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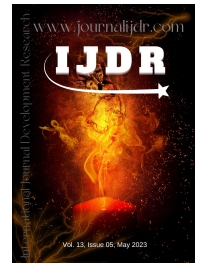
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ZANSKAR VALLEY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW ABOUT THE HIDDEN GEM OF LADAKH REGION

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ABSTRACT

Zanskar Valley is situated in the northern flank of Great Himalayas, a semi arid region at an altitude of 13154 ft. Zanskar Tehsil is a remote region due to its rugged topographical configuration, harsh environment and acute cold climatic conditions. The objective of this paper is to depict a brief overview about general topography, climatic conditions and transport & communication facility, religious festival and livelihood of the people of the Zanskar region.

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INTRODUCTION

Zanskar Valley is high altitude semi desert situated at the height of 13154 ft. It is a semi-arid region which is nestled in the lap of the northern flank of Great Himalayas. Tandup, C.(2014) has studied the natural environment of the Zanskar region and depicted the utilization of natural resources are constrained by the harsh climatic condition with rugged topography and underdeveloped technology. This paper depicts the topography of the Zanskar Valley, exploring road connectivity to Zanskar valley, focusing on culture and livelihood of the Zanskarites.

Topography of the Zanskar Valley: The mountain ranges of the Zanskar Valley includes the Northern face of the Great Himalayan Range in the south west which create boundary with Lahaul, Spiti and Chamba districts of Himachal Pradesh and district of Doda and Kishtwar of Jammu and Kashmir. The other is the Zanskar Range which is parallel to the Great Himalayan Range. Zanskar is situated along the two main branches of the Zanskar river. The first tributary is the Doda River having its origin at the Pensi La pass on the Kargil- padum route. The river flows along the south-east direction of the main valley approaching towards Padum. The second branch is originated by the two tributaries namely Kurgiakh river with

source near the Shinkula La pass and the Trasap Chu River with source near Baralacha La pass. The Kurgiakh river and the Tsarap Chu River meet at the village Purney to form the Lungnak river. This Lungnak river flows in the north-west direction and joins the Doda River to form the Zanskar River. The hydrographic system of the whole Zanskar has its only outlet namely the Zanskar river which consists of steep and narrow Zanskar Gorge flows by the Zanskar range.

Road connectivity to reach Zanskar Valley: Road connectivity to Zanskar Valley includes the following:

Leh – Lamayuru – Mulbekh – Kargil – Sankoo – Panikhar – Rangdum – Padum.

Zanskar Valley consists of mountain ranges namely the Northern face of the Great Himalayan Range and the Zanskar Range. Communication is possible with zanskar valley either through high mountain passes other than winter months or along the Zanskar river during winter months. Zanskar is situated approximate 460 km away from Leh city. Padum is the only town and administrative centre of Zanskar.

The road from Leh to Zanskar Valley via Karigil is **Leh – Lamayuru – Mulbekh – Kargil – Sankoo – Panikhar –**

The Nungnes festival celebrated in the month of July and the Sani Naro-Nasjal is celebrated during August with the blooming of the 'Guru Neropa Flower'.

Livelihood of the people of the Zaskar Valley: Majority of the inhabitants of the Zaskar Valley practice Tibetan Buddhism and a small portion of the population are Sunni Muslims. The Zaskaris are mixed of Tibetans and Indo-European origins; mainly Changpa, Dard and Mon. Villages of the Zaskar Valley are situated along the two main tributaries. The remoteness of the villages tend Zaskari people to adapt self-sufficiency. Rearing of the cattle and land farming are the main occupations of the Zaskari people. There is a scarcity of fertile cultivation land at an elevation of 4000 meters. Such harsh climatic conditions have enable the Zaskaries to develop intensive arable system of agriculture and complex irrigation system to generate adequate food and sustainable living. The practice of polyandrous marriage has enabled the Zaskaris an effective birth control system. Also the mortality rate of infants are considerably high which add to population stability. The transhumance system are practiced where the women and children from the villages of Zaskar stay far away from their residence to tend to the live stock during summer season.

CONCLUSIONS

Zaskar is a high altitude region with land of high mountain passes, remoteness due to rugged and barren topography followed by tough livelihood of the Zaskaries because of harsh climatic condition of the region.

The region of Zaskar is limited to resources in terms of inadequate agricultural land, fuels and mineral resources and scarcity of water. This paper depicts that Zaskar will no more be an isolated region during winter as this region will have different road connectivity and thus will be reachable throughout the year. The new routes to Zaskar will improve the socio-economic status of the Zaskaries through promoting tourism, hiking and trekking among the mountain lovers for exploring the different regions of Zaskar.

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