

## ECO-TOURISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN TRIBAL AREA OF LAHAUL AND SPITI DISTRICT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

DR. SHASHI SHARMA

Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Govt. Degree College Sainj, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

### ABSTRACT

Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that involves individuals travelling to nations or places outside of their typical environment for personal or professional reasons. Lahaul-Spiti is home to ancient monasteries, sky-line glaciers, lakes, and flowing rivers, as well as rare and pristine cultural treasures. The most difficult challenge was to keep the excavation going during the winter. Lahaul-Spiti is only accessible by the 9.02 km-long Atal tunnel, which opened in 2020 and attracted a considerable number of tourists. The first snow festival in Lahaul-Spiti began in 2021, and the high-altitude tribal valley found its 'Soul and Spirit' following the construction of the Atal Tunnel in new prospects. It has been determined that the tourism industry contributes to the expansion of the state economy. It is a vital industry that contributes to the local community's economic growth, job opportunities, and level of living.

**Keywords:** Tourists Destination, Socio Economic Development, Fair and Festival, Facilities, Home stays.

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the largest, most significant, fascinating, and quickly developing sectors of the global economy. Tourism provides entertainment for some, a vacation for others, and a way for yet others to learn about other people's cultures, traditions, and ways of life. Eco-tourism has been defined by the ecotourism 'as responsible travel to natural places which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people (Cochrane, 1996), a definition which emphasising the idea that ecotourism should have positive effects. Eco-tourism, like any other linked activity, is now a significant socio-economic development. It encourages national integration and international understanding, as well as infrastructure development.

The paradisiacal land is a charming settlement shielded by green valleys, sky-line glaciers, flowing rivers, expansive forests/pastures, ethnic gompas (monasteries), and heritage structures of the former ruling dynasty are the main attractions in this region. Himachal Pradesh, the gorgeous Himalayan state, is home to a variety of attractions Lahaul and Spiti are, of course, some of the country's most gorgeous, breath-taking,

and off-the-beaten-path destinations. Tall mountains will enchant your days here, while fluttering Tibetan flags will convey a sense of tranquilly to the roaming and fresh mind. Due to its high altitude and severely harsh temperatures, Lahaul-Spiti is also known as Himachal's cold deserts. It is today one of the most covered destinations in the State of Himachal Pradesh and both these valleys are in fact quite different from each other. The entire district is full of brimming with stunning natural landscape, the tourists and visitors to explore and imbibe its hidden grandeur.

Lahaul, the local say that the origin of the word Lahaul is Lho-yul, some call Lahaul the 'Himalayan Scotland'. Another possibility comes from the word La- mean "**The Land with many passes**". Interestingly, the original name given to the area by its neighbours in Tibet and Ladakh was Garza or Grasa. The local call their home Swangla. Spiti, Si-means **Mani** and Piti – means **place**. Spiti means "**the place of Mani**". Religion plays major role in the everyday life as piles of "Mani" stone, prayer flags and 'Chortens' testify. The temptation of mantra "**Om Mani Padme Hum**" (Literally, beyond the jewel is in the lotus), is said to bring good fortune and wash away all sins.

The Lahaul and Spiti is the largest district of Himachal Pradesh in terms of geographical areas and lowest in terms of population. Lahaul- Spiti is popularly known as mini- Ladakh like landscapes. Total geographical area of the district is 13,693 square kilometres which accounts nearly for one fourth of the total geographical area of the State and density of population is 2 as compared to 123 for the state. It has two district parts viz. Lahaul and Spiti. The entire district has been declared as a Scheduled area under the fifth schedule of the constitution and permanent residents of the schedule area are Schedule Tribe community who has been notified as such by the presidential order in pursuance of the Article 342 of the constitution. Lahaul and Spiti are located at latitudes  $31^{\circ}44'57''$  and  $33^{\circ}42'54''$  in the north, and longitudes  $76^{\circ}46'29''$  and  $78^{\circ}41'33''$  in the east. Agriculture is the main source of income in the Lahaul and Spiti valleys, which are known for their seed potatoes, cabbage, green peas, hops, sea buckthorn, and medical herbs, among other agricultural goods. Occupation includes animal husbandry, government services, other business and crafts that include weaving etc.

While the Atal Tunnel has made it easy for both the travellers and locals to commute it has also led to over tourism. The 9.02 km long Atal tunnel, the longest in the world above 10,000 feet, has opened in 2020 up new tourism opportunities for the people of Lahaul and Spiti valley as well as Ladakh. Before the construction of the tunnel, the road connecting Lahaul-Spiti from the rest of India used to remain closed during the

winter season for around six months. Now, with the opening of Atal Tunnel, one can visit both Lahaul-Spiti all around the year and in a bid to regulate the same, the authorities have decided to levy taxis on vehicle entering the region. With total distance covered now reduce travellers find it easier to enter into Lahaul- Spiti valley. The biggest change this Atal Tunnel is going to make in the lives of the majority of the natives here is putting an end to the winter migration of the majority of the people to low-lying areas.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Charles (2001)** discussed the role of tourism development naturally turns an important industry for income generation of the local people. He discusses that due to lack management skills the local people either lease out their land to outsiders or built their own land. **Yoon (2001)** discussed the various impacts as economic, social-cultural and environmental trade off, all play a part in determining their support for further tourism development. The relationships among the different components that form the total impact of tourism are the basis of the socio-economic development. Economic dependency on tourism has emerged as significant variable underlying residents' positive attitude to tourism development.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To have an analysis of the issues relating to tourism's socio-economic development in the Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh. The data for this research was collected from secondary data. The data for this study was gathered by citing a variety of books, journals, research articles, newspapers, and websites. The information was gathered from various departments of the Himachal Pradesh government, including the Department of Tourism.

## DEMOGRAPHIC TREND OF LAHAUL-SPITI

**Table-1: Comparative Demographic Trend of District Lahaul-Spiti between 2001-2011**

Sr. No.	Particulars	2001	2011
1	Population	33224	31564
	Male	18441	16588
	Percentage Total population	55.5	52.55
	Female	14783	14976
	Percentage Total population	44.49	47.45
2	Percentage of Rural population to Total Population	100	100
3	Literacy	73.1	76.81
	Male	82.8	85.69
	Female	60.9	66.84

4	Density of Population (persons per sq. km)	2	2
5	Sex Ratio (female per 1000 males)	802	903
6	Decennial growth rate	6.17	-5

The Table-1 reveals that the comparative demographic trend between 2001 to 2011 of the district Lahaul and Spiti, has population of 31, 564 persons in 2011 census as against 33, 224 persons in 2001. The male population is 16, 588 persons in 2011 census as against 14, 784 persons in 2001 census. Similarly, the female population is 14, 784 in 2001 as compared to 14, 976 in 2011. The percentage of males to the total population is 52.55 per cent in 2011 as against 55.50 per cent in 2001 census. The percentage of female population is 47.45 per cent in 2011 census as against 44.50 per cent in 2001 census. The population of district Lahaul-Spiti has negative 5.00 per cent growth rate between 2001 and 2011 as compared to 12.94 per cent for Himachal Pradesh during the same period. The decrease in population growth has been observed mainly due to migration of male population to Kullu district in connection with their domestic affairs and population of these male has been included in Kullu district where they are physically available and partly on account of vacancy of posts in various departments against sanctioned posts. The density of population per sq. kilometer is 2 between these two periods. The sex ratio is 802 in 2001 as against 903 in 2011. The table also shows that the overall literacy is 76.81 per cent in 2011 as against 73.10 per cent in 2001 out of which 85.69 per cent are male literacy in 2011 as compared to 82.80 per cent in 2001. Similarly, the percentage of female is 66.84 per cent in 2011 census as against 60.90 per cent in 2001. The literacy rate in Lahaul-Spiti district has been improving very fast on account of various incentives being provided by the State Govt. to the school going students.

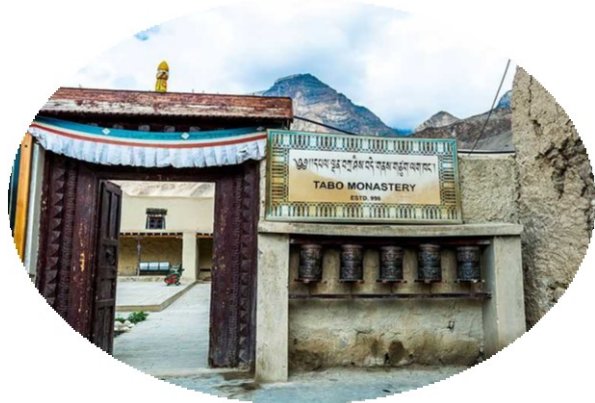
### **TOURIST DESTINATION OF LAHAUL- SPITI**

Lahaul and Spiti is an emerging tourist place in having beautiful landscape and interesting blend of Buddhism and Hinduism for most of the people which attracted attention after opening of the Atal Tunnel on 2020. There are breathing valleys, some very famous monasteries, temple, beautiful and attractive lake and trekking areas here:-



- **Key Monastery:** Key monastery is a biggest and famous Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Lahaul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh and is located at an altitude of 4166 meters above sea level. The monastery is close to the Spiti river in the Spiti valley of Himachal Pradesh. The views from the top of the monastery is amazing, beautiful and provide some breathtakingly views from massive height.

- **Tabo Monastery:** The Tabo Monastery is the oldest monastery in India and one of the most fascinating locations to visit and is situated in a little village on the banks of the Spiti River. Tabo monastery is also called “Ajanta of the Himalayas” this ancient beauty rests at 3050 metres above sea level. The wall of the monastery are decorated with fresco and fascinating murals, statues and ancient or priceless paintings must like the Ajanta Cave in Maharashtra. Since the time of this monastery has safeguarded the culture, heritage, and traditions of Buddhism.



- **Chandratul Lake:** Chandratul Lake is reckoned as the most charismatic lake situated in the laps of Himalayas and it is also called the “Lake of Moon” and is named so because of its growing shape. The beautiful lake is situated at an altitude of 4300 metres above mean sea level and surrounded by snows and deep blue water lake has a circumference of 2.5 km. The crystal-clear blue water of the lake shining in the light are too inviting and one just can't shrink having bath in the cold water. It is a famous landing place for trekking and campers. The water in the lake is so clear that stones at its bottom are easily visible and attract adventure lover nature and the source of the lake is glacier melt down.

- **Surajtal Lake:** Suraj meaning Sun and tal meaning Lake two words it is often revered as the “**Lake of Sun God**” and is a beautiful and divine lake surrounded by breathing valleys and splendid mountains. The lake is situated at an altitude of 4980 meters above mean sea level and is located of the Baralacha Pass in the Lahaul division of district Lahaul- Spiti. During winters, the beauty of this lake freezes, the lake returns to its full of glory with blue icy waters and the mountains surrounding it covered by layers of snow.



- **Shashur Gompa:** is a Buddhist gompa/monestary also known as the place of the Blue Pines because it is surrounded by the pine trees from all three sides. The monastery or gompa is decorated with flags and conventional paintings. It is situated on a hill about 3 kms from Keylong towards north on the same slope.



- **Trilokinath Temple:** The Temple, standing at a height of 2700m is situated in the town of Udaipur. The best part of the temple continues to attract both the Hindus and the Buddhists pilgrims here. The Nandi Bull of Lord Shiva may still be seen at the compound's centre. The Hindus prays to Lord Shiva whereas Buddhists worship Avalokiteshvara (a form of Buddha). There is also a drain in a temple wall at the level of the platform in the sanctorum, which was most likely built to drain out the water or milk that was poured over Shiva at the time of construction. This hilltop temple was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Tribes in India, 2012).



- **Markula Devi Temple:** this temple is one of the most historical hindu temples in Lahaul. The temple is located in the town of Udaipiur, which is the second biggest town in Lahaul after Keylong. This temple, dedicated to Goddess Kali, was built in the 12th century and features a stunning conical architecture. The insides of the temple is covered with a steep gable roof of wooden shingles in a sheep pyramid looking like Shikhara temples in the plains. The wall panels depict scenes from the Mahabrata, Ramayan, Sunderkand, Yuddhakand, grant of ground by Raja Bali to vaaman, three headed incarnation of Lord Vishnu etc.



## FESTIVAL AND FAIR

Festival and fair are the important part of the cultural lives of the people of Lahaul-Spiti. Each event is an occasion for celebration, for the community to eat, drinking, singing and dance together. The people celebrate festival and fair with great interesting, traditional dress and dressing themselves up in costumes and marks. **Snow festival** is also an attempt to boost the cultural tourism and preserve our culture and traditions. The old customs and traditions of Lahaul-Spiti, some of which are being forgotten will be provided a common platform.

After the construction of the Atal Tunnel in fresh new hopes, the high-altitude tribal valley of Lahaul-Spiti held its first time snow celebration in 2021, and the high-altitude tribal valley found its 'Soul and Spirit.' Snow festival is a **“Zero-Cost”** for government. All the activities and arrangement are being done with mutual contribution with the help of local, mahila mandals and youth. Snow festival is an attempt to boost the cultural tourism and preserve our culture and traditions. The main purpose of snow festival is to popularise the ancient festivals and culture of Lahaul and Spiti valley and promote winter tourism. The “festival of festival”, which will be celebrated in snow-



covered valley at different place will showcase Lahaul-Spiti festivals, local culture, dance, dresses, folk songs, mask dance, winter sports and many other events will be organised under the snow festival participation of the valley which remained out of reach for outsider for centuries. Tourists will also be able to enjoy and experience the festival along with winter season at the same time.

Weather and environment in Lahaul and Spiti are completely different from other parts of the country and shall take its full advantage. Some of the other important festivals and fair celebrated in Lahaul-Spiti are:

- **Halda:** The festival of halda is celebrated every year in the month of January. It is celebrated as the events pencil cedar branches are cut into strips and tied together into bundles to make a torch called Halda like 'Mashal' in hindi and number of torch remains equal to the male members of each family. During the night a special ceremony take place, people worship to Shashikar Aps, the Goddess of wealth in the Lamaistic Rantheon. The main attraction of the Halda festival is family gatherings, dancing, music and bonfire etc.
- **Fagli:** The festival of fagli (locally Kuns or Kus) is celebrated every year in the first or second week of February to celebrate the coming of the beautiful spring season and it is the most important festival in Patten valley of Lahaul. The family members prepare marchuor (local puri) and totu (dough of roasted barley flour and buttermilk). Totu is taken upto offered the rooftop which is offered to the deties and then it is distributed among the family members. The couple also goes on to pay their annual respects to their cows and sheep while expressing gratitude. The family members wake up early in the morning and also pay their respects to their elders of the household by bowing to them and touching their feet and later in the morning, families pay their respect to their close relatives and elderly persons in the neighbourhood.
- **Tribal Fair/ Festival of Keylong:** The tribal fair/festival is conducted celebrated in the headquarters of the Lahaul Spiti district in Himachal Pradesh and organized at the police ground in Keylong from 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> August which also concide with the Independence Day celebrated with great pomp. It is a state level fair and people from all parts of the valley congregate in their queer disposition and a large number of tourists come here to enjoy fair, also known as "festival of colours". It is to make the fair colourful, artists and cultural troupes are invited from Chandigarh, Dharamshala, Leh, Kullu and Spiti as well as artistes.



- Pauri:** Pauri fair is celebrated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of August every year. People first pay their respects to a statue that is worshipped as Triloknath (Shiva Lord of Three Worlds) by the Hindus and as Avalokiteshwara by the Buddhists. Then, every morning and evening, devotees go to the parikrama gallery, which is located between the temple's inner and outer walls, and perform three or seven clockwise circumambulations of the gallery, rotating the prayer wheels, and murmuring mantras such as Om Mani Padme Hum (The Jewel is in the Lotus). People of all castes and creed congregate there, not only from Lahaul but from Spiti, Chamba and Kullu also.
- Ladarcha Fair:** The Ladarcha Fair began in July in Kibber Maidan in Spiti, where traders from Ladakh, Rampur Bushehr, and Spiti gathered to trade their wares. Because Tibetan traders may no longer cross the border into India, this fair is now being celebrated in the third week of August in Kaza, the headquarters of Spiti Sub Division. A large number of visitors and traders from Kullu, Lahaul and Kinnaur congregate there. It has evolved into a gathering of cultures from Spiti, Ladakh, and Kinnaur, as well as the Indian plains.

### NUMBERS OF TOURIST ARRIVAL

The Atal tunnel in Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh has proved to be a boon for the tourism industry. Since the inauguration of Atal Tunnel in 2019, the tourist activities and massive rise of 622.2 percent indicating a new era of growth and socio-economic development in the area. The table shows that the number of the tourist arrival has jumped from 1, 32, 983 in 2019 to 9,60,952 in the year 2021.

**Table-2: Tourist Arrivals**

Year	Lahaul-Spiti	Kullu-Manali
2019	1,32,983	31,59,411
2021	9,60,952	16,47,581

The tunnel was open to the public on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020. However, Lahaul-Spiti gain is a loss for Kullu -Manali, which saw a sharp decline in tourist arrival from 31,59,411 in 2019 to 16,47,581 in 2021 shown in table. COVID induced lockdown led to the decline in the Himachal Pradesh tourism is on the recovery path with the tourist inflow registering an increase of approximately 75.43 percent last year in comparison to the preceding year. In 2021, there will be a rise in the number of tourists, which will include:

- Easing of Covid curbs
- Opening of the Atal tunnel
- Reopening of hotels/restaurants
- Half-dozen snow spells/snowfall at major tourist destination etc.

### **HOMESTAYS IN LAHAUL-SPITI**

Homestays are the best option to promote such tourism where tourists can stay with the family and best platform to exchange their cultures. The homestay plan has already registered a considerable number of dwellings, particularly in the Sissu, Kaza, Tabo, Keylong, and Jispa districts of Lahaul-Spiti. Presently Lahaul-Spiti have 407 new homestays only after the opening of the Atal Tunnel. The homestays will not only help tourist's inflow (in reaching remote villages) but also will increase the income of the tribals or will help in generation of new employment opportunities in the region. The influx of tourists to the valley has increased which would help in strengthening the economy of the people. In the valley between Sissu and Darcha, a large number of camping spots have sprung up in the last year.

**Lahaul** valley had homestays in recent times Keylong Jispa, Sissu, Khangsar, Gondla, Tandi, Biling, Darcha, Udaipur and almost all the villages of Lahaul have homestay units. This valley is going to be major source of income for the residents as the valley has a limited number of hotels. The largest homestays in the **Spiti** valley were at Kaza, Kibber, and Tabo, which eventually expanded to Pin valley (Mudh), Kee, Dhankar, Langza, Hikkim, Lossar, and other areas of the valley. Homestays in Spiti valley have been a major attraction for tourists for and the number of homestays in Spiti is increasing every year. Lahaul and Spiti valley have a large number of homestay units and both Indian and foreign tourists like to stay in them.

### **LIMITATION**

- Mobilisation and awareness generation of the local community.
- Training of village youth in such activities as: nature guiding, mountaineering, adventure sports and tourism related services to create cultural surroundings.
- Directly linking communities to conservation work through channelling a percentage of the income generated through eco-tourism by the local folks to village conservation funds.

## **CONCLUSION**

It has been concluded that the tourism sector contributes to the growth of the state economy. It is an important sector that contributes to the local community's, economic growth, employment opportunities, and standard of living. At small rest stops along major highways, there are no dustbins, public toilets, or parking spaces; drinking water capacity is limited; and skill development units are not available, among other things. Tourists and locals alike have the impression that the valley isn't quite ready to welcome visitors. It's possible that the infrastructure will take some time to develop. To keep tourists coming to the valley, the government needs to develop multiple tourist destinations.

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