

Problems of the People of Lahaul & Spiti Valley: A Sociological Study

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Abstract: India is a vast country with different geographic locations, cultures, traditions, languages, economic activities, etc. In such a huge country there ought to be problems pertaining to different locations and conditions. This study is conducted to understand the lifestyle and find out the problems related to a very unique area situated in the lap of The Himalayas at the height of more than 3000 metres above sea level, Lahaul and Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh. Known for its spectacular beauty, extreme weather conditions and one of the most difficult roads in the world, Spiti Valley has the World's Highest Village, World's Highest Post Office, World's Highest Retail Outlet of Petrol Pump, Fossil Village of India and a lot of other places of great significance for religion and cultures.

Key Words: Empirical- based on experiments and practical experience, trifle- something that is of little value, fatal- deadly, heed- to pay attention.

1. INTRODUCTION:

This study has helped in understanding the lifestyle of the local people of Lahaul & Spiti Valley, it also aims at identifying their problems and provide viable solutions to those problems. Thus this is an exploratory research empirically conducted with an objective to study and understand the lifestyle and problems of the people residing in these extreme weather conditions for ages

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Tribune has laid emphasis on the positive transformation that has taken place during the past few decades in this areas. According to this study the district has a literacy rate of 91% which is higher than our national average, best child sex ratio in the country according to the census 2011. It also found that the economic condition of the people has also increased remarkably in the past few years. Moreover the district has been designated as a priority district under the National Health Mission.

The Indian Express in an article "Climate Change in Spiti" has documented a water crises faced by Komic which is the world's highest village connected with a motorable road and is at an altitude of 4587 metres above sea level i.e. more than half the height of Mount Everest. This village lies in the upper belt of Spiti Valley and is cut off from the rest of the world or even rest of the Spiti for a period of more than 6 months, and is facing a severe water crises because the mountains are not receiving sufficient snowfall in the peak winters.

Tsering and Tashi have laid emphasis on the history of Spiti Valley which is known to be more than a thousand years old and played an important role in the so-called Tibetan Renaissance. Tabo and various other monasteries in the region established by Rinchen Zangpo who was one of the leading figures of the late 10th and early 11th century.

Supriyo Halder a teacher from Rampur had conducted a case study on Kaza which was a socio economic analysis of Indian cold desert region. In this study the analysis helped in finding out that the people in Spiti spoke languages like Spiti 76%, Nepali 16% and Buddhist 8%. Kaza market is the main market for good in this area due to lack of availability of goods and difficult transportation. Some special goods are stone jewellery, wool and metals.

Shreeshan Venkatesh has discussed the potential of Spiti Valley's wild fruit seabuckthorn that grows along the Spiti river and its collection has increased almost 20 times in the past few years. These are bright orange berries that are collected usually by the women in the valley and they provide additional income to the people. This plant has medicinal values in terms of curing diabetes, high blood pressure, and is also rich in vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants and fatty acids.

R. C. Oberoi, A. K. Sharma and T. V. Moorti in their study have discussed about the soil quality being low for fertility and the environmental conditions not so appropriate for much vegetation. Thus they have suggested conservation of water, afforestation to prevent the soil from erosion and determination of cash animals and their rearing and breeding for better economic activity in the region.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The Spiti Valley is situated along the river Spiti which is close to the Tibetan border in the northern part of our country and the culture there is a mix Buddhism, Nepali, Hinduism ,etc. The people here follow a very difficult and disciplined lifestyle in their daily routine. This study is conducted as an empirical research by visiting the beautiful and extreme Spiti Valley and interacting with the locals and discussing their daily routine and the problems and difficulties faced by them. The data hence collected and analyzed is a result of personal interview of as many as fifty locals, this interview was more of a discussion with the people in order to try and understand their psychology and the hardships that they face. The villages that were visited in the course of this study are Tabo, Shichling, Kaza, Rangrik, Kibber, Langza, Hikkim, Komic, Losur, etc. which constitute the habitats in the Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh. Several people from all these villages were interview so as to understand their personal attributes and their opinion about the problems. Some of the questions of the interview were according to the pattern of the interview schedule prepared like:

1. The name and age of the respondent,
2. The village he/she belong to,
3. The educational qualifications and the occupation of the respondents,
4. Whether the respondent was suffering from any health related issues or not,
5. Number of members in the family and the number of earning members,
6. The main source of family income and their economic condition,
7. The problems faced by the respondent and his/her family members in their day to day life,
8. The other common problems that are faced by the people of that village,
9. Whether the respondent feels secure about future,
10. The respondents opinion and solutions suggested to the probable problems,

All the questions were discussed in detail so as to understand their perspective. These discussions helped in gaining information about the said explorations, the opinion of the people, the way these people think, their occupation, etc.

Hence the data collected is in the form of primary data and has been analyzed accordingly. The table 1. below shows the percentage of respondents belonging to each age group:-

Age Groups(years)	No. of respondents	Percentage%
0-15	2	4%
15-30	15	30%
30-45	16	32%
45-60	12	24%
60 & above	5	10%
Total:	50	100%

Table. 1

Majority of the respondents were in the age groups between 15 to 60 years and only two were in the age group of 0-15 years while 5 in the 60 & above group.

Educational Qualifications	No. of respondents	Percentage%
High School	7	14%
Intermediate	11	22%
Graduate	21	42%
Post-Graduate	9	18%
Others	2	4%
Total:	50	100%

Table. 2

The above table 2. shows the number and percentage of respondents educationally qualified and the level of education completed by them as of date. Here the others category includes two respondents who had still not reached high school.

Village	No. of respondents	Percentage%
Tabo	6	12%
Kaza	6	12%
Losur	6	12%
Shichling	5	10%
Dhankar	5	10%

Rangrik	4	8%
Langza	4	8%
Hikkim	4	8%
Komic	4	8%
Kibber	3	6%
Mud	3	6%
Total:	50	100%

Table. 3

The above table 3. shows the number of respondents belonging to each of the villages mentioned in the table thus representing their habitat in the region.

4. ANALYSIS:

The method of analysis used in this research is exploratory research analysis through which the data was examined in terms of patterns, trends, outliers and unexpected results in the study. Certain problems were highlighted more as compared to the others which were trifle for the people. There are some factors which cause serious problems for the villagers residing there such as parts of Lahaul and Spiti Valley is separated from the rest of the world for six months from November to May due to excessive snowfall, landslides, falling of boulders on the roads thus blocking the connectivity of the valley. The second such factor discovered is the extremity of climatic conditions which does not offer much choice for vegetation. In certain upper parts of the valley the mercury drops up to -20°C in winters which in itself becomes a problem for the people for daily routine activities. Another factor contributing significantly to the problems of the villagers is the altitude which is mostly above 3000 metres and reaches up to 4587 metres in Komic which is the Highest Village in the world connected with motorable roads. As we know that while we go beyond 2500 metres above sea level, altitude sickness poses a threat to life, however as we go beyond 3000 metres this becomes more acute with height causing respiratory problems and problems to other organs which find it difficult to function in the presence of low oxygen and can be even fatal. While talking to Gautam, the owner of a homestay in Kaza, it was discovered that at night the temperature falls significantly and therefore the water in the pipelines freezes and it is a very common problem with almost all the homestays and houses. This prevents the water from reaching the taps and sometimes even the pipelines burst due to increased pressure and volume from within. There is a major water crises in some parts of the valley and the lack of proper snowfall in the peak winters is a major cause of it as that is the major source of water supply. There is lack of employment opportunities as said by most of the respondent who either indulged into the businesses of tourism in some form or the other or did farming to sustain their livelihood based on the basic necessities of life. When the villages are separated from the world during winters no supply of goods is attained and the villagers have to adapt and become self-sufficient groups in order to survive. Some descend the mountains for six months and seek temporary employment while those who cannot, have to prepare and equip themselves during the summers to survive the subsequent winters. There was another serious problem of lack of telecommunication services which has now been taken care of by some new players in the market. Earlier there was no network and internet which made the people relatively unaware about the rest of the world.

Age Group (years)	Total no. of respondents	Those who are Insecure	Percentage%
0-15	2	0	0%
15-30	15	12	80%
30-45	16	11	69%
45-60	12	5	42%
60 & above	5	1	20%
Total	50	29	

Table. 4

Here we have taken some independent variables such as age, village and educational qualification of the respondents, upon which the dependent variables are insecurity, the unique problems of that village and the risks there, and occupation of the respondent respectively. It was found that the people falling under the age groups of 30-45 and 45-60 were more insecure as compared to those who were in the category of 15-30 and 60 and above. Insecurity of income, expenditure, life expectancy and future were taken into consideration according to the responses gathered from the respondents. The second dependent variable here consists of the unique problems and risks involved in a particular village as it varied from one village to another, for example the acute crises of water is the makor problem of the villages Hikkim, Komic and Langza, and these three villages along with Kibber are situated at a greater height as compared to other villages therefore the acute respiratory problems and altitude sickness are more prominent problems of these

villages. The occupation of the people was dependent upon their educational qualifications mostly. The table 5. below represents the categorization :-

Educational Qualifications	Total no. of respondents	Business	Farming	Daily Wage	Employed
High School	7	4	2	1	0
Intermediate	11	6	3	2	0
Graduate	21	11	2	4	4
Post Graduate	9	5	0	0	4
Others	2	0	0	2	0
Total	50	26	7	9	8
Percentage		52%	14%	18%	16%

Table. 5

5. KEY FINDINGS:

Since the people in this area are highly dependent upon tourism both national and international for their economic growth, during the winters when the roads are blocked they don't earn much and infact while surviving the winters they spend most of what they earn in summers. There is only one Petrol pump in Kaza the highest retail outlet in the world, so in order to get fueled up people from other neighbouring villages have to travel all the way to Kaza and then back to their home thereby loosing a lot of fuel just in the process of refueling

6. CONCLUSION:

According to the analysis 80% of the respondents who are tin the age group of 15-30 years are insecure about their income, expenditure, future, etc. as they are mostly young and are still in the phase of establishment. Another important point in the study that is reflected is that 52% of the respondents were involved in business which directly or indirectly was dependent upon tourism, which is over dependene upon a particular industry. Only 16% of the respondents were employed which is a matter of great concern. The problems faced by the people residing in the Lahaul and Spiti Valley of Himachal Pradesh are unique and different from the problems faced by the people of other hill stations of the country for example the roads getting blocked, the temperatures falling significantly, over dependency on tourism for economic activities and growth, lack of petrol pumps, lack of vegetation options, etc. health problems are also severe, acute respiratory diseases like bronchitis are common during winters. Chronic diseases like cancer, hypertension, diabetes, chronic heart failures and arthritis are increasing. Proper medical and health infrastructure is also lacking. Snow storms cause accidents and thus loss of life. Although Border Roads Organization (BRO) works consistently in cutting snow and providing safe routes for passage but still the government needs to take up some alternate plan of action for the same. Moreover, the Government should provide some source of employment to the people so as to support them economically specially during the harsh winters. Development of proper Health infrastructure instead of community health centres and primary health centres and should provide services like ultrasound, operation theatres, etc. which are still missing. Therefore, the conclusion of this research is that the people living in Lahaul and Spiti valley are warriors in their own way and they deserve some heed and support from the Government and Administration so as to make life a little easier for them.

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