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Dear Sumana,

Enclosed are signed copies of LAMO's final narrative and financial report for the grant received by it from IFA under the 'Arts Research and Documentation Grant' program.

LAMO is more grateful for IFA's support during this project, and for your advice and guidance along the way.

Many thanks.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Monisha Ahmed
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AUTHORISED SIGNATORY
THE LAMO TRUST



KHARYOK – A FILM ON OLD TOWN LEH MUSIC AND CULTURAL SPACES

A Film under IFA's 'Arts Research and Documentation Grant'

FINAL REPORT

In December 2014, LAMO received a grant for five lacs towards a proposal for a film tentatively titled 'Exploring Old Town through Music'. The objective of the film was to explore the history of Old Town, its growth, changes, current status and place in Ladakh today through music. As the film looked at Old Town it explored the tradition of music prevalent there, past and present practices connected to the art, and its continuities in and influences on other places in Ladakh.

The Film – Old Town Leh's Musical Legacy

*"Tibet was known as the place where Buddhism flourished,
China for its discipline, and
Ladakh for its music and songs"*

The words of a song illustrate the importance of music in Ladakh, and they are especially true for the Old Town of Leh. With the close proximity of the Palace (Lechen Pelkhar) that loomed over it, the area was the home of several royal musicians and dancers who resided there and were given patronage by the king. Over the years, though melodies, instruments and roles have transformed, music continues to be an important part of life in Ladakh.

The film is set against the background of Old Town, with its labyrinth of narrow, winding pathways and historical buildings, some dating to the 17th century or earlier. The idea was to tell the story of Old Town through former residents and the present community, as well as traditional musicians. In this process, we have taken three important individuals; the film narrates their life-stories to reflect on the role and importance of music:

1. **Morup Namgyal** – a recipient of the Padmashree in 2004, a singer and composer, he is widely known for his vast knowledge of the subject and the revival of Ladakhi folk music. For 30 years he was the main radio artist at AIR (All India Radio) in Leh and collected hundreds of songs that would have otherwise been lost.
2. **Abi Padma Nochung** – a former, and the only surviving, Takshosma (royal court dancer). She is 98 years old, and lives at the edge of Old Town. Abi Padma was filmed at the Leh Palace, as she walked around the building recalling how the royal court dancers used to perform regularly for the king on the open terrace (known as *kathog chenmo*) located on the sixth floor of the Palace. She was able to connect traditions in Leh to Mulbeck, also the seat of royalty, and where some of them still continue today.
3. **Tsewang Phuntsog** – a Kharmon (royal musician), he reflects on his performances in the Old Town, and changes he has witnessed in the recent past.

The Process

Since 2010, LAMO has been researching and documenting the Old Town of Leh. Supported by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Jammu and Kashmir, the organisation has been mapping the social and cultural practices of Old Town, looking at the architectural heritage of the place, and exploring the problems and aspirations of its residents and the local government for the area. During the course of the study, it was realised that while Old Town has changed and many practices and traditions have been lost – families have moved out, some homes are in ruin, public performance spaces are no longer used – the one that lingers on is music.

A project on Music in Old Town thus took precedence, and a proposal was submitted to IFA to make a film on the subject. In addition to making a film, LAMO continues to support and hold music performances at its Centre in Leh with both traditional and contemporary musicians. In collaboration with the Siddhartha High School, Stok, it has held music camps for their students, assisted them to make video recordings for DVDs and is now establishing in collaboration a Sound Studio at the LAMO Centre.

As filming started it focused on the following areas: festivals, musical recitations and performances, interviews with individuals connected to various genres of music and residents of the Old Town, descriptions and construction of instruments, amongst other areas.

While a large part of the film was shot in the Old Town of Leh and the wider Leh area, trips were also made to other areas connected to the tradition in Leh. One trip was made to Delhi for archival research purposes. Archival footage (video and stills) were sought out to obtain a comprehensive historical context for the film.

1. In Leh town the following events were covered:

- Losar (New year) celebrations. During this time many different festivals take place in Leh and those filmed included: the *Metoh* procession that starts from Leh Palace and makes its way to the end of the bazaar, *Marmay* celebration in the main bazaar, a *tse tse* ritual performed by LBA (Ladakh Buddhist Association) in the main monastery in Leh with a variety of folk song presentations, *Lharna* (songs offered to the gods) performances in public spaces in Leh town as well as at residences of family's connected to the royal family. [For this film the event was filmed at the home of the Munshi family, the king's Secretary and in whose house the LAMO Centre is located.]
- *Lhasol*, ritual prayer song. This takes place in two historical homes in Old Town: Lhardak house (Lhardak was the caretaker of the royal protective deities at Leh Palace), and at Thang-thong house (they performed the same rituals but at the Kalon's [Minister's] house).
- Dosmoche. This is one of the largest festivals that takes place in Leh, over two days, usually in the month of February. The filming covered the entire process of collecting donations, offering prayers, and the celebrations.

- *Lharna* rituals. These are performed by musicians at prominent spaces in Old Town. Filming was done through the lanes leading to the main bazaar till Kadmochoy (this is near the present day Polo Ground) where Dosmoche effigies are burnt. This ritual is also performed during Losar, outside prominent houses in Old Town apart from the Palace. Today musicians perform this in a space behind Jama Masjid and outside the main Buddhist temple.
- *Storlok* ceremony. This involves days of prayers at the Cho-khang (main monastery in Leh), and then a procession through the bazaar with several effigies that are burnt near the Polo Ground. The prayers and rituals are carried out in the name of Guru Rinpoche and are performed by monks from Phyang Monastery. They are to ward off evil spirits and garner prosperity and peace, largely for the royal family.
- Saka festival. This signifies the beginning of the agricultural season, and takes place in Old Town and Leh bazaar, as well as one of the agricultural fields close by.
- In addition to filming celebrations and performances, general shots were also taken of Old Town, exploring the daily life there from collecting water to the old wood bakeries, dark lanes and covered passageways, and the challenges faced by residents living there.

2. Mulbeck:

- Mulbeck, which also has a royal lineage, has an interesting connection to Leh; the Takshosmas (royal court dancers) would come from here to perform at the royal court in Leh. In addition, some of the performances that are no longer held in Leh – such as Shon-dol (songs performed at the end of a performance in praise of the king and his family, and to wish them prosperity) – continue to be performed in Mulbeck. Interestingly, Shondol is also the only dance in Ladakhi folk tradition where male and female dancers hold each other's hands.

Filmed the Sngo-la Festival, which includes the rendition of very elaborate song and dance performances by the villagers. The event ends with Shon-dol, which is the main attraction of the festival. The event that was filmed was in some ways similar to the old pattern of performances that were followed in Old Town Leh in the past. At the same time change is also evident in Mulbeck, for instance, the Shon-dol dance ended with the youth gyrating like an electrified bunch of modern-day rock music lovers.

- Also talked to two prominent people in Mulbeck: Sonam Morup, a renowned folk singer, from the Dakshos family whose grandmother was a Takshosma and in great demand at the King's Palace in Leh. And Ama Gyamo, an elderly woman, who is currently the village Lambardar. She comes from the aristocratic Kalon (minister) family, and revealed how changes in music reflected transformations in the political arena in Ladakh. This also corroborated with what Abi Padma Nochung mentioned, that with the end of the feudal system in Ladakh, her role as a court dancer ceased to be of importance. And how subsequently, with the commercialization of performances and the entry of new singers such as Morup Namgyal and Ama Cho Cho Tsangs-pa, changes came into the Shon-dol performance. These changes also took the performances beyond Old Town Leh to newer spaces, as well as the

composition and performance of more and more new songs (*lu soma*) as now people were free to introduce and compose different songs unlike in the past when songs were mostly in praise of kings and high lamas.

3. Shey:

- Filmed the Shey Shrup-la Festival. This is performed to mark the beginning of the harvest. A villager performs as an oracle, possessed by the god Dorje Chenmo, and others perform other roles, two are a dragon. There is an elaborate performance on the *damyan* and *surna* as an offering to Dorje Chenmo.

4. Phyang:

- Interviewed and filmed former musicians in Phyang. They are descendants of the original musicians who accompanied the Balti Queen Gyal Khatoon when she came to Ladakh as the bride of King Jamyang Namgyal (around the late 16th century), bringing with them the musical instruments known as *daman* (pair of kettle drums) and *surna* (similar to *shenai*). They were appointed as royal musicians by the King of Ladakh, and many of them lived below the Palace in Old Town Leh. However, over the last few decades many of them discontinued the practice, and moved to Phyang (a village some 19 kilometres away from Leh). One reason for this is that they belong to the Shia community and they have had to abandon their tradition of music because of religious restrictions that impose a ban on singing and playing musical instruments.

4. Basgo

- Losar was also filmed in Basgo village, the former residence of the King. This included filming of the *sTa-rgyug* (Horse Race), elaborate song and dance performances by Karogs (characters that escort the high monk) and *Padrimo* (female dancers).

5. Nyoma:

- Nyoma, is the headquarters of Changthang District in Eastern Ladakh, a region predominantly inhabited by nomadic pastoralists. It is also from here that Senge Namgyal's, the King who constructed Leh Palace, wife came and their music tradition has also influenced those recorded in Old Town. Performances by nomadic communities were filmed, including changes in their music as a result of modern influences. The visit coincided with Republic Day celebrations and interestingly the school children performed a dance similar to a style that was introduced by Nepali soldiers posted at Zorawar Fort in Leh during the 1950s.

6. Da-Hanu:

- This area of western Ladakh is inhabited by the people known as Dards or Brok-pa, who are said to have migrated to the region from Gilgit (now in Baltistan, Pakistan). They are set apart from other Ladakhis in terms of their physical features; religious, social and cultural practices. But now many of them have converted to either Buddhism or Islam. They have a rich tradition of music and an unparalleled

repertoire of songs. Some of the folk music traditions practiced in Leh can be traced back to them, including some of the musical instruments they make and use. For example, one ritual called 'Mamani' involves the recitation of two hundred different songs sung at a stretch. Songs about their migration suggested the spread of their influence across Ladakh.

- Research work and filming in Da-Hanu, explored similarities in their music tradition with that practiced in Leh. Filmed a wedding ceremony over two days.

7. Delhi:

- Tashi Morup made a trip to Delhi to do archival research at the American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon, where they have a good collection of some rare audios and videos of popular Ladakhi music and artists.

Interviews and Discussions with:

Apart from filming various events and festivals, in-depth interviews were conducted with the following people, largely local historians, musicians and residents of Old Town. Amongst them were:

- **Napishu Meme**, he grew up in Old Town and is now about 90 years old. He talked about the various events and performances that happened at different spaces, and the various types of music that accompanied them.
- **Digar Nurbu**, he spoke about the Lato ceremony that is held during Losar, and is performed by the *phaspons* (clans) of old town.
- **Ali Mohammed**, an award-winning *surna* player, he spoke about his descendants who came from Baltistan with the Queen Gyal Khatoon (wife of King Jamyang Namgyal) to Leh and were established as the Kharmon (royal musicians). He now lives in Phyang and while others like him have stopped performing because of a religious ban, he continues to perform. He also spoke about the mistreatment of musicians in the past and how this is changing with education.
- **Nawang Tsering Shagspo**, a research scholar and former head of the Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy Leh, about Ladakhi folk songs.
- **Tsewang Phuntsog**, head musician of Leh town. He owns a special *daman* (pair of kettle drums) gifted to his father by the Leh community as he was their Kharmon (Head Musician of Leh Palace). He talks about the significance of this position and the respect he enjoys among the broader community in spite of being from a low caste community. With him we recorded the Pitses musical ritual that is performed at the foot of Leh Palace, as well as *lharna* (musical offerings to the gods).
- **Ama Cho Cho Tsangspa**, along with Morup Namgyal she has spearheaded the movement for the inclusion of traditional performances at different events and festivals. She lives in Old town and has strong views about the caste practices prevalent in the society and supported the cause of the low caste communities. Her

daughter has taken forward her legacy and she has played a key role in developing modern dance performances. Also set up a dance and music troupe called CATS (Cultural and Traditional Society).

- **Noe Dinnerstein** (PhD), an Ethnomusicologist from USA, he has been studying Ladakhi music for about 20 years. He was accompanied by **Stephen Dydo**, a musician from USA. They met **Tsewang Paljor**, the J & K Cultural Academy head to discuss Ladakhi music. Their entire conversation raised many interesting aspects about Ladakhi music, its history, changes over time, as well as the stigma and caste factors attached to it.
- **Tashi Jorgais**, a descendant of the royal musicians, he plays the *surna* along with his wife Lhadol, who is one of the last few surviving *daph* (drum) players today. Together they have also taken part in performances at LAMO centre.
- **Tsering Stanzin**, a veteran folk singer of Ladakh, has years of experience and an amazing collection of songs.
- **Aba Sangay**, a former royal musician. He is the only Mon (low caste) in Shey who has continued to play the *daman and surna*. During Shey Rul-lo, when *lharna* is offered, he is the only Mon to play and is accompanied by the Bedas (another group of low caste). He will be the last in his family to play the *daman and surna*.
- **Tsewang Paldan**, Morup Namgyal's student and president of cultural performing troupe Lhasol (Ladakh Artists Society of Leh).
- **Ghulam Ali**, Morup Namgyal's radio colleague, he was filmed together with Morup Namgyal sharing common memories of performances in Old Town in the late 1960s and 70s, including the famous Argon Dartes, and archery festival in which both Buddhist and Muslim male community members participated. Argon Dartes is no longer held in Ladakh.
- **Sonam Wangyal**, a veteran singer from Garkhon village, Da-Hanu.

Contemporary and Fusion Music:

In addition to filming traditional music practices, contemporary music performances at the LAMO Centre were also held and filmed.

The LAMO Centre is emerging as a new space within the town for local people, mainly youth, to share and express their talents. At several of the performances held there, local contemporary musicians have performed a fusion with traditional instruments such as the *damyang* along with guitar and mouth organ or the violin with the *daphs*. These contemporary music traditions with the youth playing guitar, violin or keyboard have also been documented for the filming process. As well as their attempts to create fusion music with different genres of Ladakhi folk music traditions and practitioners.

Some of these included:

- A performance by the Mahabodhi School's Trash Band, consisting mainly of Grade 10 students, they had made instruments out of recycled waste products such as pipes, cans, bottles, etc. While the boys played the instruments, the girls sang songs they had specially composed.
- Police Band, Leh, accompanied Tsering Chorol, Murup Namgyal's daughter as she sang popular Ladakhi and Hindi numbers.
- Filmed a music video based on a modern composition by Tsewang Phuntsog called *nGon-mo Tsangs-po* (The turquoise blue river). The music that accompanied the song was played by Rigzin Nurbu on guitar, and American musicians Corinne Adams on violin and Jonathan on clarinet.
- A concert by the ensemble of Angchuk Ralam on flute, Rigzin Nurbu on guitar, Sonam Chorol on violin, Tsering Lhadol on *daphs*, Rinchen Wachar on keyboard, Tsewang Phuntsog on *damyang* and vocals.

The Challenges

The research for the film clearly showed that socio-political changes, gender, caste and modernity could be reflected through different forms of music and their performances. Apart from physical challenges, including travel and accessibility, touching upon the highly sensitive issue of low-caste musicians has required very careful and sensitive handling. In the initial stages, many people were hesitant to speak about it, for instance, in Phyang a Shia family was at first reluctant to speak with us and even after agreeing they did not say much in front of the camera. It was the same in Shey. However, some musicians such as Ali Mohammad were quite open in speaking about these issues. What was interesting is that the government, through the Cultural Academy, is raising these issues regarding the rights of musicians who are traditionally considered low caste. And festivals such as Ladakh Spalngam Tuston (Ladakh Pride Day) are being held to build their respect in the wider community.

The editing turned out to be the most challenging, especially in the cold winter months of Leh, when both electricity and Internet were totally unpredictable. In fact, the extreme cold temperature itself posed problems in starting the computer early in the morning and thus, one had to wait till midday to actually start working. In case of technical hitches, support systems in Leh are negligible in winter and it is difficult to find technical people or relevant equipment. The worse part was the sudden crash of FCP software and without internet in winter it was difficult to upload. The crash also meant that the edited version of the film got eliminated, and it was with great difficulty the fresh updating of FCP was done at DIHAR centre here in Leh, where they have special bandwidth.

Fortunately, Lars Lindstorm (a trained editor) from Sweden was around in Leh and was able to help Tashi Morup fix the technical issues with the editing and final refinishing of the editing work. Tashi showed the initial drafts of the film to Sonam Sopari, a veteran artist, who thought that the film would serve a great purpose in understanding Ladakhi music and

its promotion. Rigzin Kalon, a Bollywood filmmaker, has made some good suggestions for the film.

While shooting, in some interviews and performances, the space was too congested to place the camera at a distance from the subject to film the scene properly, and there were some focus issues. So post production of these footages needed, during editing, some colour and focus corrections.

Tashi Morup, Projects Director at LAMO, has been the main person involved with the making of this film. Right from the research and the conceptualization of the project, to the filming and editing process amongst other parts of the making. In his own words, the below is his personal statement about the project:

“I must admit that the whole process was full of challenges, but it was a great experience for me. Not only did I realize the scope of exploring and taking film ideas in Ladakh to a greater level but also the sheer journey itself was a revelation about my own culture, exposing me face-to-face with realities that always mystified me. It not only helped me open up my understandings, but gave an opportunity to actually instill more hopes and confidence to carry on the desire to strengthen my abilities and move towards perfection in the art of filmmaking so as to share my dreams that I have always dreamt about.

I am also happy that all along the way I worked with a team of young aspirants such as Sonam Angchuk, who assisted me in Camera, and first Mabel Disket and then Rinchen Dolma who were taking pictures and assisted in some interviews. They were also able to grasp the basics of filmmaking in the process, and today both Angchuk and Rinchen are working on their own ideas and coming up with short films on different themes while working at LAMO.

Stanzin Tankong from Symbiosis institute, Bangalore, was also there at one point and discussions I had with him were very productive. His feedback on rough versions of the film was helpful also in terms of determining the shot angles and space identifications.

The intense research and filmmaking process taught me so much that I am now giving talks about music to various local organizations including Flowering Dharma and Women's Alliance. In addition, I have taken numerous visitors for an Old Town Heritage Walk during which I share with them the history, culture and changes of the area through music. I have also had some opportunities to sing some folk songs, that I have learnt during filming, at small gatherings.”

The whole experience was extremely rewarding for everyone involved with the process and the learning has been tremendous. Taking this experience forward, LAMO now hopes to hold an exhibition on the subject focusing on Ladakh's music traditions and the contributions of well known musicians.



Monisha Ahmed
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Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation

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