

# The situation of education in Zangla

## Csoma's Room Project Report

### August-September 2008







1. Picture: View of Zangla from the Western side of Zanskar river

## Zangla

Zangla is a tiny remote village in Northern India, on the bank of river Zanskar at 3500m altitude, with a rich history. In 2008, as a member of the team who initiated a project to save the fortified palace where Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, pioneer of Tibetan studies worked on his famous English-Tibetan dictionary almost 200 years ago. I was responsible for evaluating the current situation of education. The present paper is a short report of this work.

### The government school of Zangla

The government school is situated in a new building in the part of the village lying close to the Zanskar River.

The school has 8 grades, plus a preparatory kindergarten class. In 2008 the number of students was as follows:



2. Picture: The government school of Zangla

Class	0.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	Total
Students	17	12	4	8	4	4	5	5	10	69

Thus, the school has 69 pupils in total. They usually start the preparatory class at the age of 5, but as occasionally students fail the exams and have to repeat a class, the oldest pupils of the school are 16-17 years old. The majority of the students (appr. 60) are from Zangla, while the others commute from the surrounding villages, such as Pishu, Tsazar and Pidmo. In these villages only 4 years of education is available, so they have to come to the Zangla school to continue their studies.

For the 9 classes the school has only 6 teachers - even though the regulation of the state prescribes a higher teacher-student ratio, it is not achieved because of the lack of teachers prevailing in the region. The teachers and the director are centrally appointed, and they usually rotated among schools within the Zanskar region every 2-3 years. Because of that system, many teachers coming from surrounding villages who now teach in Zangla are uncertain about how long they are going to stay there (furthermore, even those coming from Zangla proper might be moved to other locations any time). This generally hinders long-term planning and any new initiatives at the school. The current head master, Mr. Rigzen Thangpa, who has been in this position for 6 years already, does his job with much enthusiasm and devotion. In the past years, he has initiated a number of innovations in the school: among others, he has created a Poor Fund<sup>1</sup> and in 2008 founded the school library.



3. Picture: Teacher and pupils in Zangla

The teaching hours are between 10-16 o'clock from Monday to Saturday. There is a lunch break between 13-14 o'clock, when the pupils receive a free lunch at school. Apart from Sundays and other public holidays, there is a long winter holiday (because of the lack of heating in the school building) between the 15th of December and the 1st of March, and a 10-day summer holiday which in 2008



4. Picture: Lunch at school

was between the 15th of July and the 1st of August. The exact dates of holidays are decided yearly by the administration of the Jammu and Kashmir State. However, because of the lack of teachers, the children often remain without supervision even during teaching periods, and they often go home earlier or do not even go to school. The teachers can also take further days of holiday in the season of harvest or other important agricultural jobs. The working climate is rather negligent, and it happens that some of the teachers fail to show up at work (which does not lead to any further consequences).

<sup>1</sup> Even though education is free of charge (as are the school lunch and the uniform), some families can not afford the notebooks and pencil necessary for school, as part of the population of Zangla practices subsistence farming and does not have any cash income. Thus, pupils of the Zangla school donate 5 Rupies (about 0.1 USD) to the Poor Fund, which is used to buy stationery for the poor kids.



Class	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
1st	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths
2nd	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths
3rd	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths
4th	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths
5th	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths
6th	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths
7th	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths
8th	English	Urdu	Maths	English	Maths	Urdu	English	Maths

5. Picture: Timetable at Zangla school

The approach of the teachers and students is influenced by the fact that in Ladakhi education in general, the level of the private schools is significantly higher than that of governmental schools. Thus, the society does not attach much importance to the education done by government schools. According to Mr. Rigzin, the head master of the school, the people of Zangla themselves do not find it important that their children study well, for example after school they would make the children do household jobs rather than encourage them to do their homework. Those who really want to ensure their kids' good education, send them to study at the

private school in the nearby village of Tongde (the Marpaling school in Tongde will be addressed later).

## Subjects taught

The main subjects are English, Urdu (which is the official language of the Jammu and Kashmir State), Bodhi (reading of Tibetan Buddhist texts), as well as Mathematics, Social Science, Natural Sciences, History. As can be seen from the list, subjects such as PE, arts, drawing, music, handicrafts are completely missing from the curriculum. There are no specialized teachers for these fields at the school, but occasionally they do organize sports and games activities on Fridays.



6. Picture: English, the language of teaching

As in all government schools of the State,



7. Picture: Plants from the region, board

English has become the language of instruction in the school as from 2007. Now, most of the textbooks are in English, but the majority of the pupils has difficulty understanding the material, so after reading in English the teachers usually explain the texts in Ladakhi. The sudden change was not only problematic for the students, but the teachers too, who also face problems teaching in English. As for the English skills of the children, apart from the reading comprehension the verbal communication skills are in a poor state too, because there is in general very little room for practice on classes. There is no Hindi education at the school, which partly decreases the pupils' chances for higher education. So, even

though in most high schools and colleges English can be chosen for the entrance exam instead of

Hindi, some pupils study Hindi after teaching hours from the teachers who give them private lessons.

As in Ladakh in general, in Zangla there is no Ladakhi education. As this language was long considered a dialect of Tibetan, written Ladakhi only appeared recently, and is still not taught at schools.

The textbooks are provided free of charge by the administration of the Jammu and Kashmir State (as is the daily lunch, since 2008).

However, these books do not contain any information about

Ladakh, as the material (both in social and natural sciences) is based on other parts of India that are very different from Ladakh in terms of history, culture, geography and wildlife. That way, the children who have never seen a mango are studying about mango trees, while they do not properly know the names of the plants found in their vicinity. To address that problem, local NGO SECMOL (Students' Educational and Cultural Movement Ladakh), among its other activities, has prepared and published school textbooks suited for Ladakh, which came in to common use in the Leh region<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, these books do not reach the Zangla school, so some of the teachers are making efforts to compile education tools to teach children about Ladakh.



8. Picture: The nunnery school in Zangla

## The nunnery school

In the Northern part of the village, on a hill facing the fort once inhabited by Csoma, lies the nunnery of Zangla with about 15 inhabitants. The school operated by the nunnery is the second school in Zangla, where only girls can study. All of them come here with the aim of becoming a nun, even though some of them later choose the lay life and continue their studies in the government school.

Currently the school has 18 pupils (mostly from Zangla) and one teacher, Mr. Lobzang, who is a monk from the close-by Karsha monastery. In 2008 an American lady, Teresa Rozell stayed at the nunnery as a volunteer teacher for about a half year. She arrived through Jamyang Foundation, which is a women Buddhist organization that supports nunneries of the region in various ways, including the volunteer teachers.

Teaching at the nunnery school is between 10-16 hours, every day except for Sunday. The summer holiday in 2008 was between 15th of July and 1st of



9. Picture: On the way home from the nunnery school

<sup>2</sup> Leh is the capital of Ladakh.



August, the winter holiday between 15th of December and 1st of March. The subjects taught are Buddhist Studies and prayers (Chors), as well as Hindi and Tibetan languages, and a little English and Mathematics too (thanks to the volunteers).

The pupils are between 5 and 15 years of age, and after the classes they go back to their families (the school does not offer boarding). The school consists of a single classroom, where the girls of different ages form separate groups. Similarly to the government school, the nunnery is facing a serious lack



10. Picture: Waiting for the Tongde schoolbus in Zangla



11. Picture: Waiting for the Tongde schoolbus in Zangla

of teachers, especially concerning arts and sports activities and English language, but even in the field of Buddhist studies. As the only teacher of the school is a monk from Karsha monastery 30 kilometers away, because of his other activities he spends a significant amount of time away from school.

The schooling is free of charge for the pupils. To cover its costs, the nunnery does not receive a subsidy from the government, but all of the expenses are covered by private donations, mostly from the USA.

## The Marpaling school in Tongde

Many children (about 25 in 2008) from Zangla go to the private school in Tongde. The school was founded by a Swiss and a Ladakhi teacher in 2000, and is a member of the Lamdon school network, which incorporates a number of other schools throughout Ladakh. The network supports itself from foreign donations, so the pupils receive education free of charge. At the same time, the families do have to pay for the school bus, which costs about 680 Rupies (about 16 USD) from Zangla.

Currently, the Marpaling school has 187 pupils, studying in 8 grades, plus 3 preparatory classes. The children come from the Zangla-Padum region, and the teaching times are largely the same as at the government school. However, in contrast with the government school, the majority of the teachers come from outside of the region (in fact, none of the teachers are from Zanskar), mostly from Himachal Pradesh or Jammu (the Tibetan teacher is from Tibet). According to Ms. Ladun, the school director, these teachers are better qualified, than the locals. At the same time, they often lack knowledge about Ladakh, for example the teacher of Hindi language does not even speak Ladakhi.

While the Landon network is organized around Buddhist philosophy, there is no religious education at the school. The main subjects are similar to the government school, but complimented by Hindi language, PE and computer classes. The textbooks are supplied by the Landon Society, and are much higher quality than the governmental ones, according to the locals. Similarly to the Zanglaschool, the



12. Picture: Pishu - the village on the other side of river Zaskar, opposite Zangla

material is in English, but the teachers also explain it in Ladakhi. At the same time, the English communication skills of the children at Tongde school are much higher than those of Zangla. The reason for that might lie in the higher number of English classes, as well as in the fact that foreign volunteers regularly come to the school through a Swiss organisation. Apart from computer skills, music, sports, etc, they mostly teach English communication. For example, in the summer of 2008, 6 volunteers visited Tongde for periods between 2 weeks and 2 months<sup>3</sup>. The volunteers mostly help the children in learning the school material, but sometimes they also complement it with other materials. Usually, they spend 1 hour teaching every day, mostly in the secondary grades. They get accommodation in the school premises, in the same building where the permanent teachers stay.

## ***Other schools in the area***

Some children commute to Zangla from the surrounding villages, such as Pishu and Pidmo. In these villages there are also schools, but they operate only the primary grades (4 years).

After graduating from the secondary school in Zangla, the children can go to high school in Padum, the nearest town lying 35 kilometers away. The schools in Padum are also free of charge, but the costs of traveling and staying in Padum (altogether about 800 Rupies or 20 USD monthly) have to be born by them, as well as part of the textbooks and the school uniform (yearly about 1200 Rupies or 30 USD). While these amounts are not high, some families in Zangla find it hard to raise money, as part of the community of Zangla lives traditional self-sufficient lives, and does not have any cash income.

In the past years, an initiative was launched to have teaching in the winter months too, when the government school is closed for holiday because of the cold. The winter school was organized in a private house of Tambu (part of Zangla lying close to the Zaskar River) by Chamden and Tsiring Palden, with French support. In the winter season agricultural work can not be done because of the harsh weather, so it would be a good period to exploit for education purposes in other parts of Zangla, too.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Ms. Ladun, teaching is much more effective when the volunteers stay minimum one month.



## ***Project proposal***

The Hungarian-organized Csoma's Room Project plans to support education in Zangla in 3 ways:

### ***1. Sending volunteer teachers to the two schools in Zangla***

As can be seen from the above description, the biggest problem of education in Zangla is the lack of teachers. Volunteer teachers could temporarily ease this problem, while also addressing other shortcomings of the education system. First and foremost, this entails English teaching, as even though the language of instruction of the school is English, children hardly speak the language at all.



13. Picture: Pupils holding the 2008 poster of Csoma's Room Project

The task of the volunteer teachers would be to practice the active use of English with the pupils. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, as Hindi is not taught at the school, a good command of English is the only chance for the children to continue their studies on high school and college. Furthermore, a better level of communication in English would enable them to exploit the opportunities given by the constantly growing tourism in the region. A more active participation in tourism would not only provide the locals with income, but also enable them to get to know other cultures and make them appreciate their own traditional culture through intercultural

communication. Currently, Zanskar can only be reached from Leh by a long a poor quality dirt road, so only less than 10 percent of the tourists arriving to Ladakh visit the region. At the same time, a new road is under construction, which will reduce the now 2 day long journey to a matter of 3 hours. The new road is expected to be completed in 3-6 years, which will undoubtedly bring an inflow of tourists to the region. English communication is a necessary condition for the community to take a more active role in tourism, so that the locals can profit themselves from the process, rather than be left out of the benefits while sharing its problems. For that reason, English education is desirable not only at schools, but among the adult population as well.

Apart from English teaching, another aim of the project is to familiarize the people of Zangla with the story of Alexander Csoma de Koros. While this unique common cultural heritage of Zangla and Hungary could serve as a source of pride and inspiration for the locals, now very few of them know about it at all. Csoma's story and former residence could also be used as a touristic attraction. The volunteers would introduce not only Csoma's story, but basic knowledge about Hungary and the restoration being done as well. This education activity can be complimented by various arts, such as drawing, singing, etc.



## ***The volunteer teachers' work***

The job will take 5 hours per day on average, including preparation for the classes, teaching (2 to 4 hours per day) , writing reports. Other than teaching, the tasks of the volunteers will include:

- preparation of teaching materials before going to Ladakh, in cooperation with the other volunteers and the organizers of the project
- gathering further information on the local education system and society, to be used for the planning of future projects
- reporting about activities done and information gathered
- other activities in accordance with local demand (such as adult education)

The volunteers will preferably come for periods of at least one month, but occasionally short-time teaching can also be arranged, to assist the work of the long-term teachers. Travel must be organised by the volunteers themselves, but the project provides accomodation at local families.

## ***2. Supporting the school with books, stationery and other teaching aid***

Even though the volunteer teachers will most probably stay only during the summer season, our aim is to improve the level of education in Zangla throughout the year. While the textbooks are provided by



14. Picture: The scholarship committee studying the project description

the Jammu and Kashmir State free of charge for each student, other education aid (such as pictures, illustrations, colour pencils, etc.) is lacking in the school. Other than making the classrooms and the classes more appealing, these complimentary materials can also help to give children some knowledge about Ladakh. So, our aim is to make available teaching aid produced by Ladakhi organizations (such as SECMOL) to the children in Zangla. Furthermore, we plan to support the newly founded library of the Zangla government school with books, as the budget provided by the state administration for buying books is insufficient.

## ***3. Scholarship for the children of Zangla to continue their studies***

While high school education in Padum is free of charge, every year there are some families in Zangla who can not afford to send their children to high school, because they can not pay the expenses of moving to the town. The children usually share a room in Padum and cook together, so the accomodation costs about 200 Rupies (5 USD) and the food about 5-600 Rupies (15 USD) per month. Furthermore, the children also have to pay for some books (about 150 Rupies or 4 USD per year) and a school uniform at the beginning of the schoolyear in March (about 900-1000 Rupies or 25

USD). The trip to Padum by bus costs 20 Rupies one way (the children studying in Padum usually come home to Zangla for the weekends).

For those children who wish to go to high school, but lack the means for it, the Csoma Scholarship was founded in September 2008. In accordance with the expenses outlined above, the children receive financial support as follows: in the beginning of the schoolyear 1000 Rupies, then for the remaining 10 months of the schoolyear 700 Rupies per month. In this year, two students were chosen for the scholarship by the Scholarship Committee, which consists of 12 representatives of the village. A teacher and the headmaster of the government school are among the committee members, as well as 2 nuns of the Zangla nunnery, the elected leader of the village, and members of the village Education Committee. The Scholarship Committee is responsible for distributing the money to the students at specified time intervals, and for supervising the children's studies (one month after the beginning of the schoolyear, the Committee must meet to write a report about the details of the money transfer and the beginning of high school studies). The Committee also chose a third candidate, for the case if one of the two children fails the high school entrance exams. The children have to write a motivation letter when they are chosen for the scholarship, as well as another letter during the schoolyear, explaining their studies and ways of life. Currently, the scholarship is offered for one year, but we aim to extend it for longer term as well, preferably for the full time of the 4 years of high school.

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