minimum damage to this heritage. In extreme cases where it is not possible to avoid going through a petroglyph cluster, provisions can be made to move the boulders to specially created petroglyph precincts. Quarrying of stone for construction also needs to be regulated to ensure that stone crushers are not permitted to work in identified petroglyph precincts. Discussions held by INTACH with the BRO in June, 2011 have led to the creation of a small pamphlet for the BRO which will be issued to all their dispatches involved in road construction. A recent discussion with the LAHDC has elicited support for the creation of petroglyph precincts. (see box on pg 2) These steps are a small beginning in what must necessarily be a larger, long term programme for the preservation of petroglyphs.

Petroglyph site at Yaru Zampa (between Sumda Dho and Chiling). The road to Zarskar being laid in the area has damaged a large number of petroglyphs, directly through blasting and indirectly as blasted stone hurled against petroglyph boulders crushing them © Martin Vernier



## FAMOUS UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE ROCK ART SITES AROUND THE WORLD

Rock art sites are gaining increasing recognition around the world and a large number of sites have been recognized as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO



The famous rock art caves of Lascaux, FRANCE



Rock art of the Mediterranean Basin on the Iberian Peninsula, SPAIN



Petroglyphs from the Tamgaly Gorge, Kazakhstan.



Rock Art of Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh, India)

Images from [www.whcuneso.org](http://www.whcuneso.org)

# TRADITIONAL MASTER CRAFTSMEN SERIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH GELONG PALDAN (LEHDO)

Gelong Paldan has devoted his life to building and restoring chorten largely in the Sham area. He acquired his learning from his master Khenpo Konchok Stanzin over 50 years ago and follows the text of the Buddhist philosopher, Dharmakirti.

*Chorten are found all across Ladakh, some dating back over a 1000 years. What is the meaning of the different kinds of chorten that we find today. Is there a common text outlining proportions for the chorten?*

Chorten are originally derived from the eight prototypes built soon after the death of the Buddha. Each type commemorates an event in the Buddha's lifetime. So for example you have the Changchub chorten symbolizing the Buddha's enlightenment, the Labab chorten symbolizing the Buddha's descent from Tusita heaven after preaching the dharma to his mother, and so on and forth. Whatever the type of chorten though, it is traditionally built according to strict guidelines. The guidelines were modified slightly over time and according to the different schools of Buddhism—Nyingma, Drigung Kagyud, Dugpa Kagyud, Saskya, Kadampa and Gelugpa etc. Within each school also there will be variations based on the different time periods in which the guidelines were

amended. While the basic proportions in these texts remain more or less the same there are small differences in measurements and details. I follow the text of Dharmakirti. There are many other texts including those by Yasel, Dharmabhatta and others. It is important to try and trace the text.

There is a profound symbolism in every element of the chorten. So its important that each element is correctly built.

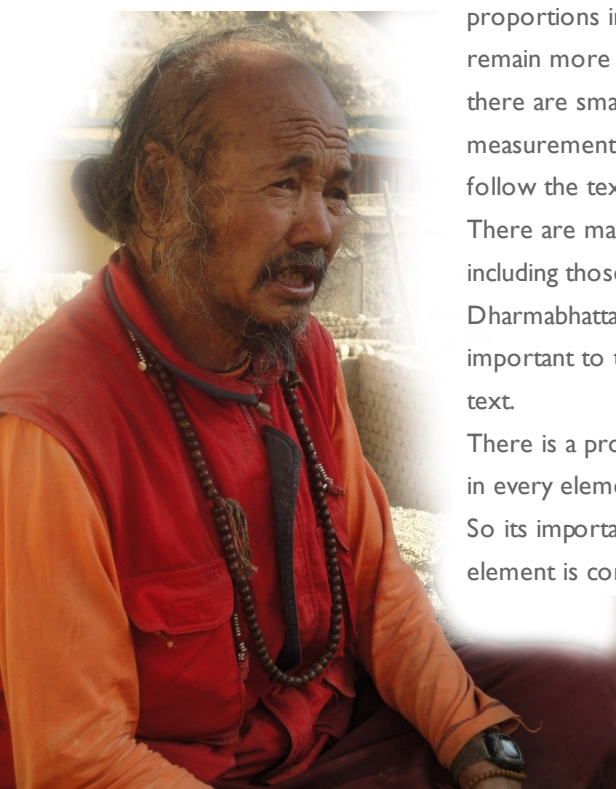
*Are all historic chorten built according to texts?*

While many chorten are built according to the text, we sometimes also find chorten that do not adhere to any text and are not built in proportion. For example, in the past when kings ordered chorten to be built by those who have committed a crime, or as a punishment, in those cases we may find that the chorten are not built in proportion or using good quality material. The Zung Dus text clearly states that best quality material should be employed in the construction of a chorten.

*From a contemporary conservation point of view, we would restore the chorten to the form in which we find it. So if there are imperfections in its measurements those are retained. What is your view on restoring a chorten that does not conform to the guidelines. Ideally a chorten should conform to the text. If it does not conform to the basic proportions then it cannot be deemed a perfect chorten worthy of worship. According to me, if a chorten in worship does not conform then it should be rebuilt to its correct standard and we should correct these imperfections. But it is first important to find out if the chorten followed a text or not. Unfortunately we have not researched into the many different variations The earliest chorten dating back to the time of Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo (10th -11th century) are unique and I have not come across any text of this period. It is difficult to restore these chorten.*

*A chorten is only deemed worthy of worship once all the rituals are performed. Tell us about the rituals that should be conducted while restoring a chorten.*

Before restoration the proper rituals need to be carried out. The *argachog* ritual should be carried out to remove the sacredness (*ishes pa*) and then on completion the *rabnas* should be conducted by a learned monk to reinstate the *ishespa*. These rituals are important because we have legends that describe how malevolent spirits can enter un consecrated images and religious structures and cause harm. There is a famous legend of Dugpa Kulnis and the Maitreya statue in Tibet where an evil spirit enters the statue before the rabnas causing havoc in the kingdom. Dugpa Kulnis was then invited by the King. He said he would arrive in 7 days and





to prepare for the puja. People gathered at the temple to welcome him but he entered quietly through the rear. He shot an arrow into the forehead of the statue and a large scorpion emerged rushing out towards the crowd gathered outside. The learned monk then performed the *rabnas*.

*There are some powerful chorten that are built for specific reasons like the special chorten now being built across Ladakh to protect the land from natural disasters like earthquakes. In the past too such chorten were built.. Is it possible to restore these chorten?*

Such chorten are built to trap 18 types of sins (*shi*) and as such are constructed after a lot of ritual pujas. If while repairing a chorten, coal is found in the foundations then it must not be disturbed and should be quickly laid back. These chorten can also be identified by the monks.

*Constructing a new chorten is seen as an act of merit. Do you feel that restoring an old chorten also brings merit to the patron?*

Both the acts of building a new chorten or restoring an old one can bring merit depending on the spirit in which they are carried out. If someone demolishes an old chorten and rebuilds it in another place because they want to make way for a road leading to their house, then it is a selfish motive and not one that arises out of compassion for all sentient beings. In such cases there is no merit in (re) building the chorten. But if you restore a chorten with the spirit of benefiting other beings then there is greater merit. It comes down to the spirit with which the building or restoration of a chorten is carried out.

SEPT

## TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR CHORTEN RESTORATION



(Left) Chorten at Mane Tsermo before restoration (Right) Trainees work under the guidance of Gelong Paldan in restoring the chorten as close to correct proportions as possible

The proportions of a chorten follow strict guidelines according to the texts. Today, only a handful of senior masons hold knowledge of these texts and are able to thus carry out repair. The need to train village masons on the correct techniques of chorten restoration including an understanding of the proportions of the chorten were raised in a meeting with the Ladakh Buddhist Association. A training programme for masons was thus organized in September under the guidance of Gelong Paldan where a group of seven masons including 5 women were trained in the tradition of Dharmabhatta. Two chorten at Mane Tsermo, Leh were taken up for restoration. The workshop was conducted through the Community Conservation Grant programme funded by the Ford Foundation.



(Left) Gelong Paldan prepares the chugsum khorlo, the central pillar that is later inserted into the chorten. Sacred mantras are tied at specific points on the juniper pole prior to insertion in the chorten (Right) Rabnas of the restored chorten is held completing the material and ritual cycles of restoration



# CHIKTAN KHAR - DOCUMENTATION AND DESIGN STUDIO FOR ADAPTIVE REUSE

JULY

Chiktan Khar, an impressive 17th century citadel served as the capital of the independent kingdom of Chiktan. The citadel built during the reign of king Tsering Malik was brilliantly constructed by the legendary Balti craftsman Shinkhan Chandan. Over the years, the citadel has fallen to ruin and in 2010 was recognized as one of the World's Hundred Most Endangered Sites by the World Monuments Watch. In an effort to conserve the site and explore an appropriate adaptive reuse of sections of the fort, a conservation plan for the citadel is being prepared by the Chapter. As part of this initiative, students from the International Programme in Design and Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand spent a week in Chiktan documenting the fort and

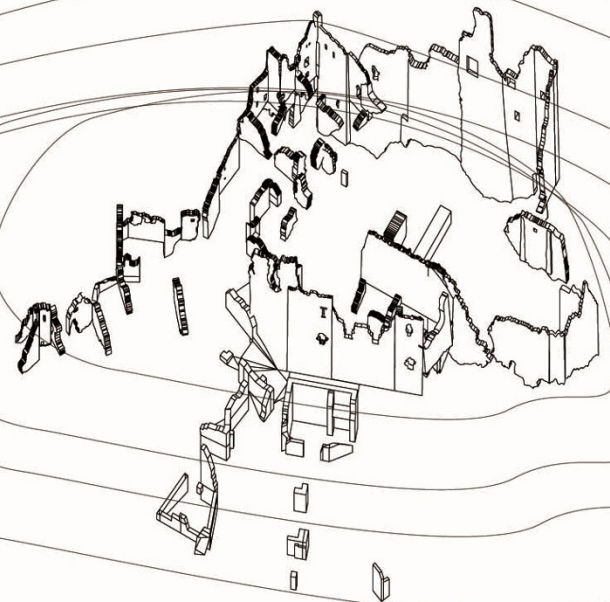
*Haji Abdul Hussain, an elder village mason from Chiktan explains construction techniques adopted in the palace*



*Students documenting the ruined palace*



*Students presenting their designs for adaptive reuse at the INTACH Chapter office in Leh*



exploring potentials for a sensitive adaptive reuse of the complex. Kaho Mumtaz Ali Khan, Co Convenor, Ladakh Chapter and Murtaza Khalili, Chapter member, facilitated this interaction between the students and the Chiktan village community.

Interviews with village elders were held to document the oral traditions in terms of folk lore and folk songs pertaining to the fort for which Chiktan is famous. Based on the preliminary documentation, a conservation plan for the site is presently being developed.

## Fox History Channel's "My City My History" Contest - Essay on Chiktan Khar

Tha Tha Khan was the founder of Chiktan and Sot kingdom. His enemy hatched a plan to kill him by treachery. He fled to Baltistan with his foster father and brothers. Later they crossed the river. Tha Tha Khan was carrying a stick of birch in his hand and he planted that stick near the present day Kukshow village and sowed walnuts and prayed to god that the walnut shall spread their roots and become a huge tree. At that time these places were uninhabited. Ultimately wandering here and there, they reached Sot where they were employed by a rich man. After spending few years in Sot, Tha Tha Khan along with his companions returned to Kukshow and Dargo. In Kukshow his planted birch tree had spread roots and had become green and in Dargo the walnut had started growing. Tha Tha Khan considered it as good omen for him and constructed two houses there. To To Khar castle for himself and Pa To Khar for his companions. In course of time he conquered all the Chiktan and Sot area and established his kingdom. Chiktan castle was built later by King Tsering Malik, one of the great kings of Chiktan in 16th century in Tibetan style of architecture. The castle is very picturesquely built on the steep cliff. It was a nine storied castle and was considered the most beautiful palace in Ladakh.. The castle was known for its revolving cabin at the top known as "Dab Da-ber". The only entrance to the castle passes through a steep rock which seems could have been guarded easily. The wall of the castle is about 3-4 feet thick and are load bearing. These structures usually have a high plinth which also acts as a foundation comprising of random rubble masonry. A unique thing was noticed in the construction of walls, a special shrub local name of "Seth" which is very durable and strong is used as reinforcement. Another unique thing in its construction is the foundation, which starts with a small stone size increases with the increase in the width of the wall. The wood works are awe inspiring depicting various flowers, animals and legendary symbols. Some unscrupulous persons dismantled the main structure for stone to construct the hospital and many important rock carvings and symbols were destroyed. This was a serious blow to the existence of Ladakh's "most beautiful castle" eclipsing one of the rich cultural past of the area.

**Habibullah**

**Class IX student of S.V.P.S, Kargil**

### TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR MASONS ON RAMMED EARTH AND MUD BRICK PRODUCTION, CHIKTAN



Mud has been an ancient building material in Ladakh and Ladakh's oldest extant buildings dating back over a 1000 years have been constructed in a range of techniques employing the judicious use of earth.

Understanding the traditional knowledge system that went into traditional earthen construction is critical today. As concrete begins replacing mud as a building material, the knowledge on earthen architectural techniques and materials are becoming increasingly endangered. To address this, a two day training programme was held at Chiktan with a group of young masons from Chiktan and neighbouring villages to understand the correct techniques of producing mud bricks and rammed earth - two historic building techniques employed in Ladakh. Hajji Abdul Hussain, a senior mason, shared his knowledge on traditional methods for the preparation of mud bricks and rammed earth. He also highlighted the use of organic binders like chopped straw, reeds and aggregates that helped strengthen mud bricks and rammed earth. The workshop formed a part of the Ford Foundation funded Community Conservation Grant programme in Ladakh.



# COMMUNITY CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAMME



The Community Conservation grant programme, which is being funded by the Ford Foundation, began this year with the conservation of a small village temple at Khaling, Tia. The project was selected from a number of applications received from village *tsogspa* (societies) following radio announcements of the launch of the grant programme.

The temple, built in rammed earth, is one of the few historic rammed earth temples to survive. Additional layers of mud thrown over the roof had caused the two columns within the temple to twist out of plumb. Around eighty years ago four more columns were added to distribute the load of the roof. However, cracks in the painted wall surface could not be addressed. Following an approach of minimal intervention to the building, the additional layers of mud were removed and the final layer relaid with a proper slope after providing additional drainage outlets. The circumambulatory path around the temple was paved with local *yamangs* and emergency conservation of wall paintings was carried out.



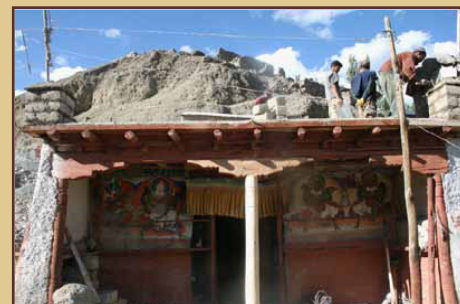
Minimal intervention to preserve the wall paintings was carried out which included consolidating delaminated layers of paint, grouting major cracks in the painted walls and cleaning the original paintings of the skylight



Load on the roof is reduced by removing additional layers added over the years. Proper drainage slopes and spouts were provided and the mud roof relaid



Cracks on the south eastern wall are stitched using umbu (tamarisk) and mud mortar



The central column of the front porch which had decayed is replaced. The traditional parapet is relaid using willow twigs split at the ends to form a padma or lotus.



AUG



## RESTORATION OF CHORTEN, GYA

Following the floods last year, a number of *chorten* in Gya, Meeru and Stakmo were badly affected. A proposal to restore the damaged *chorten* and to train village masons in the proportions of *chorten* based on well known texts was accepted for funding by the Prince Claus Fund. This year, work began on the first group of *chorten* located below the ancient *khar* (fort) at Gya. The *chorten* were located on an old path that led to the fort.

Ladakh Chapter EC member, Ms Diskit Dolkar facilitated discussions with Gelong Nawang Rigzen (Khaspang) to ascertain the correct approach to the restoration of these damaged *chorten*. As the forms of the present *chorten* did not conform to texts available presently to the experts it was not possible to determine which texts had been followed in their construction. It was, therefore, agreed to reconstruct the collapsed *chorten* based on existing evidence in the form of the two extant *chorten* which still survive at the site. Proportions for the *chorten* were worked out based on available evidence and one Changchub *chorten* reconstructed in October.

The *mane tsogs pa* of Gya has been keenly involved in the project and contributed their time and expertise in supervising the work as well as organizing material and labour at site.

As water began freezing by mid October, the plastering of the *chorten* and final finishing work could not be completed. These will be undertaken next year along with the restoration of the other collapsed *chorten* in the cluster and the ancient *tsabgyat chorten* located on a barren plain beyond the fort. The large Namgyal *chorten* in Meeru and the *tsabgyay chorten* in Stakmo will also be taken up for restoration next year.



*Argachog ceremony being conducted by the monk and villagers prior to commencement of work*



*Reconstructing the four steps (pangrim) of the collapsed chorten prior to the recreation of the pungpa*

*(L) The collapsed chorten before restoration and (R) the chorten after restoration.*





## IGU KHAR CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Igu khar located about 42 kms from Leh was the seat of Sakya Gyatso a legendary general in the army of Deldan Namgyal. A member of the Bankhapa family who owned a number of villages in the Sakti valley, Sakya Gyatso retained Igu as his seat. The fort, perched on a cliff, once incorporated the family's residence, their private chapel and *tashag* in addition to a *dukhang* and houses of the village community.

The citadel was abandoned many years ago and in 2003 statues, sacred texts from Karugma *lhakhang*, the private chapel of Sakya Gyatso, were shifted to a new temple located in the village below. The chapel has some of the finest paintings of its period. Notable among them is an elaborate banquet scene clearly highlighting the Central Asian influence that contributed to Ladakhi culture.

The murals are being damaged now as water slowly percolates into the mud walls from a decayed roof above. In 2010 following the flash floods, INTACH Ladakh chapter undertook a field visit to Igu and noted further damage to the paintings caused by the seepage from the area around the water spouts. An emergency conservation grant from INTACH UK Trust enabled clearance of superfluous debris from the roof, clearance of the water spouts and provision of temporary protection against rains and snow melt which were removed soon after the rain. A conservation programme for the temple and fort has been developed by the Chapter in close partnership with the Igu village community. Community consultations were held with the active support of Shri Tashi Norboo, Councillor from Igu, the Goba, Shri Wangial Tsering, Ladakh Chapter EC member and Shri Tsering Angchok, Ladakh Chapter convenor to develop the conservation programme. In December 2011, villagers were mobilized to clear the debris from the path and create better access to the temple and fort. With these efforts the temple and fort are now accessible. Next year, the Chapter proposes to begin work in restoring the *tashag* and Karugma *lhakhang*. A community managed visitor centre will be created in the *tashag* and youth from the village trained to conduct heritage tours to the fort. Subsequently other areas of the fort will be taken up for conservation in the following years.



View from the fort looking down at the temples showing debris blocking the path



Villagers clear the debris to create access to the fort as well as prevent boulders from crashing down on the temple below



Emergency protection during the rains was provided to prevent water intrusion into the temple

View of the path (L) before and (R) after it was repaired in Dec 2011



Detail of the banquet scene in the Karugma *lhakhang*



# SEPT

## HERITAGE INTERPRETERS TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR CULTURAL GUIDES

The profession of guiding has attracted many youth across Ladakh and with the increase in tourist arrivals in recent years the demand for guides will only increase in coming years. Their role, to introduce guests to the rich and vibrant culture and landscape of Ladakh, is crucial in providing a good visitor experience. As cultural ambassadors of Ladakh, the responsibility of the guide is to ensure that Ladakh's heritage (cultural and natural) is correctly interpreted for visitors.

A training programme for cultural guides was organized by the Chapter through the sponsorship of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The training programme was developed in collaboration with the All Ladakh Tour Operators Association and the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. Based on discussions with both ALTOA and the J&K Academy it was decided that a practical programme be devised so as to instill new perspectives on established tourist routes for the guides. The training expanded the ambit to include thematic lectures on diverse subjects including Ladakh's architecture, prehistory, geography and wildlife, and its Buddhist monastic heritage.

The workshop (22—27 September, 2011) was held at the J&K Academy and was inaugurated by the Executive Councillor for Tourism (LAHDC), Shri Gyurmet Dorje.

Over the course of 6 days, the trainees were provided a different

perspective on well established routes around Leh town. The focus for this first workshop was to explore sites within a 30 kms radius of Leh that could be covered by tourists based in Leh.

was well appreciated and identified as an area of interpretation for tourists. Tashi Dawa, introduced the trainees to Ladakh's earliest prehistoric past through a field visit to Taru thang where trainees saw for the first time 5000 year old petroglyphs lying a short distance from Leh town. heritage walk through the old Leh town was conducted by Sonam Gyatso (LOTI) where trainees explored possibilities of expanding visits to the Leh Palace with an exploration of the old town. A field visit to understand the Buddhist heritage of Ladakh was conducted by scholar and Ladakh Chapter EC member, Thupstan Norboo. The field visit included visits to Matho and Stakna monasteries and the ruined choskhor at Nyarma where the earliest remains of the second resurgence of Buddhism can be seen.

Trainees were given an introduction to the advent of Buddhism in Ladakh and the establishment of the different schools of Buddhism. The linkage between the monastery and the village settlement were also discussed and ways by which visitors to the monastery can get to experience different facets of village and monastic life were reflected upon. En route to Matho, a brief discussion was initiated on the possibility of halting at Chushot.

The trainees broke up into three groups to develop fresh itineraries based on the new perspective of looking at different elements of Ladakhi culture and moving beyond the stereotypes. This new itinerary was enacted as a skit by each group and later an exhibition on the itineraries was put up by the trainees. Recommendation for future workshops as well as the need for sustained learning on different aspects of Ladakh's history, culture and environment were proposed. In continuation of this training, INTACH is now working with the group of guides in developing two heritage walks which will commence next year.



*Shri Gyurmet Dorje, Executive Councillor for Tourism presides as chief guest at the inaugural function*

perspective on well established routes around Leh town. The focus for this first workshop was to explore sites within a 30 kms radius of Leh that could be covered by tourists based in Leh.

Padmashri Morup Namgyal delivered the first lecture of the workshop focusing on Ladakhi history, music and culture, costume and cuisine. The wonderful expression of Ladakhi life reflected through the music



*Trainees enact skits based on the new itineraries devised by them*

# HERITAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

## WORLD HERITAGE DAY, 2011

INTACH Ladakh Chapter, celebrated this year's world heritage day on the ICOMOS theme of "Cultural Heritage of Water". The celebrations were held at the traditional pastures of Skara, on the outskirts of Leh—a site that was once known for its springs that fed the stream which form the lifeline of the settlement. The pastures are dotted with small earthen structures - *lubang*—built to placate the *lu* or underworld serpent deities who control the flow of water. These *lubang* are renewed by the community every spring prior to sowing the fields. Special offerings of cow's milk after the birth of a calf were made at the *lubang* of this pasture to ensure a constant and clean source of water.

Shri Rigzen Spalbar, Chief Executive Councillor, Ladakh Autonomous Hill

Development Council, was the chief guest for the function. School children from

different schools in Leh were invited for the



Shri Rigzen Spalbar, CEC, Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council presents prizes to the national winners of the Fox History Channel My City My History essay contest

# APRIL

event. Shri Spalbar highlighted the role of the community in preserving traditional water sources and urged urgent action to prevent the pollution of these streams. Gelong Thupstan Paldan spoke to the children on the role of water in Ladakhi culture. Ladakh Chapter Convenor, Tsering Angchok and INTACH EC member Thupstan Norboo highlighted the need for both cultural and natural heritage conservation in Ladakh. The event concluded with the distribution of prizes by the Chief Guest to the winners of the Fox History Channel "My City My History contest".

## CHILDREN'S HERITAGE CLUB

A children's heritage club was founded by the Ladakh chapter to generate awareness among school children on the various dimensions of Ladakh's heritage. 62 children have enrolled in the club which meets once a month for film screenings, field visits, painting/

essay exhibitions, craft activities etc. The first meeting of the club was held on the 27th of

November 2011 at the INTACH Chapter

office where the

children discussed the mandate of the club and the kind of activities that can be undertaken.

The second meeting was held on the 18th of November 2011. The children were divided into small groups for a group discussion on heritage issues in Ladakh. Each group developed a logo and name for the club which they shared with the other groups. A short film on Ladakh shot in 1974 was then screened and this was followed by a discussion on the changing culture of Ladakh.



Children develop a logo and name for their heritage club



A Heritage club meeting at the INTACH Ladakh chapter office in Leh



# DOCUMENTING INTANGIBLE KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

## CHIKTAN

Chiktan has for many centuries been renowned as a cradle of Ladakhi culture, famous for its folk lore, folk songs, traditional sports such as polo and archery. The story of the ruined citadel that today looms large over the village, is known through folk lore and legends. The beauty of the palace was put to verse and even today is sung by village elders. The adventures of the early migrants who settled here, legends of the clever and talented Balti architect, Shinkhan Chandan, are still recounted.

To understand the fort and its place in history, documentation of these oral traditions was initiated. Interviews with village elders including women provided different perspectives of the area's history and associations with the fort.



*Ancient fort of Gyapo Cho in Gya*

## GYA

Gya is one of the oldest villages in Ladakh and evidence of the early Mon settlers are seen in the ruined chorten which dot the landscape. It was ruled by a line of chieftains referred to as Gyapa Cho. According to oral traditions Gyapa Cho invited the Tibetan prince Nimagon to establish his kingdom in Ladakh and help them fend off attacks from the Yarkandis. Gya is rich in its oral traditions, folk songs and festivals. An interview with Meme Rigzen Urgainpa (Rebopa) was conducted to learn about Gya's history and culture through its folk songs and lore.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NIGHT SKY WITH THE NOMADS OF KORZOG

Nomadic populations and trading communities across the ancient world had their own understanding of the night sky where constellations, events like the lunar or solar eclipse, the waxing and waning of the moon or its changing colour were 'read'. In Changthang the indigenous astronomy tradition is known as Kargoon. 28 constellations are recognized by the Changpa which are collectively known as Gu-kar Nyeshu Sabgyat (in Changthang dialect) or Gys-kar Nye-shu-Sabgyat (in Leh dialect). Interviews with Meme Nawang Namgyal Khamak pa were held and constellations are being mapped. Lakskor (corresponding to the Orion constellation) is seen as the left hand with the belt forming the wrist and Orions' bow forming the little, middle fingers and thumb. When the moon passes through this constellations at different phases (known as *thool*) predictions are made. E.g the moon passes through the hand then it will be a good year for production of butter, cheese and milk; passing through the tips of the fingers predicts a harsh season not good for the nomads livestock.



*Lak skor- the constellation in the shape of a hand corresponding to the constellation of Orion*

# TARSING KARMO PILGRIMAGE

*Kunzes Dolma undertook the Tarsing Karmo pilgrimage in November 2011 and shares this report on the pilgrimage. Sacred journeys such as this reaffirm the close linkages between people and the landscape in which their cultures evolve.*

The mountains of Ladakh are home to a rich tradition of sacred geography where many sacred sites have been discovered over the centuries giving rise to pilgrim trails in one of the world's highest terrains. Tarsing Karmo is one of the most well known pilgrim sites in Changthang where pilgrims undertake a pilgrimage on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month of the Tibetan Calendar. Located in Durbuk block, the nearest village to the pilgrim site is Shayok. Today the site is connected by road but prior to 2008 people made the pilgrimage on horse back or walked here. Pilgrims carry their tents and food, pitching camp en route to the sacred mountains. It is said that many centuries ago traders from Hor (Yarkand) passed through this

route and saw images in the mountains. It is also believed that Muslim pilgrims from Yarkand making their way to Mecca for the Haj also used this

route. Venerable Togdan Rinpoche and Lha chen Takla Angchok, the local oracle, came to Tarsing Karmo and blessed this place.

A few kilometers from Shayok, at Chak-tsal gang, the oracle tells the pilgrims not to carry intoxicants or meat further on as



*The ancient Hor route*

it will pollute the sacred mountains and result in pilgrims not being able to view the sacred imagery. Pilgrims reach here by the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month. People prostrate themselves to atone for their sins and to garner merit. On the other side of Chak-tsal gang across the Shayok river and between the steep cliffs of the mountains, a naturally lit butter lamp can be seen on the auspicious day. The pilgrimage starts from here and many sacred impressions of Buddhist deities and sacred objects can be seen on either side of the Shayok river here.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> day, at dawn pilgrims begin crossing the Shayok river. In the past people would ride on horseback to ford the river. The entire day of the 15<sup>th</sup> is spent in visiting the sacred impressions. A huge cave known as Dolmay Tu-phuk is reached around lunch time when pilgrims halt for lunch. The oracle blesses the place and holy water drips down in the cave which is drunk by the pilgrims who also carry some back for their



*View of the sacred mountain, Tarsing Karmo*



*Pilgrims gather at the Dolmay Tu phuk*



# LOSAR CELEBRATIONS AT GYA

*Losar*, the traditional Ladakhi New Year festival, was traditionally celebrated over several days in the 11th month of the Tibetan calendar. It was a time of community gathering marked by performances of special folk songs and events. The traditional festivities that marked *Losar* are today celebrated in only a handful of villages across Ladakh. One such village is Gya which celebrates *Losar* in a unique way linking the festivities to its pre 9th century line of rulers known as *Gyapa Cho* (see pg 13).

Famous events in the Gya *Losar* celebration include the horse race. In the afternoon of the 2nd day of the 11th month of the Tibetan calendar, people begin to prepare their horses for the event. The horses are then led up to the *Gonpa* (in the fort of *Gyapa Cho*) for *Dala Sparches* (blessing of the horses for the race). The whips are taken into the temple where the monk performs the *Yang gugs* ritual. The sword and bow of *Gyapa Cho* housed permanently in the *Gonpa* are then taken out along with the *Dra Melong* the target which the horse riders are supposed to hit with a stone. The *lhardak* (keeper of the *lhato* or altar to the protector deity of the *Gyapa Cho* family) along with some village elders then dance with the sword and bow of *Gyapa Cho*.

After the horses and riders are blessed by the monk, they are led to the field by the *lhardak* where the race has been held for over a thousand years. The *lhardak* circles the group holding incense in his hands and singing an auspicious song for the success of the race. The race commences with the beating of the *daman* (drums) and riders race towards the *Dra Melong*, kept in the centre of the field, attempting to hit the target with the stone. The person who succeeds in breaking the target is declared the bravest in the village. The race concludes with the dance of the *lhardak* wielding *Gyapa Cho*'s sword and bow.

Another special *Losar* custom in Gya is that known as *Abi Meme*. A group of eleven people

(known as *Bak pas* who are members of the 11 oldest families in the village) headed by an elder (*Meme*) and another man taking on the role of the *Abi* (elder woman) visit all the houses in the hamlets of Gya, Rumtse and Lato.

They visit houses which have been blessed with a recent marriage, a new born baby that year and ask for money. Before asking for money though *Abi Meme* recites a mantra, in a special voice, said to have been recited by the *Cho* which runs something like this *Gyagar Chhiyi Gyapo, Gyanak Rtseyi Gyapo, Bakta Horgi Gyapo, Takrig Norge Gyapo, Thompa Laggi Gyapo, Tot Ngari Skorsum, Bar Ustang Rurzhi, Maan Dho Khamsum, Yul Kandu zukspay yultse, khar kandu zuk pay Serla, sponba auru zukspay gurlha kazhu nyanbay zabla chot* (names of all the *lha* or mountain deities, the line of kings or *Gyapo* and the village protector deities).

Three members of the group begin dancing if they do not receive adequate offerings and continue dancing till such time as they do. The event lasts for three days. On the fourth day, people gather in the evening at the old Hemis Labrang which was the old residence of the last *Gyapa Cho*. Here the *Bak pas* perform the

*Meytho* ritual for the entire village. The *Meytho* is a ritual held during *Losar* when

people light lamps with an effigy of the devil made of dough amidst loud shouts and cries ushering the devil out of the village. The *Meme* of the *Bak pas* prays for the happiness and prosperity of the entire village in the year to come.



Horses prepared by their riders await blessings in the old fort

(see image on pg 13)



Horse riders race on the barren field towards the *Dra Melong*



The *lhardak* dancing with *Gyapa Cho*'s sword and bow

# MESSAGE FROM THE CONVENOR

Ladakh occupies an important place in the cultural identity of India. Famous both for its natural heritage in terms of its diverse flora and fauna as well as its cultural heritage, including both the tangible and intangible, that have been cared for by the local communities for centuries, Ladakh is today one of the top tourist destinations in India. Largely well preserved for centuries, this heritage has now begun feeling both the positive as well as negative impacts of rapid development over the past several decades. It is the duty of all of us to preserve and promote this heritage, making it meaningful in our contemporary life and fostering pride in our culture among our youth. The INTACH Ladakh chapter, set up in July 2010, aims at working together with various stakeholders - village tsogspa, community leaders and creators of heritage and most significantly youth in ensuring that this heritage is not only preserved but also promoted, developed, renewed and created anew through capacity building and training workshops, pilot projects for promoting local stewardship and awareness programmes.

The Chapter aims through this newsletter to highlight critical concerns on specific aspects of Ladakh's heritage, share the work that the Chapter is undertaking across Ladakh and highlight through photo features some key facets of our culture.

We hope that you enjoy reading the *Shesrig Melong* and look forward to receiving your feedback on our first issue.

*Er. Tsering Angchok (Hornak)*



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## ABOUT INTACH

INTACH is a national level NGO established in 1984 with a mandate for promoting and conserving India's rich cultural and natural heritage. Over the years INTACH has established 170 Chapters across India to develop a grass roots conservation movement that engages citizens in the preservation and promotion of their heritage.

Head quartered in Delhi, the organization functions through its networks of chapters and specialized technical divisions including the architectural, material conservation, heritage tourism, intangible heritage, heritage education and communication services, crafts divisions. The Chapters division works with individual chapters across the country.

INTACH Ladakh chapter was formally established in 2010 with 15 members. INTACH is a membership based organization and membership is open to all individuals and institutions interested in associating themselves with INTACH's mandate. For further information on membership please contact the Ladakh Chapter office at

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*We welcome your feedback on our newsletter. If you would like to contribute an article on Ladakh's heritage or highlight a specific heritage issue, we would enjoy hearing from you. Please write to us at [intachladakh@gmail.com](mailto:intachladakh@gmail.com).*

*Text: Tara Sharma*

*With inputs from*

*Martin Vernier (Endangered Petroglyphs of Ladakh)*

*Kunzes Dolma for the two photo features on the Tarsing Karmo pilgrimage and Losar celebrations at Gya*

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