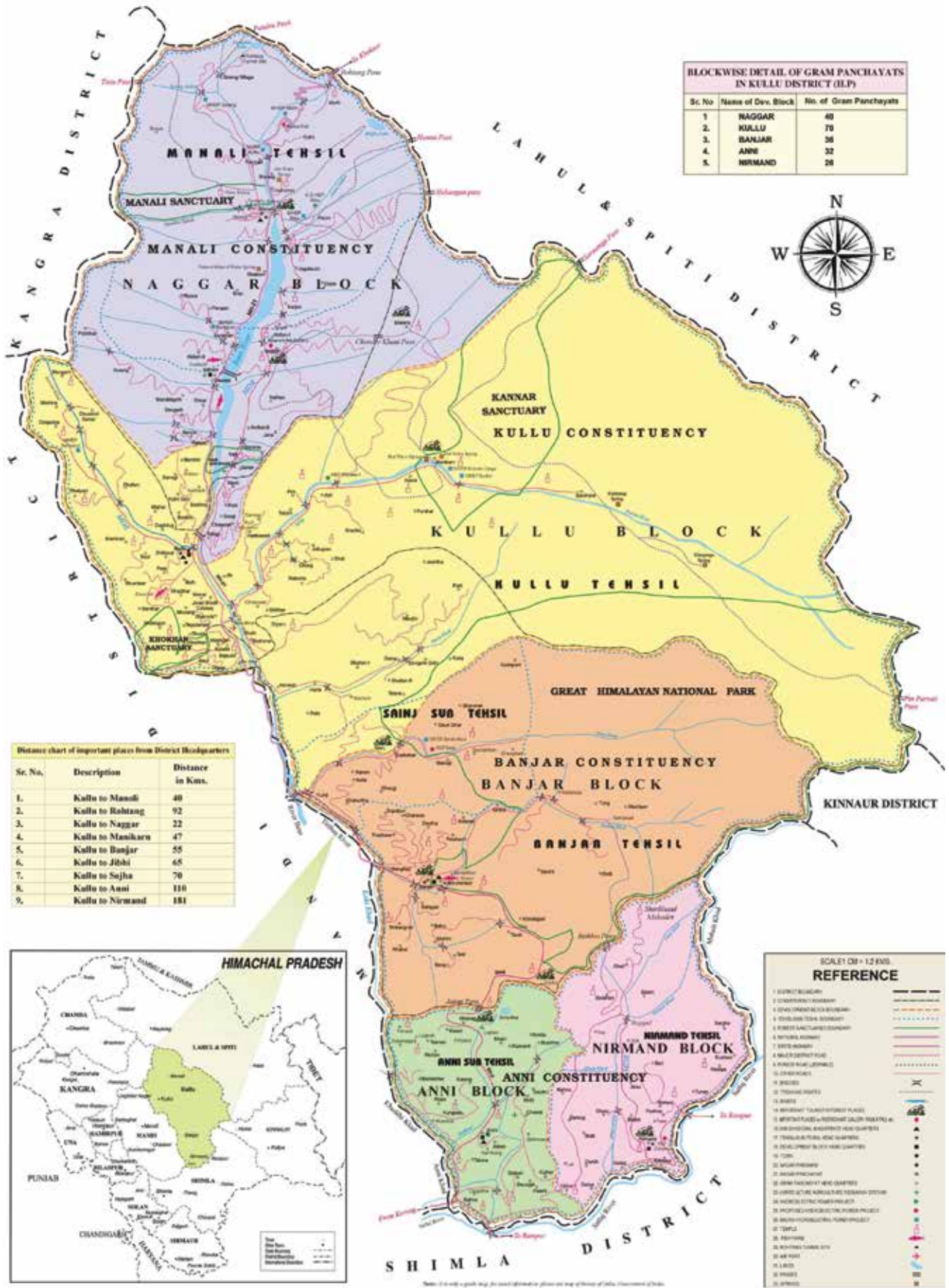


KULLU



ISDM
INDIAN SCHOOL OF
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Realising India Series
2017-2018



Source: India Administrative Atlases, Census of India

Realising India Series (2017-2018)

District Kullu

This Realising India report is a part of the series compiled by the ISDM Knowledge and Research Centre to disseminate the secondary research put together by the students of the PGP-DL programme at ISDM along with their reflections from the field as an output of their Rural Immersion.

Each part of this series contains findings from secondary research on the district in the first section and individual reflective pieces written by the students in the group while in the specific district. Some of these pieces have also been published in blogs and/or other web portals.

**Names have been changed to protect identities and privacy of persons students interacted with.*

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KULLU

History of Kullu

Kulata, the original name for Kullu, finds mention in the *Vishnu Purana*, Ramayana, and other Hindu mythological texts. HiuenTsiang, a Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the 7th century A.D., described the country of Kiu-lu (now Kullu) as being situated at 117 miles to the north-east of Jalandhar which exactly corresponds with the position of Kulata. (Geological Wing, Department of Industries, 2012)

Kullu has been one of the oldest principalities of the Punjab Hills. According to historical references, it was founded by Behangamani Pal in 1 A.D. whose forefathers were from Tripura. Many legends are associated with the name of Behangamani Pal. To save the people of the higher valley of Kullu from the oppressive Thakurs of Spiti, he organized the upper valley's first revolution at *Jagatsukh*. With the blessing of the powerful goddess *Hadimba* and the guidance of the renowned village astrologer *Paljho*, Behangamani Pal succeeded. Even today the goddess *Hadimba* is respected as the 'grandmother and the patron-deity' by the *Rajas* (Kings) of Kullu. The Pal dynasty was established with Jagatsukh as the capital which later shifted to Naggar. Naggar remained the seat of the government for almost 1,400 years until it moved to Kullu. In the year of 1849 Kullu was made a subdivision of the then Kangra district by the British Government. Before 30th July 1963, it was a sub-division of the Kangra district, part of the then Punjab government which upgraded this subdivision to the status of a district.(Geological Wing, Department of Industries, 2012)

Geography

The mountainous district of Kullu is in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Lahul-Spiti district in the north, Kinnaur in the south-east, Shimla in the south, Mandi in the west and south-west and Kangra in the north-west surround Kullu district. All-weather roads including State Highways and National Highway number 3 (old National Highway 21) connect Kullu with the rest of India. It consists of various small valleys – Kullu valley along the Beas river, Lug valley along Sarvary Khad, Manikaran valley along the Parvati river and Garsa Valley located in the eastern part of the district. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

The swift flowing rivers from the Himalayas have huge potential for generation of hydropower. Hydroelectric power stations in the district include the Parvati project and Larji project. Electricity generated through these projects are a source of revenue for the state. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

Geomorphology and Soil

The district of Kullu can be broadly divided into the following geomorphological units:

I) *Mountainous area:*

Dhauladhar and Pir-Panjal ranges from the north west to the south east with peaks ranging in height between 4200-5000 meters above mean sea level.

II) *Snow covered area:*

The northern and north eastern parts of Kullu district are covered with snow and snow line exists in this area.

III) *Denuded hills:*

The presence of residual ridges along the intermontane valleys suggest that these ridges are the remnants of high relief mountains.

IV) *Valley area:*

Fluvial processes and structural disturbances in the area form intermontane valleys. Kullu valley is elongated and broadly v-shaped with denuded hills along the sides.

V) Terrace area:

A number of terraces are formed along the river valleys in Kullu district. Terraces are generally noticed on the western banks of the Beas River. Two levels of terraces are demarcated near Bhuntar town, which are covered with thick vegetation. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

Geomorphology of the area plays an important role in deciphering the subsurface and surface hydro-geological conditions.

The elevation of the district ranges from 914 m to 4084 m above mean sea level giving rise to varied agro-climatic conditions. In Kullu, the soil texture ranges from sandy loam to clay loam; colour varies from brown to dark brown and the depth of the soil from 50 to 100cm. Generally, the soil is acidic. The varied agro-climatic conditions provide a range of possibility for growing cash crops like off season vegetables, seed potatoes, pulses and temperate fruits. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

Drainage

The river Beas and its tributaries water more than 80% of Kullu district. Beas originates in the Pir-Panjal range near Rohtang, at an elevation of about 4000m. In its course of flow, several perennial tributaries like Parvati, Hurla, Sainj, etc. join the river. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

The Beas river flows in south-southwest direction under steep gradient up to Larji (site of Larji Hydro Project), and after which, the slope becomes much gentler. The river Sutlej forms a border between Shimla and Kullu district and flows in a south-easterly direction. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

Based on hydrogeology, the entire area of Kullu can be divided into porous and fissured formations. Porous formation include 'unconsolidated sediments,' which form potential aquifers (layers of porous rock are potential sites for the extraction of groundwater). The unconsolidated sediments underlie Kullu valley, Garsa valley, Manikaran valley, and other valleys along major rivers.

In Kullu Valley, groundwater is generally found in confined or semi-confined conditions. These aquifers are tapped mainly by open wells and constitute a significant source of domestic and agricultural water supply in the valley area. The aquifer zone comprises mostly of sand and silt. The static water level of the region varies from 1.62m to 31.45m below ground level. Based on the Central Ground Water Board in 2013, study of the aquifer parameters and subsurface geology, the discharge from the wells varies from 299 LPM (Litres per minute) to 1079 LPM. Snowfall in the higher reaches and rainfall in the lower areas recharge the groundwater. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

Springs form the primary source for water supply in the district and the discharge varies from 0.5 litres per second to 25 litres per second. Majority of the springs are 'gravity springs'. According to the Bureau of Indian standards, except hot springs, the water from aquifers and springs are permissible for drinking. The State Ground Water Organization has constructed shallow hand pumps down to a depth of 30 to 50 meters below ground level mostly along the Beas and its tributaries. The water supply schemes use most of the water from these handpumps. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

There are a lot of hot springs in the Kullu and Parvati valleys. The temperature in the hot springs of the Beas river valley varies from 29 degrees Celsius to 59 Celsius, and in the Parvati river valley, the thermal springs range in temperature from 35 degrees Celsius to 96 degrees Celsius. The rocks in the Beas River valley belong to Precambrian age and consists of gneiss, phyllite, quartzite, and limestones. The emergence of thermal activity in the regions appears due to a major fault extending in the north-south direction from Bashisht to Katrain for a distance of 25 km. (Central Ground Water Board, 2013)

Demography (Census of India, 2011)

- Kullu with 326 villages has the lowest number of villages among the 12 districts of Himachal Pradesh. Kullu occupies the 9th rank among the districts in terms of population and has 6.38% of the total population of the state.

- Kullu has a sex ratio of 942 females per 1,000 males as compared to 972 females per 1000 males which is the state average and occupies the 7th position in Himachal Pradesh.
- The total number of workers in Kullu district are 269,084 persons against 3,559,422 working persons of the state.
- With a decadal population growth of 14.8 percent in comparison to state decadal population growth of 12.9 percent, Kullu district stands at 4th position in Himachal in population growth.
- The population density of Kullu is 80 persons per sq. km and it is the 10th most densely populated district in the state.
- Kullu has a literate population of 307,672 persons constituting 79.4% of the total district population (excluding 0-6 years of age). The proportion of female literacy is 70.9%, and male literacy is 87.4%.
- The economy of Kullu is primarily agriculture-dependent with 197,141 persons that are cultivators.

Administration

Kullu district consists of four administrative sub-divisions and five blocks under it. The sub-divisions include:

- Kullu
- Manali
- Banjar
- Anni

The blocks in the district are

- Kullu
- Naggur
- Banjar
- Anni
- Nirmand

The district has a total number of 326 villages spread over four tehsils and two sub-tehsils; Manali comprises of 75 villages, Kullu (163 villages), Banjar (31 villages), Sainj (14 villages), Ani (17 villages) and Nirmand (26 villages). There are four administrative towns in the district namely Banjar Nagar Panchayat, Bhuntar Nagar Panchayat, Kullu Municipal Council and Manali Nagar Panchayat and one Census Town named Shamshi. (Census of India, 2011)

The administration of the district is as follows:

- The Deputy Commissioner is the administrative head of the district and is responsible for the general administration and maintenance of law and order.
- A Sub-divisional Officer (civil) heads each sub-division. Tehsildar for each tehsil while a Naib-tehsildar heads the sub-tehsil.
- Besides this, a Block Development Officer is posted in each community development block to supervise and co-ordinate the development work assigned to the Gram Panchayats.
- The Superintendent of Police heads the district police and Additional Superintendent of Police and two Deputy Superintendents of Police assist him/her besides Sub- Divisional Police Officers of Deputy Superintendent of Police rank at the subdivision level.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the primary occupation of the inhabitants of Himachal Pradesh. 83% of all women and 65% of all men are in some way involved in agriculture as labourers or cultivators. Historically, agriculture in Kullu has been small-scale and intensive because of the terrain. As of 2011, small and marginal farmers constituted 88% of all the farmers, which implies that they own 1 hectare of land or less suggesting that the trend of small-scale farming has not changed much. (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2017)

The Department of Agriculture produces an annual plan, listing production targets, seed/pesticide/fertilizer/equipment quantities to distribute to farmers as well as listing existing schemes for farmers. According to the 2016-17 report, the Department of Agriculture has re-oriented its strategy with a focus on the production of high-value crops like off-season vegetables, vegetable seeds, potato, ginger, and tea, besides increasing productivity of prime grain crops viz. maize, rice, and wheat. This change in strategy was done to ensure economic upliftment of farmers through optimum utilization of natural resources. (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2017)

The change in strategy not only aimed at reducing poverty among farmers but was focused at meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2- doubling farm productivity by 2022. Himachal Pradesh is committed to achieving all SDGs by 2022 through diversification into cash crops based on market demand. (Voluntary National Review Report of the Implementation of SDGs - India, 2017)

Kullu valley traditionally had a mixed-crop and forest-based agriculture system which meant local communities were largely self-sufficient in terms of food. The cropping pattern transitioned into a horticulture-intensive 'fruit belt,' focussing mainly on apples, with farms and terraced rice-paddy fields being converted into large scale apple orchards, due to external demand (Rahimzadeh, 2016). With the changing climatic patterns in Kullu valley, the apple orchards no longer receive enough yearly 'chilling units'. These trees need to be exposed to a sufficient degree and duration of cold weather to successfully bloom at their present altitudes, resulting in falling yields and subsequently the apple belt shifted to higher elevations to achieve the required chilling units. (Rana et al., 2011).

It remains to be seen whether this transition from self-sufficiency to market dependency has long-term impact on Kullu society. The real effects of such a shift will likely be felt most starkly in the event of an unforeseen market shock like a sudden drop in prices of these cash crops.

Food Habits

Paddy, maize, Kodra (high-iron millet variety) and Salyara (variety of Amaranth – high in protein) are the main crops in mountains as the climate is favourable for growing them. In functions and marriages, food is cooked and served in a traditional way called '*Dham*.' The food is made using in huge brass utensils, and everyone sits on the ground in rows to have food. Food is served by *Boties* (people who serve the food) on *Pattal* (leaf plates). People of Kullu Valley make wine from barley and red rice in their houses, known as '*Chakti*' and '*Lugri*' respectively.

Concept of *Devaban* and *Devata* in the Kullu region

Religion and belief systems are traditionally integrated with natural resource use and management. *Devaban* is the colloquial term used to refer to forests that are considered sacred in the Kullu region of Himachal Pradesh, India. Local discourse in Kullu claims that the landscape was dotted with many such *Devaban* in the past. Today about half a dozen well-defined *Devaban* are found in the Sainj and Thirthan valleys of Kullu district.

The Vanshira, deodar trees considered guardians of forests of Kullu is one example. It is common to find iron nails driven into trees and pieces of red cloth or old iron articles left below such trees as a mark of sanctity.

Caste or gender-based restriction: These restrictions are prevalent even in the era of democratic equality. Women and people from lower castes are most often restricted from entering a *Devaban* since they are considered polluting. Such restrictions continue even though the *Devata* (local deity) commands the respect of all the castes in mixed-caste communities. Paradoxically in this society, women and lower caste households are often the most intensive and regular users of forest resources. Women are responsible for forest-related tasks within the division of labour, and lower caste households have few other resources to meet their livelihood needs. Restricting their entry reduces the use of these forests in general, but also serves to reinforce social hierarchies and inequalities. This restriction is viable only when alternative forests are available for use.

Geographical or social community-based restriction: This is a management strategy that is often adversely affected by colonial and postcolonial state policies. None of the *Devaban* or other community resources are open access resources. The community of users is well-defined, and ‘outsiders’ or anyone not part of the defined community are not allowed any use.

Some forests are the legal property of the *Devata*, making *Devatas* the principal landowners in Kullu. In the last century, Kullu kings ruled on behalf of the *Devata*. Thus, all the land in Kullu belonged to the *Devatas* at least notionally before colonial rule. This practice has no legal validity today. However, *Devatas* continue to own small pieces of land, and some existing *Devabans* in the Kullu valley are the private property of the *Devata*. Since the deity is considered a legal minor, the *Devata* Committee manages his/her property. In general, the property of the *Devata* is sacred, although conversion from one form of property (individual to community) to another may be entirely acceptable. Analysing the *Devata* institution of Kullu shows that these integrate religious and secular values. However, the *Devata* institutions that exist today are unique institutions in their structure, politics, and function. (Shabab, 1996)

Education in Kullu

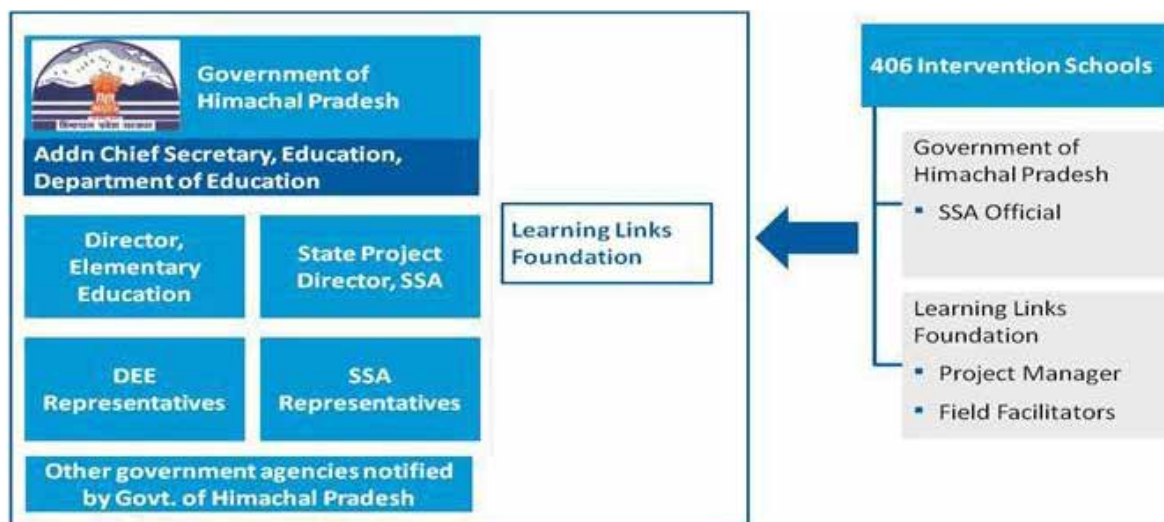
Khaas Shiksha (Special Education) is an annual award given to teachers, head teachers, headmasters, and principals at the state and district level. It is awarded to recognise the initiatives undertaken by teachers, headmasters and principals to improve the learning outcomes of children.

Since 2012, the Learning Links Foundation (LLF) has been working with the government of Himachal Pradesh to strengthen the curriculum and evaluation procedure in the state-run schools. The effort has led to the creation of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) framework. This framework aims to increase the student learning outcomes for classes 1 to 8. (Quality Enhancement Initiative - Elementary Education Department, n.d.)

Quality Enhancement Initiative Cell (QEIC)

Dedicated Quality Enhancement Initiative Cell (QEIC) facilitates government decisions based on academic performance of students across all elementary schools of the state. QEIC set up under the Education department works on improving quality in Student Learning Outcomes. QEIC comprises of government officials and Learning Links Foundation (LLF) resources. LLF supports the QEIC through its on-field support in developing a roadmap to implement QEIC recommendations and bring a systemic change to improve student learning across the state.

Structure of the Quality Enhancement Initiative Cell (QEIC)



Source – Department of Elementary Education, Himachal Pradesh

Mukhyamantri Vidyarthi Swasthya Karyakaram

This is a school health program run by the Himachal Pradesh government. It aims to address the health needs of school children by addressing health education, environment, sanitation, nutrition, safe drinking water, gender, and social concerns. The state utilises strategies of disease prevention, health promotion as well as detection of underlying diseases and medical advice for health problems. (Himachal Pradesh | National Health Portal of India, 2015)

Healthcare

Himachal Pradesh is a mountainous state in northern India which has a special category status in Indian Territory. Its physiography is a barrier to implementation and accessibility of health services. Therefore, the availability of health services in rural areas and across the districts is uneven and providing health services is a challenging task. (Vijender, Kumar & Kaushik, 2015)

The 2011 census categorizes the health institutions of Himachal Pradesh into various types, i.e., Community Health Centre, Primary Health Centre, Primary Health Sub-centre, Maternity and Child Welfare Centre, T.B. clinic, hospital-allopathic, hospital-Alternative Medicine, dispensary, mobile health clinic, family welfare centre, and other health institutions. Kangra district has the highest number of healthcare institutions. It is the only district in Himachal Pradesh where the number of total health institutions is more than one thousand followed by other districts like Mandi, Shimla, Chamba, Una, Solan, Hamirpur, Sirmaur, Bilaspur, Kinnaur, and Lahaul and Spiti. (Vijender et al, 2015)

Rural Areas covered by health institutions

There are vast spatial differences in the state in terms of the area covered by health institutions. For example, districts like Bilaspur, Una, Hamirpur, Mandi, Solan, Kangra have better accessibility to health institution within the area between 9.77 and 27.26 km; whereas other districts like Sirmaur, Shimla, Kullu, and Chamba have health care accessibility within the range of 53.63 to 102.85 km². (Vijender et al, 2015)

Kullu maintains the third position in terms of healthcare facilities in rural Himachal Pradesh. It reserves the first position in terms of person per doctor ratio, and people benefited per family from the family planning center. In terms of rural population served by health institutions, Kullu stands third. This is primarily because of the lack of other infrastructure facilities like road density. Road density is the ratio of the length of the country's total road network to the area's land area. The road density in Kullu district is only 0.35 km per km. (Vijender et al, 2015)

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Stories from the Field

🌀 *An evening in Kullu*

I close my eyes and my mind takes me back to the picturesque evening in Jana Village of Kullu district. It is amusing and intriguing how some incidents leave imprints in our memories. Perhaps, it is because we were part of that moment, we feel more connected, we become a part of that landscape. I vividly remember each and every aspect of the village- the wooden houses, cornfields, children playing football, smoke from the chimneys as families cooked food after a long day. I remember as the sun cast its last rays onto the village, there was a certain lightness. Nature replicated the tired face of an old pahadi (from the hills) woman I had met as I walked around the village that evening. As I wove a story about her in my mind, my thoughts were broken by the urgency that the sight of shadows created. It was almost dark. My team and I were supposed to meet the Pradhan of the village before we boarded the last bus for our house in Shuru village. We did not have much time, so we hurried and managed to reach his house. Unfortunately, he was not home. Instead, we were greeted by a young couple. They asked us to wait. As we sat talking and drinking the sweetest black tea that had been offered by the couple, I could not help but notice how easily the young wife was building a fire with a child tied on her back. There was a sense of calm and happiness on her face. But there was something peculiar about her actions. She built the fire without touching the wood and kept a safe distance from her house and the people around her. As my mind wandered, thinking about the reasons, the Pradhan arrived. I stood up from my chair and went near the woman to thank her for the tea. She was shocked, so was I. The woman shouted "Stay Away from me, I am polluted." I understood what she meant as I connected the dots. She was menstruating. I felt the urge to hug her but could not. Suddenly there was a barrier between us and I felt helpless. I realised that I had experienced discrimination in the midst of the nature which has always treated all beings equally.

—Isha Vajpegi

🌀 *Entrapped Youth of Kullu*

During a meeting with a local journalist, I came to know about international drug cartels operating out of Kullu and how they were exploiting the existing drug culture and international tourism in Kullu to export indigenously produced organic psychedelic substances.

Despite numerous posters making people aware about drug abuse, the seasonal burning of marijuana plants in areas where cultivation is high was rampant. It was very evident that the attitude of the administration and the police towards use of these substances for recreational purposes and small scale smuggling was very lenient. As Charas (marijuana) has been a part of their culture and daily life, everyone has been quiet about it until recently. What is triggering unrest now are the changes in patterns of dealing and payment.

Earlier cartels would have their own cultivation land in forests or would have lured the locals to sell charas in return for which they were paid 800 to 1200 per tola (a unit of measurement), however, in recent days the trend has changed. Now locals are paid psychotropic chemical substances such as Heroin, Cocaine, MDMA, Crystal Meth etc in return for charas. This has become a matter of concern and a barrier to the values, culture and human life in Kullu.

Currently prices of these drugs in Kullu are much lower than those in Delhi or Mumbai as the phase of market creation is going on. The locals who are paid back in these substances are encouraged to sell it to get their money out and in order to create a demand these locals sell it to their friends at very low prices. Additionally, a lot of locals are trying these drugs to experience how it feels before they can sell them to others. This has been leading to a high number of cases where teenagers and young adults are involved in abusing, beating or harassing their parents to get money for drugs.

These young people are not criminals but victims of grey capitalism and black-market trends. During my stay at Kasol, I met a 19-year-old local boy Mani (name changed). He was dressed in expensive clothes from popular brands. It appeared that he was living a good life, yet his face spoke of a different story, his sunken eyes intrigued my curiosity. It was around 9 in the evening when I was standing in the main market and Mani approached me. Without any fear or hesitation, he asked me if I wanted some Cocaine, MDMA or Brown Sugar.

He was confident and comfortable in asking me and anyone could make out that it was his daily practice. I said I wouldn't like any of his wares but followed with a request to converse with him. I was very curious to know more about his association with drugs. He seemed to pay no heed and started moving towards the other side of the road, until I said "yes, I want some". He came back and asked me what I want. I had no clue I just randomly asked for Brown Sugar but with a condition that if I buy he would sit with me for some time to talk. Without even a second pause I told him about my meeting with two other members of the local cartel in Kasol who I had met the same afternoon to build trust.

Later in the evening, over some tea, Mani told me how his elder brother Vishwa (name changed), who was 33, used to sell charas to the mafia and received great wealth in return but now he receives 62 parcels over the year of chemical drugs. It was getting very difficult for Vishwa to sell these drugs in the market, so he pulled in brothers Mani and Lalit (name changed) into it and eventually have been able to secure a good market base. Each brother sells 15-25 thousand worth drugs every day during the tourist season and 2-4 thousand during non-peak season, as half of their customer base comprises of locals.

Mani had no clue that the story he was telling me as his own was the story that the journalist told me as the story of trapped youth in Kullu.

— Yashashri Mukesh

❧ An Unfortunate Villian

My creators would never imagine that I would become a villain for this soil. I remember, about 15 years ago I was like a refugee when I had my first experience of this paradise. This ‘Valley of Gods’ was not known to me, or I was a stranger to the people here. Eventually when people from different corners of the world flowed to this beautiful valley, slowly I too was introduced to the community and became heart and part of the land.

Beas was much elder than me, even older than Kullu itself. She never complained about anything so far. I knew she was dying slowly, I knew she is slowly being polluted, and more over, I knew, I am the reason for her death. But I don't know, if it was me who is killing her or are the people of the Kullu, who dump me in the laps of my dear friend Beas, to kill her? Whom should I blame?

— Krishna Priya

❧ That Conversation with Some Children in Kullu

As I was taking a stroll on the Mall road in Manali, I was intrigued by the bounty of the mountains and the stillness that it brought to me.

Amazed by the beauty of nature around me, I started thinking to myself- is the present moment that I am living really this good? Is this good for me alone or the people around me too? And I see a group of children selling balloons. I hear them talking about, how much money they have been able to make that day.

I go close to them and one of them watches me listening to their conversation, he smiles and tells me, “Please buy a balloon from me.” The rest of the children turn back and I greet them all with a smile.

We begin and they tell me, that they buy 3 balloons for Rs 10 and sell it for Rs 20 each. I wonder how these little minds work, who teaches them?(I was so naïve when I was as old as them). I tell my background conversations to stop.

As we interact more, they tell me that their parents are manual scavengers, rag pickers and they belong to the lower castes. I ask them why they sell balloons. They share that it is their responsibility to support their parents financially. I am humbled by such mature answers and they become heroes in my eyes.

They say that they hope to eat their favourite foods someday.

I leave with a heavy heart, leave with questions on whether their wishes will ever become a reality. What makes us understand others and their challenges? What is it that prevents us from “seeing”?

— Udit Tiwari

Is this the way to go about tourism

6 A:M 28th October: I open my eyes in the lap of nature – the mighty Himalayas. I am surrounded by these majestic mountains, gushing rivers, lush green forests and snow capped peaks far away. My heart danced to this beauty. Could anything be more beautiful than nature? I don't think so. The child in me is awake, excited, jumping! Wish I had eyes in the back of my head so that I could capture all this beauty in my heart forever.

Our journey from Kullu to Manali began. As we travelled through the meandering roads, I was aghast to see what was happening. Enormous “development” projects were being carried out. These lofty mountains were bare and scared, trees fallen, debris alongside rivers, fine dust in the air.

I have always admired the human mind for its potential to construct technological marvels. The marvels that made world a village. The marvels that connect us to far off places, bringing nature close to people. But here I see the same “marvels” changing the topography of the place that has taken million years to form. Marvellously built structures deceptively hiding the damage they were doing to the Earth.

Day by day, the need of outsiders to explore more and more pristine environments has led to rise in demand for “better” infrastructure. Expansion of national highways, tunnels across mountain passes and massive deforestation severely degraded forests and defaced mountains. This greed of tourism comes with a potential to endanger the beauty this place has to offer.

I hear stories from local people of how their climate has changed over the past few decades. I hear about their morning fog turning to smog. I hear about their annual snowfall reducing from a few feet to inches. I hear how glacial retreats have been reducing water in rivers. I didn't want to hear about any of these changes. I didn't want to know that my children might not see this beauty. I didn't want to accept that human induced climate change is real. I didn't want to believe that the very existence of humans is a threat to nature!

— Mounica Rgari

Layers of Inequality

While nature holds all as equal, we have divided ourselves along caste, class, gender and other arbitrary distinctions.

This is clearly visible in the story of a family that belongs to the lower castes in Jana village in Kullu. During our interaction with the family, we were aghast to see how we have normalised this discrimination and accept it as a way of living. Hearing statements like “Ye hamare liye theek hi hai” (this is right for us), we could feel a sense of helplessness for the current generation and the future.

The Indian constitution guarantees equality for all, but the deep-rooted caste system in society has not allowed Dalits to be treated at par with the upper castes. There were clear segregations made in the residential quarters of Jana village. Speaking to a Dalit family, we realised that not much had changed in terms of social mixing or

relations across caste barriers. The manner in which persons from lower castes have accepted systems of untouchability and caste discrimination is very painful to see. There was absolutely no hope for this generation to see an equal society or even imagine access to basic human rights. Persons from lower castes are still forbidden from entering into temples that belonged to people from the higher castes. What was most shocking was to know the existence of the Bali system (or the animal sacrifice) within the low castes as a mandatory ritual that had to be performed if they break the rules of untouchability. Even after 70 years of Independence, for the country's Dalits, oppression is still an everyday reality.

— Paribhasha Mishra

❧ Drugs Eating Away Young Lives

I remember the day I met the police representatives at the Manali police station. They were telling me how alcoholism had become common among the people of Kullu. I could easily resonate with this, when I met Mukul, an active young office bearer of a political party, and the co-owner of the cottage we were staying. On the first sight, it appeared that he led a happy life with his wife Priya and an 8 year old child. He was economically well off and offered help throughout the days I stayed in his cottage.

Once I did not see him for 2 days, and later when he re-appeared, he told me that he was unwell and was on medication. Later, during a conversation I had with him, he told me that he had become addicted to alcohol. He would have his first drink less than an hour after waking up, and continue drinking throughout the day. During our stay he got into a fight with villagers on one night, an argument with his family on another, and ended up on a glucose drip on yet another night. There were times he sought advice from me to escape the addiction, but while asking for this advice he was always heavily intoxicated, and thus all those heavy words would be soon forgotten. The suffering and sorrow were evident in the faces of that family. They all knew the hopes of that family was fast fading. His wife had given up totally on him, spending her energy instead taking care of the cottage, the farm and the child.

Mukul had been trying to improve his English during our stay, and on the day I was returning to Delhi he told me that the next time I would visit, he would speak English fluently. This sent a pang through my heart as I looked at that gaunt and hollow face, wondering if he would even be alive the next time I visited.

— Abhishek Saran

❧ An Evil Friend

This story is about Vishal, a good friend of mine who lives in Old Manali. Vishal is a 25-year old from Jammu, who moved to Manali in search of work. He is a gentle, kind and grounded young man with a great sense of humour and now works in a shop that sells blankets and woollen items. He is paid entirely on commission, and is also given a room beneath the shop, with a bed, stove and a toilet outside- comfortable and compact for a single person. I met Vishal in January when I first visited Manali,

and have seen him several times since, including over the RI experience. Over time, I started noticing some changes. He went from a mop of floppy hair to a cut and styled western look and a flat-topped baseball cap. He also bought a small portable speaker, and would rarely be seen without it in his pocket, playing techno and trance music. None of this was of concern, it just seemed to be a transition in taste and style. However, on subsequent visits, I started noticing changes in his personality- he was quieter, withdrawn, and had become very thin. It was then that I learnt that he had developed an addiction to brown sugar- an impure, cheap form of heroin that has become popular with the local youth. Things culminated in a particularly intense episode one night, when Vishal and I were at a mutual friend's home. The three of us were watching a film when, after a while, Vishal started becoming restless, scratching his skin frequently, his hands trembling gently. Shortly, he stood up, walked to the door and placing his hands on the handle, turned around to look at us:

“Fred bhai, phir main nikalta hoon” (Brother Fred, I will take your leave now)

“Kahan jaa raha hai tu?” (Where are you off to?)

“Dost ke ghar” (To a friend's place)

“Kaunsa dost?” (Which friend?)

There was no answer, only a strained silence. It was evident that he knew that we knew what was really going on. A few moments later he spoke again, more pleadingly this time, his eyes focussed on the floor:

“Fred bhai mujhe jana hain” (Fred, I really need to leave)

“Kahan? Tu chitta marne wala hai na? To phir jaa, ja kar mar” (You're going to get drugs aren't you? Then go, do as you please)

“Nahin Fred bhai, dost ke ghar jaa raha hoon” (No brother Fred, I really do have to go to a friend's place)

“Kaunsa dost?” (Which friend?)

There was no answer.

— *Shantanu Menon*

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