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When Buddhism Meets Bollywood: The Naropa 2016 Festival in Ladakh, India

Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg

In September 2016, hundreds of thousands of devotees gathered in Ladakh to celebrate the millennial anniversary of Naropa (1016-1100 CE), an Indian Buddhist scholar-saint who is widely revered in the Himalayas. Deemed 'Naropa 2016,' this Himalayan Buddhist festival centered on the ritual of *na ro gyen druk* (Tib. *na ro rgyan drug*), the 'Six Bone Ornaments of Naropa.' What was announced as a sacred Buddhist ritual of revealing these ornaments, also included evening performances by renowned Bollywood performers with booming sound and impressive light shows enjoyed by large crowds of monks and laity until late in the night. This was one of the first occasions that popular Bollywood artists came to perform in Ladakh, and the first time that Bollywood and Buddhism were combined to such a large degree. In this article, I take a closer look at the spectacular Naropa 2016 festival. Based on ethnographic participation and recording of the festival through fieldwork, I consider this Buddhist festival as an important site

for negotiating social change. Especially due to heightened modernization processes in Ladakh, the role of Buddhist institutions has been undergoing swift changes. Under the leadership of the Gyalwang Drukpa, the Drukpa organization pushes against processes of secularization, which have entailed a lessening of the importance of monasteries in the swiftly transforming Ladakhi society. In organizing a large monastery festival and incorporating elements such as Bollywood performances, the Drukpa Kagyü organization presented a vision of their religious institution as adapting to the current times and relevant for modern, 21st century Ladakhi lives. Hence, the Naropa 2016 festival, I argue, worked as an attempt to introduce alternative cultural understandings of the role of Drukpa Kagyü monastic institutions, and in particular, the role of the Gyalwang Drukpa.

Keywords: Buddhism, Ladakh, Buddhist ritual, Modern Buddhism, social change.

Introduction

In September 2016, hundreds of thousands of devotees gathered in Ladakh, India, to celebrate the millennial anniversary of Naropa (1016–1100 CE), an Indian Buddhist scholar-saint who is widely revered in the Himalayas. Referred to as ‘Naropa 2016,’ this Himalayan Buddhist festival centered on the ritual of *na ro gyen druk* (Tib. *na ro rgyan drug*), the ‘Six Bone Ornaments of Naropa.’ In an elaborate ceremony, the current reincarnation of Naropa and the lineage holder of the Drukpa Kagyü (Tib. *brug pa bka’ bgyud*) sect of Tibetan Buddhism, Jikmé Pema Wang Chen (Tib. *jigs med pad+ma dbang chen*), otherwise known as the Gyalwang Drukpa (Tib. *rgyal dbang ’brug pa*), wore intricate bone ornaments in front of a massive audience. In the promotional material, the Naropa 2016 festival was announced as the “Kumbh Mela of the Himalayas,” and “Ladakh’s largest Buddhist festival in history” (“Naropa 2016: Celebrating 1000 Years” [Pamphlet] 2016: 9, “Naropa Festival Returns to Ladakh after 12 Years,” 2016). The festival ran for eleven days, from 13 through 23 September 2016, with six days constituting the main part of the festival. During these six days, the program started in the early morning hours with Buddhist ritual and teachings, while the afternoons were filled with Himalayan cultural performances, and the evenings brought large-scale entertainment on a stage built for the occasion. What was announced as a sacred Buddhist ritual of revealing the Six Bone Ornaments of Naropa also included evening performances by renowned Bollywood performers with booming sound and impressive light shows, enjoyed by large crowds of monks, nuns, and laity until late in the night. Every evening during the six main days of the festival saw a different Bollywood star who took to the stage to perform their famous pop songs for thousands of adoring fans who knew their songs by heart. This was one of the first occasions that popular Bollywood artists came to perform in Ladakh, and the first time that Bollywood and Buddhism were combined to such a large degree. Yet, it also left many Ladakhis wondering: Why were Bollywood stars invited to perform at a sacred Buddhist ritual?

In this article, I consider the Naropa 2016 festival as an important site for negotiating social change, especially in relation to the role of Buddhist institutions within a society that is undergoing swift changes due to heightened modernization processes. Since Ladakh opened for tourism in 1974, the tourism industry has grown immensely, bringing economic growth and development, especially to families near Leh, the largest town in the region. In addition to economic growth due to tourism, an increasing army presence, a growing bureaucracy, and subsequent

government employment have provided new economic opportunities for Ladakhi families. This has led to a transition from a predominantly agricultural and land-based society to a capitalist cash-based society, in alignment with processes of modernization. With these changes, the position of monasteries has altered in that other sources of social prestige—such as the army, government, business, and higher education—have gained prominence, thus threatening to lessen the standing of monasteries and monastics in the region (Bray 2007: 9; Jina 1997: 159; Michaud 1996: 296; Palden 1998; Pirie 2007: 2).

The Naropa 2016 festival, I suggest, worked as an attempt to introduce a vision of modern Buddhism and alternative cultural understandings as to the role of Drukpa Kagyü monastic institutions, and, in particular, the role of the Gyalwang Drukpa in Ladakh. Naropa 2016 was planned as “a carnival of spirituality, beauty, culture, sights and sounds” with “a touch of sportsmanship, tradition, modernization and compassion” as stated on the promotional literature distributed well before the event (“Naropa 2016: Celebrating 1000 Years” [Pamphlet] 2016: 15, 23). According to the promotional material, Naropa’s “legacy and lessons traversed the Himalayas and shaped the identity and culture of many peoples and continues to have a lasting impact in the modern world” (ibid: 9). The importance of this millennial celebration of Naropa was advertised not only to Ladakhis, but to the world, as an event that was “unmissable” (ibid: 11). The promotional brochures further assert that Naropa’s “life and teaching marked the beginning of a new era of Buddhism,” perhaps foreshadowing how the Drukpa organization would like to see the efforts of Gyalwang Drukpa understood in the future (ibid). According to the promotional material, “the Gyalwang Drukpa is recognized as the preeminent voice for modern issues now facing the Himalayas” (ibid: 10). In organizing a large monastery festival and incorporating elements such as Bollywood performances, the Drukpa Kagyü organization presents a vision of their religious institution as adapting to the current times and relevant for modern, 21st century Ladakhi lives.

Under the leadership of the Gyalwang Drukpa, the Drukpa organization pushes against processes of secularization, which have entailed a lessening of the importance of monasteries in the swiftly transforming Ladakhi society, by displaying this “new era of Buddhism” through the spectacle of the Naropa 2016 festival (ibid: 9). In this version of modern Buddhism, monastic Buddhist ritual can share a stage with Bollywood performances. Hence, the Drukpa Kagyü monastic institutions align themselves with modernity rather ‘tradition,’ and the Gyalwang Drukpa takes the

stage as the “pre-eminent voice for modern issues” (ibid: 10). The carnivalesque ambience of Naropa 2016, invoking a spectacular meshing of Buddhism and Bollywood, introduces new positionings for the role of Drukpa Kagyü Buddhists in Ladakh and beyond. As Ping-Ann Addo (2009) suggests,

...repeated performance is revealing of underlying social structures which are ‘emergent in action.’ In other words, for utterances or actions to be ritually efficacious, they must set up the appropriate conditions for agents to receive them as such. I would argue that spectacle is one such condition of ritual. People are socialized to expect and respond to its arresting and captivating effects in order for societies’ tensions and hierarchies to be made, periodically at least, more bearable (229).

Whether or not the categories of ‘modern’ and ‘secular,’ as well as ‘religion’ and even ‘Buddhism’ have been constructed by scholars in the past (Masuzawa 2005), these categories are used within emic discussions regarding the role of religion within increasingly modernizing societies such as Ladakh. In this sense, the secular and secularization throughout this article highlights local articulations of the secular and modern (Gayley and Willock 2016). Where the analytical concept of ‘modern’ refers to a break with a ‘traditional’ past, and societal changes brought upon through processes of industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization (see Bauman 2000; Beck 2002; Berman 1983; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Cooper 2005; Latour 1993), these abstract categories which might not withstand academic scrutiny are simultaneously made concrete through the ways in which they are employed in emic discourse (Gellner 2001; Miller 1997). Throughout this article, I pay close attention to how the terms ‘modern’ and ‘secular’ are invoked in Ladakhi discourse, both in promoting as well as contesting Drukpa Kagyü visions for reforming Buddhism in the modern world.

The research I present in this article is based on in-depth ethnography gathered during five fieldwork periods (over a course of five months and four years) in Leh, Ladakh. Two fieldwork periods took place prior to the festival, one during the festival, and two after the festival. I first became aware of Naropa 2016 while working on a project related to Buddhism and tourism in Ladakh in October 2015, and I returned in July 2016 to capture more of the planning and reception of the event. In September 2016, I attended the full program of Naropa 2016, recording not only the events as they took place on the ground, but also discussions that concurrently took place on social media as the event was broadcast live via YouTube and

afterwards. Since then, I have returned to Ladakh in the summer of 2017, and as recently as July and August 2018, where I continued discussions with Ladakhis—both recorded interviews and informal discussions—about how they experienced and perceived the Naropa 2016 festival. I turn, now, to introduce Naropa and the *na ro gyen druk* ritual before I discuss the organization of the event and the various elements that were included in the planning of the festival, as well as its reception.

Naropa and the Bone Ornament Ritual

Naropa 2016 celebrated the millennial anniversary of Naropa, an Indian Buddhist *mahasiddha* (a yogi who has attained the supreme accomplishment) who figures prominently in the Kagyü lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.¹ Born into a royal family, Naropa lived in northern India in the 11th century. After eight years of marriage, he divorced his wife and entered the monastic university of Nalanda where he became an abbot. Around the age of forty, while reading “books on grammar, epistemology, spiritual precepts, and logic,” he encountered an old woman who informed him that the only way to realize the real meaning of the book was to seek a tantric master, her brother, Tilopa (Tib. *ti lo pa*) (Trungpa 1994: 5-6). Tilopa, after many trials, accepted Naropa as his student and transmitted the mind-to-mind realization of *Mahamudra* (Tib. *phyag rgya chen po*), and instructed Naropa to bring benefit to beings (ibid: 11). At the time of his enlightenment, *dakinis* (Tib. *Mkha’ ’gro ma*), or angels, offered Naropa the bone ornaments revealed during the ritual, and then flew back into the sky (“Naropa 2016: Celebrating 1000 Years [Pamphlet] 2016: 9, Rabgais 2017: 314). The ornaments (armbands, a necklace, earrings, bracelet, and bone-beaded apron) were reportedly made of human bone, and were accompanied by a headdress made of the hair of the *dakinis* who presented these ornaments to Naropa (Rabgais 2017: 315). Naropa reportedly gave the ornaments to Marpa (Tib. *mar pa*; 1012-1097), the great translator who visited Naropa to receive teachings, and from then on, the ornaments were passed through the lineage. Marpa gave the ornaments to his disciple, Ngok Chöku Dorjé (Tib. *rngog chos sku rdo rje*; 1246-unknown), and they remained with the Ngok (Tib. *rngog*) lineage until Ngok Jang chup Pel (Tib. *rngog byang chub dpal*; 1360-1446), the 7th Ngok lineage holder, presented them to Gyalwang Kunga Paljor (Tib. *rgyal ba kun dga’ dpal ’byor*; 1428-1476), the second Gyalwang Drukpa. At that time, he “declared he had returned the six ornaments to the rightful owner,” and they have stayed within the Drukpa lineage ever since (Rigzin 2016: 11).

The six ornaments symbolize the spiritual realization achieved through the Six Yogas of Naropa (Tib. *na ro'i chos drug*), a Vajrayana practice which is widely practiced among the Kagyü order (“The Great Pandita Naropa” 2016: 14). These religious objects have become so-called “meditation objects” for past reincarnations of Naropa and a “field of accumulation of merit for all beings” (“The Great Pandita Naropa” 2016: 14). The blessings received by mere sight of these ornaments has the power to close the doors to the lower three realms (animal, hungry ghost, and hell), potentially causing “liberation upon sight” (“Naropa 2016” [Pamphlet] 2016: 11). According to the Naropa 2016 promotional material, these ornaments are “some of the most significant Buddhist relics in active use” and have become “the most revered relics of Buddhism and historic symbols of a great Himalayan odyssey” (ibid: 11).

The *na ro gyen druk* ritual of revealing these ornaments in the past only occurred once every twelve years, normally in the fifth lunar month of the Monkey year. As promoted on the Naropa 2016 website beforehand, “Once every 12 years, in the year of Monkey, half a million people from across the Himalayas gather in Ladakh, India, to celebrate Naropa’s life in one of the largest events of the decade” (“Naropa 2016” 2016). The twelve-year interval is also one of the ways in which the festival resembles a *Kumbh Mela*. The *Kumbh Mela* is the large Hindu festival in India that takes place every twelve years, and draws a crowd of thirty to 120 million pilgrims.² Previously, the *na ro gyen druk* ceremony coincided with the renowned Hemis festival in which a four-story thangka of Padmasambhava is revealed on the tenth day of the fifth month of the Monkey year, which normally falls during the summer months (Rigzin 1997: 94). However, this time the Naropa 2016 festival was not held during the fifth lunar month as part of the Hemis festival, but instead in September, alluding to the ‘newness’ and innovation of the Naropa 2016 festival.³ According to a promotional video for the Naropa 2016 festival, the previous incarnations of the Gyalwang Drukpa, or the previous lineage holders of the Drukpa Kagyü lineage, performed this ritual only once or twice in their lifetimes (Drukpa 2004). Some of the Gyalwang Drukpas never wore the ornaments, since they considered the bone ornaments as “too precious to be shown for the public during their lives” and were meant to be kept secret (ibid: 36m21s). In this sense, while encased in a long lineage history of Naropa and the Drukpa Kagyü order of Tibetan Buddhism, the *na ro gyen druk* ritual is positioned as relatively ‘new,’ at least with regards to the frequency with which it is held, when it takes place, and the importance placed on the ritual within the Drukpa Kagyü lineage.

The current Gyalwang Drukpa has so far worn the six bone ornaments of Naropa four times in his lifetime, each time in Ladakh. The first time was in 1980 in the Hemis monastery courtyard during the Hemis festival with a reported 50,000 attendees (“Past Naropa Ceremonies: Naropa 1980” 2018). The second time in 1992, also part of the Hemis festival but a new structure, or *naro phodrang* (Naropa palace) was built in the forest below Hemis monastery to accommodate the reported 80,000 attendees (“Past Naropa Ceremonies: Naropa 1992” 2018). In 2004, the festival was moved to Shey, a village which lies between Leh and Hemis monastery, where a new *naro phodrang* was built at the Druk Padma Karpo institute with more than 135,000 attendees present (“Past Naropa Ceremonies: Naropa 2003” 2018). Although the festival has moved locations, it has remained in Ladakh during the lifetime of this Gyalwang Drukpa. During an interview, Gyalwang Drukpa stated the reason for performing the ritual in Ladakh was due to the long history of Drukpa Buddhism in Ladakh, and the knowledge and faith in Naropa that Ladakhis possess, allowing for greater benefit from this potentially “liberation through sight” bone-ornament ceremony (“Naropa 2016: Celebrating 1000 Years” [Pamphlet] 2016: 12).

In the past few decades, the ritual of revealing the bone ornaments has become one of the most important Buddhist rituals for the Drukpa Kagyü lineage, which has a strong presence in Ladakh. While the festival took place near a particular monastery, it is not a monastery-based or place-based festival, but lineage-based. According to the Gyalwang Drukpa in an interview published with *Hindustan Times*, seventy five to eighty percent of Ladakhi households are followers or patrons of the Drukpa lineage (Jha 2014).⁴ The Drukpa Kagyü lineage has a large influence throughout the Himalayas in India, Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan. Bhutan, known as *druk yül* (Tib. *'brug yul*) or place of dragons, recognizes the Drukpa order as the state religion. Now, mostly due to the teaching tours led by the Gyalwang Drukpa, there are Drukpa practice centers in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam, as well as in Europe and the Americas, with over twenty-seven million followers worldwide as stated on the Naropa 2016 website (“About” 2016). The Drukpa organization communicated clearly to these devotees across the world about the importance of attending this festival through their website, <www.drukpa.org>.

Preparing the Ground for Naropa 2016

To accommodate the more than 100,000 Buddhist pilgrims expected for the event, a huge construction project was undertaken to turn a dusty field into a festival site at the

Hemis Zhing Skyong, just below Hemis monastery. Some sources even claimed there to be a possible one million pilgrims or more (Ancheri 2016, Deepak 2015). When the total population of the Leh district of Ladakh with a Buddhist majority at that time was around 150,000, the number of pilgrims and spectators expected to attend the event necessitated the building of new infrastructure. This included building a new *naro phodrang*, or Naropa Palace. The Naropa Palace was where the ritual took place, as well as where the bone ornaments were on display. Throughout the six main days of the festival, pilgrims could receive further blessings by visiting a separate ornament-viewing room located at the top of the Naropa palace. Everyone could visit this room, say prayers, and receive the blessings from the objects, which were said to encase blessings from the entire lineage since the time of Naropa. In addition to the Naropa Palace, the Drukpa organizing committee built roads and established new electricity and water lines to the arid palace grounds to support crowds coming from all over the world.

To advertise Naropa 2016, the organizing committee distributed brochures a year before the event, and set up large billboards that dotted the streets and landscape of Leh. They also created an impressive website to inform potential pilgrims and the wider public about the festival, including where to donate if one could not attend, as well as a number of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to spread awareness about the festival. While the marketization of Buddhist festivals is not unknown in Ladakh, as posters, banners and billboards are regularly produced advertising upcoming Buddhist festivals with the aim of drawing more tourists, the extent and degree of marketization was on a much larger scale than previously witnessed in Ladakh.

Ladakh hosts a number of monastery festivals, or *tsé chu* (*tshes bcu*),⁵ throughout the year, especially in the summer,⁶ the region's main tourist season. Increasingly, tourism has become the main industry and the main source of income for Ladakhi families, in addition to government employment and the army. Buddhist-related tourism is a main feature of the economy, especially in the Leh district, and heavily promoted through publicized lists of monastery festivals on the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) website and on various tourism promotional websites ("Festivals" 2019, see also Williams-Oerberg forthcoming). Monastery festivals usually entail an annual event in which the colorful *cham* (*'cham*) or tantric mask dance is performed in the monastery courtyards.⁷ These events typically draw large crowds of Ladakhis and tourists, and include elements of entertainment beyond

the colorful ritual performance, such as small make-shift markets outside the gates of the monasteries, and cultural performances by lay Ladakhis during the breaks. However, the Naropa 2016 festival offered more than what was commonly found at monastery festivals in Ladakh, with a wider range of activities and events included to draw a much larger audience.

Naropa 2016 was planned and executed by an organizing team, which consisted of the Young Drukpa Association, the Hemis museum and monastery, and Thuksey Rinpoche.⁸ According to Norbu,⁹ a member of the organizing committee, the festival was organized with a "something for everyone" tactic in mind. In this way, a number of participants attended who might not normally have, such as Ladakhi Muslims, foreign and domestic tourists, and more modernized Ladakhi youth. Additional events planned for the festival included an archery competition, essay writing contest, fashion show, "world class magic show," and concerts by renowned Bollywood celebrities, along with a multitude of cultural performances by local artists, representatives from the Himalayan regions that were present, and a colorful dragon dance performed by Vietnamese representatives. In the afternoon sessions, a debate on the modernization of Buddhism and a discussion on conflict resolution in the 21st century with the celebrities of Robert F. Kennedy¹⁰ and Tenzin Palmo¹¹ took place. Additionally, the 'Kung Fu nuns,' or nuns from the Druk Amitabha Mountain in Nepal (many of whom are Ladakhi) also had a number of performances in the program. These nuns were from the Druk Gawa Khilwa nunnery located in Nepal, which houses Drukpa Kagyü nuns from across the Himalayas. As stated in a promotional brochure for the Kung Fu Nuns, they "trained not only in spiritual development and in the complex practice of higher Tantric yoga, but also in humanitarian work.... In an effort to promote self-empowerment, the Gyalwang Drukpa introduced Kung Fu in 2009, for health improvement and for self-defense" ("The 1st Women's Self-Defense Workshop by Kung Fu Nuns Celebrating Self-Empowerment" 2017: 3). These were also the same nuns who accompanied the Gyalwang Drukpa on his bicycle and walking tours or *pad yatra* throughout the Himalayas, where he promoted gender equality and environmental awareness.

During the festival, a large makeshift market sold various goods, religious and otherwise. A number of stalls sold souvenirs for the festival, all with the Naropa 2016 logo. These items include various wide-brimmed hats to help protect from the blistering sun, as well as thermoses, bags, t-shirts, phone covers, umbrellas, books, and CDs published by the Drukpa organization. A row of tables lined the walk up to the Naropa palace where other Buddhist

monasteries and organizations summoned donations for new building projects, such as new temples and large statues. Various stalls sold religious implements for Vajrayana practice, such as peacock feather fans, water bowls, vases, hand-held drums, and bells. Beyond the religious paraphernalia, sellers from across the Himalayas came with goods ranging from wool sweaters and shawls, to plastic housewares, colorful plastic toys, and balloons to entertain the children present. Just below the market area, a makeshift restaurant area sold fried noodles and spicy rice dishes. These tent restaurants fed those who were not part of the large donor and international section and offered free meals during the festival.¹² For those with a caffeine addiction, pop-up coffee shops sold cappuccinos and lattes, along with smoothies to smooth over the hectic and chaotic environment of the massive festival.

The Naropa 2016 festival was not limited to the six days of the event, as a number of other events were planned both before and after. Prior to the festival, a ‘Live to Love’¹³ eye camp offered free eye health screenings and cataract operations. A bicycle *yatra* or bicycle pilgrimage led by Drukchen Rinpoche and over 200 nuns started in Kathmandu two months before the festival and ended in Ladakh. They made frequent stops in villages along the way, where Drukchen Rinpoche gave spontaneous Buddhist teachings and sermons about protecting the environment and women’s empowerment. The cycle *pad yatra* received extensive national and international press coverage, preparing the world for the even larger media event of the Naropa 2016 festival yet to come (Payne 2016). The “Seventh Annual Drukpa Council, Meeting of the Masters” took place on 13-14 September 2016, the two days leading up to the festival (“Naropa 2016: Celebrating 1000 Years” [Pamphlet] 2016). The Council is a yearly event where Drukpa Buddhist masters and their followers from across the Himalayas (including Tibet, Bhutan, Ladakh, Sikkim, Kinnaur, and Lahaul) gather “to revive some unique aspects of the Drukpa Lineage and share the 1000 over [sic] years old rich spiritual legacy with the world through the inspiration of teachings, initiations and oral transmissions” as stated in the Naropa 2016 online program and pamphlet (ibid: “Program at a Glance” 2016). This also meant that these Drukpa Buddhist masters were present during the festival itself.

Additional elements of the festival which had particular religious significance include: the tantric Chakrasamvara empowerment conferred on the same day as the *na ro gyen druk* bone ornament ritual; the unraveling of the new, multi-story high Buddha Amitabha thangka on September 19th; and teachings given by Drukchen Rinpoche on the

text “50-stanzas of Guru Devotion” (Tib. *bla ma lnga bcu pa*)¹⁴ for five days following the *na ro gyen druk* ritual. Many of the international pilgrims from Europe, North and South America, and East Asia came expressly for these teachings. Many also stayed after the festival to go on a pilgrimage journey across Ladakh, the “8th Eco Pad Yatra” (walking pilgrimage) which started at the Drukpa-Kagyü Chemdrey monastery and continued to “a renowned prediction lake in Ladakh” (“Naropa 2016: Celebrating 1000 Years” [Pamphlet] 2016: 14). For a fee of 540 USD, this additional pilgrimage opportunity not only gave participants the chance to see more of the religiously marked landscape of Ladakh, but also allowed more time to spend with Drukchen Rinpoche. The journey included picking up garbage along the way to raise awareness about the environment. The *eco pad yatra* is an annual event organized by the Drukpa organization with the intent to remedy some of the ailments of the modern era.¹⁵ As stated on the *pad yatra* homepage, “Modern lifestyle with conveniences has resulted in a disconnection with the natural science and beauty. A Pad Yatra helps us to return to the basics” (“About” 2018). These additional events added to the Six Bone Ornaments of Naropa ritual helped raise global awareness of Naropa 2016 and the Drukpa Kagyü order, along with the Gyalwang Drukpa’s vision to reform and modernize Tibetan Buddhism in the Himalayas.

Spectacular Rituals for Social Change

I suggest that Buddhist rituals are important events to pay attention to in order to trace and analyze cultural processes of change and transformation that are both reflected in and set in motion during these events. Ritual or cultural performances are, according to Marvin Carlson (2013), “liminal activities [that] mark sites where conventional structure is no longer honored but, being more playful and more open to chance, they are also much more likely to be subversive, consciously or by accident introducing or exploring different structures that may develop into real alternatives to the status quo” (9). Carnivals, according to Carlson, are sites where structure and the order of the ordinary are suspended as an “unstructured testing ground for new social and cultural structures” (ibid: 24). In other words, carnival is “a ritual deeply imbricated with the pathos and emphasis on change” (ibid). In this sense, the Naropa 2016 festival was a testing ground. It became a site for instigating change and introducing new social and cultural structures that challenge processes of modernization and secularization that possibly lead to a decrease in influence of the Drukpa Kagyü monasteries and organizations in Ladakh.

By incorporating Bollywood performances, reinventing the role of nuns in Himalayan Buddhist societies as path breakers rather than caretakers, and showcasing the humanitarian efforts of the Drukpa organization, the festival attempted to redefine Buddhism and the role of Drukpa Kagyü Buddhist institutions in Ladakh and beyond. As stated on the Naropa 2016 festival webpage: “The Drukpas are best known for taking its meditation practice off the mat and into the world—converting compassion into action to tackle the world’s challenges” (“The Drukpa Lineage” 2018). Furthermore, the Gyalwang Drukpa explained that the reason for performing this event so often during these previous twelve year intervals was due to the requests made by his devotees, and “out of great love and compassion for the sentient beings tormented by the five degenerations of this dark age” (“The Great Pandita Naropa 2016”: 15). The Gyalwang Drukpa, hence, positions the ritual performance of the Six Ornaments of Naropa as a remedy for the suffering in the modern age, the so-called Age of Degeneration (Tib. *rtsod ldan gyi dus*). According to Buddhist eschatology, the current era of the present Shakyamuni Buddha is coming to a close (see Keown and Prebish 2006). We are in a “degenerate age” (Drukpa 2004: 36m54s) and will soon reach a point when Buddhism will no longer exist in the world. Once Buddhism disappears, the world will be destroyed and a future era—that of Maitreya Buddha—will begin. The sense that Buddhism is in decline is a common sentiment expressed by the religious elite, but also by lay Ladakhis more generally (see Butcher 2013: 160, 268; Williams-Oerberg 2014).

The Age of Degeneration refers not only to the gradual disappearance of Buddhism in the world, but also to an era filled with war and strife. In this sense, Buddhist eschatology aligns with more general concerns about the negative impact of modernization processes. The modern era where “all that is solid melts into air” (Berman 1983) has led to a “disembedding” of social forms (Beck 1994: 2) and threatens to eliminate them. As Nawang Tsering Shakspo, a Ladakhi scholar, writes: “all Ladakhis must consider the good things of the past Ladakh. Only that awareness can save the culture of Ladakh from the threat of modern civilization” (Shakspo 2010: 17). Narratives that construct an idyllic, utopian past are drawn upon to contrast the course of development occurring in the present, as well as concerns about the future (see, for example, Palden 1998: 8; Shakspo 2010: 256; Wangchuk 2007: 256). The impression of a peaceful, stable past compared to the destruction and instability of the present brought upon by modernization and globalization is a common feature of public Ladakhi discourse, among young and old alike (Williams-Oerberg 2014). Furthermore, the concern about modernization pro-

cesses and ongoing social change in Ladakh provides space for possible remedies to such ills of modernity—something which Buddhism and Buddhist leaders are particularly apt to provide (ibid).

Concern about the future of Buddhist institutions within contexts of social change spurred by modernization is not unique to Ladakh. Throughout the Buddhist world in Asia, processes of modernization have ushered in new ideas, values, and lifestyles that challenge religious hierarchies and norms (see, for example, Baumann 2001; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; Heine and Prebish 2003; Lopez 2002; McMahan 2012). David McMahan (2008) highlights how Buddhist modernism has been “fashioned by modernizing Asian Buddhists and western enthusiasts deeply engaged in creating Buddhist responses to the dominant problems and questions of modernity” (5). However, the form of modern Buddhism that the Drukpa organization proposes differs significantly from how scholars have written about modern Buddhism. For example, Donald Lopez (2002) writes, “Modern Buddhism rejects many of the ritual and magical elements of previous forms of Buddhism, it stresses equality over hierarchy, the universal over the local, and often exalts the individual above the community” (ix). We see with Naropa 2016 a different approach to reforming Buddhism in response to the dominant problems and questions of modernity in Ladakh. Rather than rejecting ritual and magical elements, the Drukpa organization emphasized ritual, and the supernatural, liberating potential of the Six Bone Ornaments of Naropa. By expanding the ritual into a six-day program with cultural performances, a fashion show, debate on Buddhism and modernity, Kung Fu performances by nuns, discussions on conflict resolution, and the importance of saving the environment, what the Drukpa organization presented was a modern form of Buddhism that does not reject ritual, but transforms ritual into a modern spectacle that has “something for everyone.” Instead of exalting the universal, however, the importance of maintaining a distinct Ladakhi and Himalayan (Buddhist) identity was repeatedly emphasized throughout the festival during the teachings of the Gyalwang Drukpa, and during the speeches offered throughout the program. The focus of the festival was on community building, rather than individual self-actualization, with the Drukpa Kagyü organization and the Gyalwang Drukpa at the center. Religious hierarchy was certainly not done away with during Naropa 2016, with the Gyalwang Drukpa sitting on an elevated golden throne flanked by large golden elephants. During his teachings on the “50-stanzas of guru devotion,” the Gyalwang Drukpa specifically emphasized the importance of paying heed to hierarchy through paying homage and dedicating one’s life to the guru. While gender equality was

emphasized through showcasing performances by the Kung Fu nuns, eliminating patriarchy was not, in that these nuns have dedicated their lives to following their exclusively male religious leaders.

The Drukpa organization, via the creation of spectacle and their charismatic leader, offered an alternative positioning of Buddhist institutions as those that are most capable in leading swiftly transforming societies such as Ladakh within processes of modernization and social change. What the Drukpa organization showed through holding this “*Kumbh mela* of the Himalayas” (“Naropa 2016: Celebrating 1000 Years” [Pamphlet] 2016) was that Bollywood, entertainment, gender equality, and concern about the environment were all integrated into this new form of Buddhism. Moreover, they showed Ladakhis and the world that they shared the same stage as Bollywood stars such as Shreya Ghoshal, KK, Vishal Shekhar, Sivamani, Shakti and Neeti Mohan, Terence Lewis, Rahul Kharbanda, and the illustrious American Robert F. Kennedy. In this sense, while the *Kumbh mela* connoted a Hindu festival, the attempt to stage a large Himalayan Buddhist spectacle was in fact effective in garnering worldwide attention. The strategy of providing “something for everyone” through spectacle worked in drawing large crowds, day and night. Many of the Ladakhis I spoke with, especially modern-educated younger Ladakhis and Muslims, only attended Naropa 2016 during the evening to catch a glimpse of these famous Bollywood stars in Ladakh. At night, long lines of cars crept along the mountainside, as they waited their turn to enter into the Naropa palace parking area.

In considering the number of people who participated in the festival, Naropa 2016 was a large success. One newspaper claimed there to be over five million visitors (Singh 2016), another half a million (Bhowmick 2018) while others suggested hundreds of thousands (“Thousands Flock to Indian Himalayas for Rare Buddhist Festival” 2016). The Naropa 2016 festival website claimed there were 500,000 attendees (“Past Naropa Ceremonies: 2016” 2018). Most of the participants were Ladakhis who travelled from remote areas of Ladakh. Based on conversations I had with festival organizers responsible for the participant registration, there were over 3,000 international participants, and 6,000 to 7,000 Himalayan participants from other parts of India. However, these numbers were most likely inflated in order to create an image the festival as larger than it actually was. Similar to what Nicolas Sihlé (2013) observed at a large-scale Buddhist ritual among tantrists in the Repkong region in Tibet, the reporting of large numbers of attendees is important. Sihlé recognizes a “culture of numbers” in which the ritual event’s reported size “definitely matters in local understandings” and

can be understood as an attempt to correlate size with the position and importance of Buddhist leaders and their lineage (ibid: 176).

What was generally agreed upon during my discussions with Ladakhis afterwards, was that there were more people gathered for Naropa 2016 than previously witnessed in Ladakh, even larger than the *Kalachakra* (Tib. *dus kyi 'khor lo*) rituals performed by the Dalai Lama in Ladakh and around the world. The 2014 *Kalachakra* ritual was its 33rd instantiation, attracting 150,000 participants (“*Kalachakra* 2014 at Ladakh” 2014). It was organized by the ecumenical Ladakh Buddhist Association, in conjunction with the Ladakh Gonpa Association. In my discussions with Ladakhis after the *Kalachakra* was held, the Buddhist event was viewed as a large success, mostly due to the large number of volunteers who came to help prepare the area, provide food, tea, and transportation to and from the ritual grounds, and build make-shift tent shelters to house the large number of attendees. Due to the support received from such a large number of Ladakhis, the successful organization and implementation of such a large collective ritual, was a feat that many Ladakhis doubted could be repeated, especially without the global star power held by the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama, although technically not the head of the Geluk (Tib. *dGe lugs*) sect of Tibetan Buddhism, is certainly the most renowned Geluk and Tibetan Buddhist in the world. Geluk and Drukpa Kagyü Buddhists have a long history of sectarian rivalry both in Tibet and Ladakh (Martin 1990; Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977). In the past decade, recent political events have led to rising concern among Ladakhis about intensified sectarian competition between the Gelukpa and Drukpa in Ladakh (Jha 2014; Stobdan 2016). As speculation increases as to who will be the successor to the Dalai Lama as leader of Tibetan Buddhism, according to one seasoned observer, the Gyalwang Drukpa seems poised to “fill the post-Dalai Lama vacuum” (Stobdan 2016: 3).

The use of spectacle within Tibetan Buddhist ritual to draw a large audience and promote the position of a particular lineage and lineage holder is not a new practice. As Dalton (2016) has shown, large public festivals organized by Geluk and Nyingma (Tib. *rnying ma*) Buddhist leaders in Tibet was a means to “export their new vision, inviting lamas from all over Tibet to grand festivals at their monastery, during which they would transmit their new ritual systems” (22). The Great Prayer Festival (Tib. *smon lam chen mo*) in Tibet held by the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent in the 17th century had “the clear intention of enhancing the grandeur of the new regime and the prestige and stability of the position of the Dalai Lama and the Gelukpa, Yellow

Hat, church” (ibid: 100; Schaeffer 2003). Similarly, the Nyingma order held large Buddhist festivals, such as the Mindröling (Tib. *sMin grol gling*) Sutra recitation, with the primary purpose of reformulating the Nyingma School and to “reinforce a sense of community on a much larger scale” (Dalton 2016: 108-109). Dalton argues that the spectacle of these large Buddhist festivals “emphasized less the transmission of the lineage or the realization of the presiding lama and more the elaborate spectacle of the performance itself” (ibid: 112). Through creating spectacle and the organizing of large Buddhist festivals, these Tibetan Buddhist leaders could introduce new ritual systems as well as consolidate their positions of power and prestige.

Through Naropa 2016, the Drukpa Kagyü order created a Buddhist spectacle that helped to display and consolidate their position as global leaders in the 21st century, where their modern form of Buddhism has “something for everyone”, not only Buddhists. The *na ro gyen druk* ritual of the Six Bone Ornaments of Naropa held in 2016 differed significantly from the previous occasions, in which the organizers of the festival attempted to make the ritual more attuned with the torments of the Age of Degeneration. In other words, as a response to the ailments of the modern age and the decreasing influence of Buddhist leaders and institutions. In this way, the spectacular organization of the festival including ritual elements as well as ‘secular’ elements such as Bollywood and fashion may have worked to position new models, symbols, and paradigms in which the Drukpa organization reacted to as well as enacted change.

Victor Turner suggests, rituals can be considered as processes that “heal” a society around moments of “life crisis” (Turner 1957 in Addo 2009: 218). The life crisis to which the Naropa 2016 festival seems to be a response is a perceived crisis of religion and modernity: we are living in an age of degeneration. The spectacular Naropa 2016 was an attempt by the organizing committee to reform Buddhism so that it may become more relevant for 21st century lives, attracting more attention among the so-called disinterested modern youth, thus extending the life of Drukpa Kagyü Buddhism in the current age.

Naropa Controversy

However, these attempts did not come without criticism. The brash contrast between how monastery festivals were previously held and Naropa 2016 provoked a strong debate among Ladakhis, and one that was still continuing two years later in 2018.¹⁶ Instead of performing rituals in a manner that upheld the sense of timelessness and continuity of a religious organization, the Drukpa order chose a different tactic. By introducing swift changes to a religious

ritual, this also worked to provide a shock to the cultural system and position the Drukpa organization as instrumental in invoking change in Ladakh.

The ambiguity and controversy surrounding Naropa 2016 began already one year before the event. In October 2015, I sat in a travel agency waiting to interview a travel agent about the relationship between Buddhism and tourism. I noticed a large stack of colorful brochures advertising Naropa 2016 sitting prominently on his desk. Since, at that time, I was unfamiliar with the event, I asked him to tell me more about the festival. In response, he merely shook his head, showed his disapproval, and exclaimed, “I don’t know what they are doing. Why are they making such a big festival? What is the point?” (Interview, 15 October 2015). At that point, I realized that the Naropa 2016 festival was not only an important event for the Drukpa Kagyü organization and their followers, but also for Ladakh more generally, and potentially also highly contentious. The extent to which the festival was advertised beforehand, along with the more spectacular elements added to the program, provoked avid discussion among Ladakhis regarding the role of Buddhist monastic institutions in a modernizing Ladakh. In this way, the festival worked as a prism illuminating various standpoints regarding efforts to reform and modernize Buddhism in the region, and how these efforts were either accepted or rejected among clergy and laity. In particular, highly educated Ladakhi youth who were presumably the targeted audience for these more ‘modern’ and ‘secular’ aspects of the festival happened to be the most outspoken in their critiques of the festival before the festival took place.

While visiting with younger Ladakhi friends a few nights after the festival, I stayed up until 2 am discussing Naropa 2016. During the conversation, one of the young men present stated matter-of-factly, “it will take us 5-10 years to figure out what just took place.” There were so many additional, as often stated, more “secular” elements integrated into this Buddhist festival that had never been witnessed before in Ladakh, that it left many Ladakhis wondering: What was the point of Naropa 2016? Before, during, and after the festival, Ladakhis engaged in ardent discussions between one another and on social media about the following questions: What is Buddhism? What is and is not Buddhist? What should and should not be part of Buddhist festivals? And why was this festival deemed the “*Kumbh Mela* of the Himalayas” since that is a Hindu not Buddhist festival? The Hindu-ization of former predominantly Buddhist areas in the Himalayas already struck concern among Ladakhis, so why bring this Buddhist festival into the fold of a Hindu ritual? Modern-educated Ladakhi youth

were especially concerned about this issue, some of whom drafted a protest letter to the organizing committee.¹⁷ Additional aspects for debate included: the blatant “commercialization” and marketization of Buddhism; the role that Bollywood should play in Buddhist festivals; and the expenditure of money on Bollywood performances rather than investing in schools and roads.

The performances by the Kung-Fu Nuns were especially controversial. As was pointed out by many, according to the eight precepts in Buddhism, monks and nuns undertook the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, music, and going to see entertainment. As one Ladakhi monk from the Geluk sect stated during a pre-festival interview, “by performing, singing and dancing, one’s ego and self-cherishing will increase. The aim of Buddhism is to decrease the ego and self-cherishing, not increase it” (Interview, 15 July 2016). The so-called Kung-Fu Nuns from the Druk Amitabha nunnery had multiple performances throughout the six days of the festival, including a dakini dance which resembled a female version of the *cham*, or mask dance traditionally performed by monks at monastery festivals. They also did a drum performance with choreographed, avant-garde-ish arm movements and slow, almost meditative sounds. For their Kung-Fu performances, the nuns entered the stage to dramatic music reminiscent of the soundtrack from the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.¹⁸ The performance started with gymnastic feats, and then shifted to fight sequences set to very loud heavy metal music. Seeing nuns wearing Kung Fu outfits and fighting to heavy metal music was both sensory overload and confusing to many Ladakhis. Later in the evening, these same nuns appeared to perform a Nepali folk song written by the Gyalwang Drukpa. For this performance, the nuns entered the stage in saris and long, black-haired wigs as they shook their hips in a fashion typical for Nepali folk songs that depict flirtatious relations among young men and women working in the fields.

Nuns performing, fighting, dancing, wearing wigs and saris, and shaking their hips left many Ladakhis wondering: What was the point of these performances? Was it to show that nuns can do anything the monks can do and more? As one Ladakhi commentator posted on Facebook, “Times when nuns are dancing for a religious gathering and Bollywood is used for religious centenaries, something just doesn’t look right. Sorry, but not sorry, things like these actually destabilizes Buddhist community in Ladakh.”¹⁹ This post elicited an enormous response, both in support and critique of the Drukpa organization. The response was so great that the commentator deleted her comment and Facebook profile for a short while to let the controversy simmer down a bit. Monks also spurred controversy,

since they were seen in evening entertainment programs dancing energetically to Bollywood performances. When these dancing monks were shown on the YouTube via live streaming, critical comments and confusion resulted. Are they allowed to do that? Shouldn’t they be discouraged and not encouraged to dance in public? These varying responses illuminate the contentious and ambiguous reception of the festival, which in turn highlight larger issues related to the modernization of Ladakhi society and 21st century Buddhism. Thus, Naropa 2016 has become a “seedbed of cultural creativity” (cf. Sutton-Smith in Turner 1974: 60), the results of which are yet to be determined.

Conclusion

In trying to make sense of the spectacularity of the Naropa 2016 festival, it is clear that the festival was not only involved in transmitting religion through re-creating a religious ritual, but also in transforming religion and enacting change. In the Naropa 2016 festival, the tension between transmission and transformation of religion was played out in the carnival-like setting of a religious ritual with new cultural elements adding an increased emphasis on entertainment, such as performances by renowned Bollywood performers that lasted late into the night. The incorporation of these more ‘secular’ elements within a traditionally Buddhist ritual provoked widespread debate among Ladakhi Buddhists, highlighting the role of Buddhist ritual in not only maintaining social structures, but also in transforming social structures. Naropa 2016 offers an illuminating case through which to understand the contemporary contexts in which Buddhist ritual specialists attempted to maintain the prominence and relevance of Buddhist institutions. By bringing in seemingly ‘secular’ elements, such as Bollywood performances and fashion shows, within the context of an historic and highly sacred Buddhist ritual, these Buddhist leaders showed Ladakhis and the world that their level of influence reached beyond the secluded domain of the Himalayas.

Scholars have long discussed modernity and processes of secularization, debating whether or not modernization necessarily entails secularization and the delimiting of the religious sphere as apart from other spheres such as the political, economic, and social (Asad 2003; Casanova 2006; Berger 1999, 2012). However, emic conceptualizations such as those discussed by Ladakhis in the context of Naropa 2016 often uphold the binary distinctiveness between the sacred and the secular. Through avid discussion and debate, as witnessed in conversations in Ladakh as well as on online fora, Ladakhis engaged in the process of redefining and delimiting how they understand Buddhism and the role of Buddhist institutions in their society. This process

was exemplified in the Naropa 2016 festival, where the spectacularization of Buddhism was at its height, resulting in a success as well as confusion about what should be considered Buddhism. While the Drukpa organization introduced this “new era of Buddhism” to the world through spectacle and the spectacular millennial anniversary of Naropa, debate and speculation arose among Ladakhis as to the purpose and meaning of Buddhist ritual and monastic Buddhism in general.

Despite the controversy and debate surrounding Naropa 2016, the Drukpa organization has not retreated in their attempts to modernize Buddhism. Another Naropa festival was held in September 2018, which repeated the same style and format as the Naropa 2016, with ritual performances during the day, cultural performances during the afternoon, and Bollywood performances during the evening. However, Naropa 2018 drew a much smaller crowd. With the repetition of this Naropa festival, there was also much less controversy than in 2016, already attesting to the power of repetition in promoting platforms of change, as well as implementing these changes.

Through holding the Naropa festival again, the repetition of the spectacular Buddhist ritual perhaps worked to make more bearable the tensions and hierarchies of the Drukpa Kagyü Buddhist organization and their vision for modernizing Buddhism. With the ‘emergent in action’ attempts of the Drukpa organization to not only maintain their position, but expand their position in Ladakh and beyond, these efforts at counter-secularization were repeated and much less debate and controversy were invoked two years after the first attempt in 2016. The question then remains as to what extent the Drukpa organization aims to expand their efforts to usher in this “new era of Buddhism?” And, perhaps even more relevant: At what point might Ladakhis push back against these modernizing efforts in response to the expanding influence of the Drukpa organization in Ladakh? Only time, and perhaps repetition, will tell.²⁰

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Endnotes

1. The Kagyü (*bka' rgyud-pa*) sub-sects include the *Phag-mo-gru* (Tib.), *'bKar-ma* (Tib.), *'Bri-khung* (Tib.), *mTshal* (Tib.), *sTag-lung* (Tib.), *'brug* (Tib.) and *Shangs-pa* (Tib.). Throughout this article, I focus on the *'brug* order.
2. The *Kumbh Mela* is a large Hindu pilgrimage where Hindus from all over the world come to bathe in holy rivers at four major sites of Allahabad, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain. The *maha* (great) *Kumbh Mela* is held every twelve years at Haridwar and Allahabad and has become the largest religious gathering in the world with up to 120 million participants (see Cariappa et al. 2015).
3. Originally, Naropa 2016 was planned for the fifth lunar month during the Hemis festival, but due to a number of reasons the festival was postponed to September. The official reason given by the Gyalwang Drukpa was that he did not want to interfere with the Dalai Lama's visit to Ladakh, which was to take place at the same time. However, another reason for the postponement was the delay in constructing the Naropa palace.
4. In a recorded interview with the president of the Young Drukpa Association, this number was substantiated (interview, Leh, Ladakh, 31 07 2017).
5. The *tsé chu* (*tshes bcu*) is an annual monastery festival typically held on the 10th day of the month in commemoration of Padmasambhava. Various monasteries in Ladakh hold their *tsé chu* on different months, however the summer months has become a popular time to hold these festivals.

6. Previously, most of these festivals took place in the winter. Due to the advent of the tourism industry, many of these festivals have been moved to the summer (Jina 1994: 186).
7. Mona Schrempf (1994) describes 'cham as "a public Tibetan ritual dance, performed for a lay audience by monks" in which "[m]usic, chanted mantra and sādhana, costumed dance with masks, ritual objects and gestures (mudra) combine to form an elaborate performance of gods dancing on earth" (96). According to Cathy Cantwell (1995), the 'cham is a Vajrayana ritual that that is particularly oriented towards benefitting lay people.
8. Thuksey Rinpoche is a high-ranking Ladakhi Buddhist monk of the Drukpa Kagyü order, and often revered as the second highest ranking Drukpa Buddhist master after the Gyalwang Drukpa. He is the head of the Druk Padma Karpo School, a school which was showcased in the immensely popular Bollywood film *3 Idiots* (Hirani 2009).
9. Norbu is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors.
10. Robert F. Kennedy is the president of the Waterkeeper Alliance's board of directors. The Waterkeeper Alliance is a large nonprofit organization, which focuses on clean water. In 2013, the Waterkeeper Alliance named the Gyalwang Drukpa the "Guardian of the Himalayas" ("Waterkeeper Alliance Names Gyalwang Drukpa 'Guardian of the Himalayas'" 2013).
11. Tenzin Palmo is a renowned English nun and the center of the bestselling book *A Cave in the Snow* by Vickie Mackenzie (1998).
12. International participants were requested to pay a registrant fee of 380 USD. For Himalayan participants (from Bhutan, India, Nepal), their fee was reduced to 300 USD. Ladakhis could attend the festival for free, but they were not allotted a section in the large tent constructed to provide shade from the blistering sun in this high-altitude desert region, and they were not offered meals.
13. *Live to Love* is the "global humanitarian movement" founded in 2007 by Drukchen Rinpoche "in his effort to use Buddhist approaches to solve modern day problems" ("Our Founder" 2017). *Live to Love* is "an international consortium of secular, non-profit organisations" and focuses on the five aims of Education, Environmental Protection, Health Services, Relief Aid and Cultural Preservation (ibid).
14. The *50 Stanzas of Guru Devotion*, or *50 Stanzas on Following a Teacher*, is a text written by Ashvaghosha (80?- 150? CE) that explains in detail how one can be devoted to one's guru, including how to choose a guru and the commitment one makes in doing so (see for example Karmapa IX 1978).
15. A documentary on the eco *pad yatra*, "Pad Yatra: A Green Odyssey" (Lee 2013) was directed by Wendy J.N. Lee, the sister of Carrie Lee who was the previous president of *Live to Love* foundation, narrated by Daryl Hannah and produced with the help of Michelle Yeoh, the actress from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* fame. (see <<http://www.padyatra.org/about>>).
16. In particular, the Facebook page, "Ladakh in the Media," became a prominent social media platform where Ladakhis debated the significance and running of the Naropa festival; see <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/904515826309195/>> (accessed on 28 September 2018).
17. In particular, students at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi wrote a letter of complaint about deeming Naropa 2016 as a *Kumbh mela*, since *Kumbh mela* is a Hindu festival and not Buddhist.
18. The similarity is not so far-fetched in that Michelle Yeoh, the star of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is also a spokesperson for *Live to Love* foundation.
19. Facebook post on September 22, 2016.
20. In September 2019, the Drukpa organization held another Naropa festival, this time without including Bollywood performances and expending the resources needed to fly in Bollywood stars to perform at a Drukpa Kagyü Buddhist festival.

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