

## Global Flow Of Finance In Zanskar

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**Abstract:** Over the last fifty years Buddhism has found its way around the world. There is increasing feminist awareness and the growing global interest in Tibetan Buddhism. Deep within the folds of the Indian Himalayas in Zanskar, a subdistrict of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, Zanskar is the last remaining original Tibetan Buddhist society with a continuous untainted lineage dating back thousand of years. It's a well-known fact that it remains cut-off from rest of the world for many months every winter due to heavy snowfall in the Zojila Pass. In the coldest months, the Zanskar River freezes and the people use the ice as a winter road (named as "Chadar") to the rest India. Karsha one of the oldest and most prominent village in Zanskar proudly hosts ancient nunnery named as Kachod Drub Ling and Buddhist temples dating back to 11<sup>th</sup> century. The Buddhist nuns here are popularly known as 'Chomos'. These nuns face poverty and thus the global flows of finance have brought funds within the nun's scope, which have brought them the opportunity to leave home re-establish their own locality and above all transform their identity.

They now play a very valuable role as counselors, ritual performers, health workers, natural medicine doctors, teachers, Thangka painters.

In this paper we focus on the various co-creators of monastic field like Jamyang Foundation bringing in large amount of capital.

Cultural capital consists of forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has which gives them higher status in society. The nuns thus converting this cultural capital into social capital by maintaining and strengthening bonds, also extend borders of their monastic field into the global world.

**Keywords:** Chomos, social capital, economic capital, cultural capital, monastic, funds, Buddhist.

Buddhist religious field is precisely the foundation for the creation of the nunneries as promoted by many organisations to create an international network of communication among Buddhist women promoting world peace integrating scholarship and social activism. The Tibetan Nuns Project now provides facilities for nuns and initiates programs to educate, empower and improve their status including refugee nuns from Tibet.

With female practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism being denied a chance at fulltime religious practice and education, the Jamyang Foundation joined the Tibetan religious field by co-creating and supporting monasteries for Tibetan Buddhist Women in the Northern Himalayas

It was founded in 1987 in Dharamshala, the seat of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of the Tibetan Buddhist in India. Starting off as a literacy project for Tibetan Buddhist

nuns in Dharamshala, this foundation's support has expanded to Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries for women all over Northern India.

It gives priority to shelter, food, education. By providing a start up for the building of shelter, the women are given a communal place to study, work and practice their religion. The chomos (the Buddhist nuns of Zanskar) are able to go onto higher education and eventually serve as teachers, health care workers, community workers and mentors to others.

With the help of foreign volunteer teachers, the Jamyang Foundation expanded the curriculum in the nunneries with classes in English and Hindi, basic calculation, bookkeeping and maths (having control on economic capital) health and hygiene, social studies and environment awareness. This has provided some of the nuns with the opportunity to visit international conferences. Basic bookkeeping and calculation

gives them control on income and spending. This foundation also gives training on health and hygiene in and outside the nunnery.

In 2003 two nuns from Zangkar and one nun from Spiti followed a year of basic medical training in the Sonam Norboo Memorial Hospital in Leh under the guidance of Dr. Tsering Lhadro. A publication named 'Healthy Body, Healthy Mind' is also sponsored which is a kind of self help book for these chomos.

Recognizing the need for higher education, this foundation also supports a number of nuns from Karsha attending the Leh Buddhist School in Ladakh. These nuns can also apply for scholarship for higher education.

Bringing international volunteer teachers as foreign cultural capital into the monastic field to serve as catalyst to the nuns' own cultural capital into the monastic field, the Jamyang Foundation also attempts to modify the traditional Tibetan Buddhist doxa in the monastic field. The nuns capitalize on their newly acquired knowledge and skills by improving their daily life. The nuns also invest their cultural capital in the family and locality. Examples are sisters, brothers and local students invited for computer classes and knowledge on female health shared with the Karsha village women.

The younger generation of nuns uses their newly acquired English language skills in practical ways to communicate with passing tourists to keep in contact with their beneficiary.

Capitalizing on their cultural capital to strengthen the bonds with their donors. This way they clearly obtain social capital which might even result in more economic capital through subsequent monetary support.

Combined with the cultural capital of literacy skills in Hindi and English these nuns are able to apply for government grants thereby to launch into different national and international networks and subsequently obtaining more social and economic capital.

The economic capital of owning computers and the cultural capital of being able to use these computers has brought a high status in the locality to the nuns who do possess these skills, thereby capitalizing cultural capital into social capital.

The nuns also see their results of their investment in this cultural capital being materialized in economic capital of saving on doctor's bills, medicines and food expenditure.

Also accepting small donations for the offered classes in the form of cookies, tea, butter, small change, they again transform their cultural capital into economic capital.

Over the last 2 decades years, Gaden Relief funds were used to institute construction projects including passive solar classrooms, compost toilets, greenhouses, and passive solar water storage tanks, as well as provide support for ritual and scholarly activities at nunneries.

Gaden Relief project has also been helping Buddhist nuns in Zangkar since 1991. After funding Karsha's Chuchikjall nunnery as a pilot program, the Zangkar Project now covers all ten nunneries that are spread across Zangkar's 7000 sq. kilometers. The Zangkar Project has funded the following projects at local nunneries using local technology, skills, and materials. At Karsha, a classroom was built which is now used as a meeting and seminar room. At Sani, traditional stone and

mud mortar cells were built to house new nuns. At Skyagam, Tibetan wall paintings were completed in a new assembly hall. All nunneries receive annual subsidies to help defray the expense of ritual assemblies, secular training sessions, and individual stipends to help nuns purchase books & food.

Gaden Relief only sponsors those nunneries that have a permanent sangha in residence that meets on a regular basis. Funds are sent to individual nunneries annually to provide basic foodstuffs and other materials necessary for communal rituals and collective meals. From 1991 through 1998, Gaden Relief focused on the Chuchikjall nunnery in Karsha, where it built a classroom, toilet, greenhouse, and helped fund wintertime prayer assemblies. The classroom facilitated the study of Tibetan logic, debate, philosophy, and other topics under the guidance of a Tibetan Geshe. The compost toilet was modeled on those used in Zangskari homes to provide valuable compost for fields and gardens. Finally, the addition of a greenhouse near the assembly hall has enabled nuns to grow vegetables that would ordinarily not have thrived in Zangkar's cold climate. Funds were also used to purchase over 40 locally produced "smokeless" stoves. These dung-burning stoves substantially reduced the amount of smoke in the communal kitchens and residential cells at several nunneries where they were installed. In 1998, Gaden Relief began sponsoring other nunneries after repeated requests by their members. As of 2010, Gaden Relief sponsors all ten nunneries across Zangkar, including those located in Karsha, Sani, Zangla, Skyagam, Tungri, Pishu, Rizhing, Manda, Bya, and Chumig Gyartese. It helps support appropriate technology at each nunnery including passive solar constructions, water delivery systems, and prayer sessions where the assembled nuns can meet and younger nuns learn the many of required prayers and ritual texts used during regular rites held at the nunnery. Besides the benefits of education, winter prayer sessions provided an ongoing communal gathering during which nuns could meet to discuss community affairs, group finances, village ritual requirements, and other administrative matters.

The Karsha nuns are also in contact with LNA and two nuns from LNA came visit Karsha last year. Ladakh Nuns Association is an association of Buddhist nuns in Ladakh. It was founded in the year 1996 by Dr. Tsering Palmo with the aim of reviving and rejuvenating the tradition of nuns in Ladakh. It aims to raise the education level of the nuns and to give them a way to study and practice the Dharma. It was registered officially in the year 1997 under the Jammu and Kashmir Government.

Currently, all the nuns of Zangkar have organized their own NGO, the Zangskari Nuns Association (ZNA) with the significant insistence of and assistance from Kim Gutchow who understands the importance of the nuns and the power of numbers. With this NGO, the nuns can now receive government and foreign funds, and work together to benefit all the nunneries of Zangkar. They can also raise money to work on larger communal projects and also distribute this money to individual nunneries based on their individual needs. The nuns can gather together on occasion and discuss what they think are important issues for female monastics of Zangkar and then, with skill and care, demand from the government certain recognition and funding. In this way, the nuns will have more

opportunity to build a proper space for ritual and meditation sessions, and also for teaching, studying and learning. The doors are wide open for all the nuns of Zangskar in terms of what they can build and achieve materially, but more importantly, spiritually. All nuns seem to have many similarities: the same determination and wisdom, and with that the same difficulties and obstacles in terms of appropriate support from abroad and locally. But even within the past three years, one can notice the change in the nunneries condition and the change in the way in which the villagers view the nuns as not just women refusing to marry, but as women who are seeking enlightenment and deserving of proper recognition as such. From the nuns' side, however, they are in a way too busy to worry about what the rest of society thinks and feels: they have much higher goals in mind. Between 1991 and 2010, Gaden Relief raised roughly \$100,000 to assist Zangskari nuns. These funds are delivered annually or bi-annually by Kim Gutschow, the Zangskari Project Coordinator, or Lauren Galvin, Field Manager.

Previously these nunneries were facing many challenges like poverty, getting Buddhist education, freeing themselves

from familial obligations but now they are attracting enough support to maintain their nunneries. Build with global support, the nun's monastery represents a physical safe house and an inspiring religious haven, giving both protection and safety.

While slowly changing the gendered perception through investing in various forms of economic, cultural and social capital, the nuns are also treading the field of Tibetan Buddhist religion with the creation of their own monastic field.

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