

Experiential learning of Geography 5th. Semester Honours students from the Field Project at Kaza, Lahul and Spiti valley, Himachal Pradesh

The domain of the subject of geography precisely describes it as a natural science or an earth science or a regional science and/or a field science. Any segment of the earth's surface provides an open natural laboratory to a geographer who seeks to identify and explain the spatial organization of the surface of geographical features through a careful study of the patterns and processes. A field study gives a scope to discover a set of geographical facts hitherto inexperienced. It involves the observation of landscape in minute details.

Physiographic location: Kaza is the capital of Spiti Valley. Monasteries, villages, high altitude farming, a rugged terrain and rocky mountain slopes sweep down to the river beds giving the landscape a moon like appearance. The region is known as 'Cold Desert' and doesn't receive rainfall. Kaza, located at an altitude of 3,800 m is spread over an area of 358.66 hectare. The town is divided into the old, as Kaza Khas and new as Kaza Soma sections. The new town contains the administrative buildings.

Topographic location: 32.22 N and 78.08 E

Administrative Location: A small hilly village and sub divisional headquarter of Spiti Tehsil, Lahul and Spiti district, Himachal Pradesh.

KEY ISSUES

The sectoral key issues that emerged out of public consultations, field visits, analysis of data from secondary sources and discussions with Kaza panchayat office are---

(1) Physical Growth and Environment: The major issues that face Kaza are --

- (a) Hilly terrain and ecologically fragile areas restrict the physical expansion within the village boundary;
- (b) Although ecologically sensitive areas have been earmarked as 'prohibited areas' in the plan, there is high incidence of unauthorized construction in these areas;
- (c) Many buildings in the old village area are in dilapidated condition;
- (d) Growth of slums and squatter settlements is leading to environmental degradation;
- (e) Unsafe construction practices render the buildings vulnerable to natural disasters;
- (f) Landslides on surrounding hills, and
- (g) Pollution in the locality.

(2) Water Supply: Kaza depends on springs and streams originating high above in the surrounding hills for its water supply. The flow in these springs and khads depends on a variety of factors including levels of rainfall and snowfall, rate of snowmelt, land use in the catchment, and is also likely to be affected by climate change, urbanization etc.

However, unequal distribution of water, low pressures, old dilapidated pipelines, uncontrolled zoning and unsatisfactory operation and maintenance requires thorough reorganization and up-gradation of this sector to meet future demand.

(3) Storm Water Drainage: In a hilly village like Kaza, adequate storm water drainage facilities are required to prevent soil erosion and control of pollution to water bodies. Investments are needed to address the needs of

- (a) repairs and reconstruction of drains in critical sections,
- (b) additional cross walls and catch-pits,

- (c) provision of screens at outfalls,
- (d) disconnection of side drains from sewers and
- (e) removal of obstruction in drains.

(4) Solid Waste Management: The village has not met its mandatory obligations under the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2000 and is burdened with an inefficient collection system, environmentally unsound disposal practices and uncontrolled dumping at a site down a gorge like formation. It thus requires immediate and sustained effort to upgrade to an acceptable level.

(5) Roads and Transport: High percentage of tourists with respect to the resident population, growing number of vehicles and lack of space lead to an unacceptable congestion in Kaza. Traffic management, road hierarchy and provision of parking are greatest needs. Pedestrianisation of tourist areas and alternative intermediate transport are of utmost importance. The village needs immediate investment in these areas.

(6) Heritage and Tourism: Kaza is a known destination in the Tribal and Buddhist voyage of India. Tourists are attracted by the beauty of Kaza surrounded by hills and its rich cultural heritage. Its rich heritage needs to be conserved and showcased to promote tourism through diverse means such as interpretation centers, experiential museums, walks, publications, etc. Other elements need attention, are--- demonstration of model architectural elements and restoration of heritage buildings such as gompas, monasteries etc. Kaza has the potential to tap high end tourism by development of eco tourism and adventure tourism.

SWOC ANALYSIS AND VISION

Kaza started its journey as a popular tourist destination of to-day. Along with tourists, came the hotel industry, shopkeepers and traders, raising population, putting pressure on land and urban infrastructure. In addition to the human pressure, the natural formation has undergone changes; some of it is in the form of landslides along adjoining hill slopes and changes in topsoil and vegetation. To-day the village is still growing, obviously shifting the growth westwards at Kaza Soma to wherever buildable land is available. The citizens of Kaza, who grew-up with the hills, is not too pleased with the present state of affairs and the forces affecting their lifestyle and expectations. They want to 'retain' the ecologically sound and beautiful character' of Kaza, yet seek an efficient management with a progressive and healthy economy. Protecting natural environment, which is the main asset of the village becomes all the more important towards sustainability of the village.

Detailed village profiling and analysis of various aspects led to identification of the following **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges** for Kaza Area.

STRENGTHS:

1. Strong tourism base
2. Very rich cultural heritage
3. Adequate housing
4. Environmentally conscious and responsible community
5. Strengthening administration function

WEAKNESSES:

1. Lack of development of tourism attraction points around Kaza and related infrastructure to hold tourists interest and increase their average duration of stay,
2. Unplanned growth and inefficient land management,

3. Lack of public transport and inadequate NMT infrastructure,
4. Inadequate and inefficient infrastructure and services,
5. Seasonal tourism,
6. Lack of industrial activities,

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Global tourism destination,
2. Infrastructure development,
3. Natural features
4. Willingness of stake holders for plan,

CHALLENGES:

1. Large floating population,
2. Disaster risk,
3. Increasing traffic related issues and unorganized parking,

The socio-economic as well as physical environmental aspect of Kaza needs attention to the planners. The availability of civic amenities is in primary level and if we want to develop it as a prime tourist spot we should have to give much focus on it.

Though the developmental activities create many environmental problems which are localized, yet the interaction between these problems give them a regional dimension. Thus the basic purpose of policies concerning environment and development must be concerned to enhance life quality along with satisfaction of human needs. In reality policies to promote anthropogenic ventures and designs to enact them are the forces directing impacts and consequences of anthropo-environmental interactive system, at a junction where far less is known about complexity of environmental systems prevailing in highlands.