



SURVIVING AGAINST THE ODDS: THE RESILIENCE OF LADAKHI PEOPLE DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The world was struck by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. It interfered with people's daily lives. Worldwide students and academics suffered a great loss, as a result it disrupted their education. Many families even experienced the loss of their loved ones, but despite all, some families managed to remain together. This work is an observational work based on the pandemic situation in Ladakh.

Key Words: Ladakh, Covid-19

The Covid 19 had transformed all aspects of human life. It caused exceptional stress to young people, as it has changed the education environment worldwide. Due to the lockdown, many Universities and colleges have switched from offline modes of teaching to online modes to stop the communal transmission of the infection. This new mode of teaching caused a great loss to the students in the far-flung area who have network issues as well as the digital mode of learning was not possible, this led to depression, and anxiety among students, and they were even left out of the usual learning space. Along with the students there were families who lost their dear ones, in worst scenario people lost more than one family members. Though apart from the negative changes there were people who thanked this pandemic period which not only helped them connected to their families also pandemic period helped eased the life especially of women who were engaged in farming. This work is an observational work on the condition of Ladakhi people from my point of view.

Initially when the pandemic broke down people were anxious as they never heard of such virus and didn't know how to deal with it. The initial case in Ladakh was detected from the two return pilgrims from Iran. At that time the lockdown was imposed in the region but people were not sure how deadly it was, which brought together relatives and community outbreak happen. First people to get infected by the viruses were the pilgrims from the Chushot, Leh. Therefore, whole Chushot area was made a contentment zone and people were confine to their homes. At that time there was a lot of news that students were asked by school authorities to leave campus and

hostels and didn't know where to go, patients too were detained in different places, families worried about their elderly parents at home to keep them at containment area. There was a lot of chaos at that time.

The Covid 19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown has impacted people of all ages, but one cannot deny the fact that especially students have severely affected. As regular classes filled with activities, practical work, Laboratory experiments, Physical Sports all were replaced with onscreen Computer and Mobiles. Conventional classes have made way for online classes. In India as per the lockdown rules, all institutions were closed from Primary classes to university therefore, affecting the teaching and learning process. Initially the teacher in Ladakh tried reaching student through WhatsApp where the teacher used to share class notes and give home-work through WhatsApp images. Later they made an Audio-Video tapes of the lessons and shared it that to the respective parents and used to evaluate students on the basis of home-work accordingly.

Due to its geographical condition, Ladakh is the northernmost region of India. Due to harsh geographical location and climatic condition, it is frequently cut off from the rest of India for nearly five to six months, indicating that the region is still developing. As a result, there is a significant development gap in the region, whether in the medical or educational sectors. During the study, the telephone and internet network issue were the most problematic factors for students and researchers.

People, particularly the poorer segment, were more affected when the epidemic struck the area. Their kids were unable to adapt to the new way of learning because smart phones were not available. Thanks to the teachers who occasionally went to the students' homes to deliver class notes and to provide weekly home assignments. However, teachers were also impacted since they lacked the digital literacy necessary to use the new technology. Teachers were unable to finish the curriculum, and daily student evaluations were also impossible. However, pupils who resided in city regions were in a more privileged position than those who reside in rural or remote places, where access to the network and a smart phone were not available, students who lived in urban areas were still in a privileged position.

As there are several network issues in the valley region, many students from remote places like Changthang or even the eastern peripheral areas used to travel to mountain tops to access the online classes. Many students find it difficult to keep up with their classes, therefore their lessons frequently end up being incomplete. The government has taken steps to make the online course available in a variety of ways. On May 1, 2020, the Ladakh School Education Department introduced the "dselonlineeducation" mobile app for online learning.

Expert lecturers and instructors from various Ladakh schools were requested to deliver online lectures to students, particularly those in classes 10 and 12. All India Radio (Leh and Kargil) broadcast the classes. Additionally, the lectures for science and math were broadcast on Doordarshan Leh. Both the Education Department and the University of Ladakh have launched websites, which may be found at educationdepartmentleh.in and www.universityofladakh.org.in/elearn, respectively. It intends to consolidate all of the Ladakh region's internet resources under one roof where teachers, professionals, guides, and other individuals can register and publish videos and text assignments that are helpful for pupils on a variety of subjects. The students were able to ask questions and the teachers were able to at least feel like they were teaching. Teachers began holding classes on Zoom, Google Meet, etc.

In order to provide academic activities digitally to students who did not regularly have access to the internet, the Department of School Education in Ladakh also launched a YouTube channel. Through this channel, video lessons for classes 12th (Science stream) and 10th (Maths and Science), which have already been broadcast, are uploaded. Online classes were accessed in urban settings where mobile networks were available, and community classes were set up in rural settings where there were network problems. In these classes, not only teachers but also students volunteered to teach and engaged the students in various activities. We can give you an example of a small group of students working together as volunteers to support young children in the basic grades.

Students and seniors were reliant on technology as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. Since 4G network coverage is currently a basic requirement, it is tempting in every corner of the area. However, it also has a flaw that cannot be ignored, as many students were becoming cell phone addicts, spending more time playing games like Pub-G away from their classes. Elders were also not exempt, as many false rumours and hatred were being spread via social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. Parents were first required to give their children smartphones in the name of education and online classes, but over time, the addiction and increased screen time have had unsettling effects on the mental health of the youngsters. As many students have finished their upper secondary schools and are even set to conclude their graduation without even going to colleges in person, additional lockdowns and postponed classrooms have caused worry among students. Students' uneasiness was a result of their lack of social contact and practical expertise. They were more competitive and nervous as a result of social media, which also had a significant impact. Numerous kids experienced anxiety problems, intense loneliness, and grief as a result of all this.

Dr. Padma Angmo, the state's nodal officer for psychiatry, reported that almost 150 new and follow-up cases of mental illness had been reported. The reported instances are extremely numerous given the region's small population. In the Ladakh region, issues with mental health, like as depression, drug addiction, and suicides, are becoming more and more of a worry. Dr. Padma emphasized the importance of comprehending the underlying factors that lead to young people developing such bad habits and how such items are made available. "Substance abuse is horribly prevalent in our society, and it's not just limited to alcohol or tobacco; drugs like opioids have also crept in," she continued.

Apart from regular student there were other student who was preparing for competitive exam and were doing self-study in the different region of India also faced severe difficulties as they not only lost the space for their preparation but also to some extent lost the opportunities as many exams got postpone as well as exam which usually used to happen twice a year got merge. Research students including myself have also face problem as we are not able to access the field due to restriction, the interaction with the respondent was almost impossible as the people were sceptical to share the contact of their family members due to precautionary reason, therefore the personal interaction was not possible. Network issue was always there even if I have to make a presentation or a webinar to attend to. In one of my progress presentations, I have to call my senior PhD Scholar who through her cell phone made my presentation audible to all the panel as my internet was having connectivity issue.

The state's nodal officer for psychiatry, Dr. Padma Angmo, claimed that there had been close to 150 new and follow-up cases of mental illness reported. When compared to the area's sparse population, the documented

instances are incredibly numerous. Mental health problems like melancholy, drug addiction, and suicides are becoming a growing concern in the Ladakh region. Dr. Padma stressed the significance of understanding the fundamental causes of young people picking up such unhealthy behaviours as well as the mechanisms by which such things are made accessible. Our society has a horrendously high rate of substance abuse, and it's not only restricted to alcohol or tobacco; other narcotics, like opioids, have also sneaked in.

It is a requirement of research scholars to publish research papers or give presentations, but during the pandemic, it was challenging to even obtain the data in time. We observed a higher death rate during the pandemic's second phase as a result of community engagement. Even two to three family members died in single-family households. Even so, these research projects were on the verge of ceasing. Poor internet connectivity made it difficult to receive or access timely notices for jobs, fellowships, or simply decent mail. It is well known that the prepaid mobile SIM used in other parts of the country cannot be used in UT J&K and UT Ladakh without a postpaid SIM number. Due to the fact that most students use prepaid phone numbers, and initially due to this, many students lost contacts with their individual institutions and friends when they were evacuated.

Numerous good developments in the area have also been brought about by this pandemic. To increase connectivity, as many telephonic towers as possible were built in the isolated area. Although there were difficulties at first for both students and teachers, online learning has made it easier for students to acquire knowledge on a variety of topics in addition to their classes. Some students participated in organic farming, took online courses on local guides, and even started a conversation about topics like mental health. Elders called their families on the phone as well. Both students and researchers had access to numerous research sites and journal articles. Webinars on many topics have been held, and at first, students and researchers had free access to many worldwide webinars.

The grandparents welcomed their grandchildren's return and assistance with the farm and household. People who work for IT firms have the option to work from home, which not only helps them to stay secure but also allows them to stay in touch with their elderly parents. Farming-related working women expressed their happiness and satisfaction in being able to balance job and family obligations during the pandemic. Many ladies started devoting their lives to spiritual activity out here in the Leh region. Additionally, during the pandemic, social media assisted people in connecting so that they could not only connect with distant relatives but also learn cooking and baking techniques. These techniques also assisted people in learning their traditional cooking and baking techniques, bringing family members closer together.

The pandemic has helped people realize the importance of health and family as a whole, and just like the elders, there were people who got reconnected with their loved ones. The working environment has also changed, and there are now hybrid modes of working as well. In conclusion, I would say that many families have lost their dear ones, women were forced to do the dual work, some even faced emotional and physical violence, but the pandemic has helped people realize the importance of health and family as a whole.