

## HEALTH STATUS OF CHANGPA NOMADS OF CHANGTHANG REGION LADAKH

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### ABSTRACT

The investigation was aimed at studying the health status of changpa nomads of Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir State. The finding of the study, revealed the birth control methods all of the women respondents have never used any contraceptives, due to lack of awareness and it is also noted that, in Changthang most people still prefer home delivery with the result both mother and child are prone to severe infections and have a very low chance of survival. Nomadic women often have multiple pregnancies within a small time period which leads to anemia in women and premature deliveries and childbirth often takes place in unhygienic conditions and many more things like poor diet, harsh climatic, lack of awareness about facilities available. Women said that they move camp to remote location, it become very difficult to visit health centre for delivery and in such case mother has delivered the child in the Rebo (tent) and this is the major impact on women and child health, during their migratory life. Finding of the study also revealed that, women and children during migration all of the respondents from all the villages suffer from general diseases like fever, cold, cough, blood pressure, headache, deficiency diseases, etc. Most of Changpa women were suffering from anemia and children suffer from deficiency of vitamins, while migration and worst impact on their health, as Ladakh is characterized by poor vegetative cover and low plant production especially remote areas like Changthang, with the result their diet is deficient in various important nutrients, which often leads to anemia & other deficiency diseases.

**KEYWORDS:** Nomads, Changpa, Changthang, Health, Women

### INTRODUCTION

Changthang is a unique part of Ladakh, which has harsh climatic dryness (with very low rainfall) whose temperature varies from hot to extreme cold. The area is known as a Cold Himalayan Desert and has very low thermal and hydric indexes. July and August are the hottest and January is the coldest month of the region. The minimum and maximum temperature fluctuates between  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $40^{\circ}\text{C}$  and rainfall is meager. The average relative humidity varies between 13–90% with the highest humidity corresponding to the lowest temperature. The snowfall in the area is very scant and when it does occur it is dry and powdery. Wind velocity in the area is very high and the fallen snow gets accumulated in the gorges which remain until the summers. During summers melting of this snow causes regeneration of various grasses in the region (TAS Ganai et al., 2011). Changthang region is geographically located in the eastern part of Ladakh, the easternmost part of the state of Jammu & Kashmir. The average altitude of the area is around 14600 metres above sea level. Changthang with an area of 21,000 square kilometers occupies strategic position, which also shares border with both China and Pakistan. It is home to thousands of the Changpa nomads.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Bhatnagar (2006)** Studied that, the Changthang has a wide variety of flora and fauna, in spite of the cold climate. The Changthang is the home of threatened and protected wildlife, that are protected under the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife (protection) Act. The fauna includes snow leopard, and the another one, that is unique is the wild or (kyang in local language) and deer, marmots, mouse hares, red foxes, wolves, ibex, kyang wild Ass which is common in the grasslands of Changthang (visit Ladakh). Species that can be observed in the area, includes the kiang (*Equus kiang*), which can be observed either in flocks or single the most common animals found in Changthang are yak (a wild ox), is the largest animal found in Changthang.

**Kratli (2001)** The Buddhist Changpas-pastoral nomads of Changthang, Ladakh form an ethnic entity. Like other nomads in the world, the pastoral nomads of Changthang are a minority, suffering problems of under representation, social, economic and geographic marginalisation. The region is extremely poor in conventional energy sources (fossils, fuel and wood) and has almost no industrially exploitable resources. Natural environmental limitations dictate many aspects of traditional life, especially settlement pattern and economic system.

**Chaudhuri (2000)**, studied that, while reducing the grazing area, the seasonal migration pattern had to change into shorter movements and the local nomads had to divide themselves into smaller units and shift settlement more often, which is more burdensome and exhausting, especially for the women. The nomads shift 8- 15 times depending upon the environment.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in Changthang region Leh District of Ladakh J&K state. Ladakh is divided into two main districts, Leh and Kargil. Leh District is located at a distance of 430 Kms from Srinagar and 235 Kms from Kargil. Population of Leh district as per census 2011 is 147,104. Total geographical area of Leh district is about 45 thousand km<sup>2</sup> and it is the biggest district by area, in the state. (**Schofield, 2003**). There is only one city in the district that comes under the district administration, which is Leh. Leh district is inhabited by followers of two major religions Buddhism and Islam. Buddhists contribute 66% of the total population and is the largest religious community in the district followed by Muslims which contribute 17% of the total population followed by 14% of the Hindus. All other religious communities contribute 3% of the total population ([www.leh.nic.in](http://www.leh.nic.in)). Changthang region falls under the Nyoma block of Leh district in Jammu and Kashmir. The Block Nyoma located on the south-east of Leh District was established in the year 1966. Nyoma, the main part of the highlands of Changthang region of Leh district. The block is very important as it is bounded in North and east by China.

### Research Design

The information source for the study was primary as well as secondary sources. The secondary data was obtained from various published sources of journals, magazines, prospects, books, and different websites. The secondary data was used only after thorough scrutiny. The primary data for the study was collected from seven nomadic villages of Changthang region, from Nyoma block of Leh district. Participatory observation, interview, and focus group discussions were held with the family members of Changpa nomads, in order to know Migration and its socio cultural impact on women and Children of Changpa Nomads.

## Sample Design

To achieve objectives of the present investigation, a set of sample was drawn from Changthang region of Nyoma block of Leh district. The sample for the study was drawn from seven nomadic villages namely, Hanley, Koyul, Korzok, Samad, Kharnak, Angkung and Sumdo of Changthang region. The sample for the study was drawn from Nyoma block of Changthang region. Nyoma block consists of 17 villages from which 7 nomadic villages were selected for the study. Purposive and random sampling technique was used for seven villages of Nyoma block of Leh district namely, Hanley, Koyul, Korzok, Samad, Kharnak, Angkung and Sumdo. From Hanley, Karzok and Samad 40 households were selected and 15 households were selected from Karnak, Ankung and Sumdo. From Koyul 25 households were selected for the study totalling 190 households in the study area. To achieve all the set objectives, both primary and secondary data was used. The primary data was collected, through participant observation, self structured interview schedule, beside focus group interviews method was also be used for collecting the desired information. The secondary data was collected from the published reports, magazines etc, and from various official sources.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1: General Health Problems of the Women and Children Due to Migration**

Health problem of the respondents	Koyul		Korzok		Sumdo		Kharnak		Angkung		Samad		Hanlay		Total
	n=61	%	n=116	%	n=37	%	n=48	%	n=39	%	n=105	%	n=96	%	n=502
General diseases	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)
Infectious diseases	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	61	100	116	100	37	100	48	100	39	100	105	100	96	100	502(100)

Analysis of the table reflects the general health of respondents. Data from the table reveals that, 100% of the respondents from all the villages suffer from general diseases like fever, cold, cough, blood pressure, headache, deficiency diseases, etc. Most of Changpa women were suffering from anemia and children suffer from deficiency of vitamins as Ladakh is characterized by poor vegetative cover and low plant production, especially remote areas like Changthang with the result their diet is deficient in various important nutrients, which often leads to anemia & other deficiency diseases.

**Table 2: Frequency of Health Checkups**

Frequency of Health Checkups	Koyul		Korzok		Sumdo		Kharnak		Angkung		Samad		Hanlay		Total	
	n=31	%	n=58	%	n=19	%	n=29	%	n=23	%	n=62	%	n=56	%	n=278	%
Once in a year	9	29.03	33	56.89	8	42.10	11	37.93	6	26.08	28	45.16	25	44.64	120	(43.16)
Never	22	70.96	25	43.10	11	57.89	18	62.06	17	73.91	34	54.83	31	55.35	158	(56.83)
Total	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100	278	(100)

Table shows that, regarding health checkups 56.83 % women respondents from all villages have never visited a doctor for checkups as they were not aware about the routine checkups and they move to camps in remote locations so it becomes very difficult to visit the health centers for regular checkups. Moreover, the unavailability of transport facilities as well as the long distances of hospitals from their residing place also makes it difficult to go for regular checkups, whereas 43.16% noted that they pay a visit to a doctor at least once in a year.

**Table 3: Birth Control Methods**

Birth Control	Koyul		Korzok		Sumdo		Kharnak		Angkung		Samad		Hanlay		Total	
	n=31	%	n=58	%	n=19	%	n=29	%	n=23	%	n=62	%	n=56	%	n=278	%
Use contraceptive	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Never use	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100	278	(100)
Total	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100	278	(100)

Table 4.46 reveals that, 100 % of the women respondents have never used any contraceptives, due to lack of awareness and it is also noted that in Changthang most people still prefer home delivery with the result both mother and child are prone to severe infections and have a very low chance of survival. Nomadic women often have multiple pregnancies within a small time period which leads to anemia in women and premature deliveries and childbirth often takes place in unhygienic conditions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Changpas are a nomadic pastoral who rear livestock and move from place to place, across the Changthang, staying in yak wool tents (rebos). Changthang which is the home for pastoral nomads. Changpa nomads of Changthang region follow a year round migration cycle and grazing their herds of sheep, goats, yaks and horses on pasture areas, each was dependent on the availability of pasture and water. They faced many challenges in their life in aspect of everything like, children health, women health, nutrition, diet and many other basic necessities and cause major impact on their social, economical life.

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