

A Report
On
Status of
“Tobacco Free Village”
Tashi-Jong
Tehsil Baijnath
District Kangra, Himachal Pradesh



Submitted by:

1. Dr. Naresh Mehta
Chief Medical Officer, Kullu
2. Dr. DD Rana
SMO Civil Hospital, Baijnath
3. Dr. Ravinder Kumar
MLCD, SHFWTC Parimahal, Shimla



Department of Health and Family Welfare
Government of Himachal Pradesh

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Introduction:

Tashijong a small Tibetan refugee settlement in Himachal Pradesh, about 2 hours drive from Dharamshala, the district headquarter of Kangra. It is situated in Baijnath block of Kangra district on a Mandi Pathankot national highway and is just 10 km away from Palampur town. This village was established in 1969 by H.E. Khamtul Rimpoche as a Tibetan Craft Community which works for preservation of Tibetan arts, culture heritage and *budha dharma*. Near 850 peoples including 500 lay persons and 350 *budhist* monks reside in the Tashijong village. Although most of the residents are of Tibetan origin, but near 100 people are also from district Kinnaur and district Lahul & Spiti of Himachal Pradesh, North Eastern State of India and other parts of the country, who learn and practice *budhist* study in the monastery. The birth place of most of the Tibetan origin people is also India; near all people can write and speak fluent *hindi*. Beside this, about 30-40 tourists visit the Monastery daily. The village has a residential colony consisting of 86 households and a small market having 10 shops includes 5 tea stalls and restaurants.



Fig 1: A panoramic view of Tashi Jong village



Fig 2: A map of Tashi Jong village

The village has an office of Tibetan Craft community which act as an administrative body of the village for Tibetan people, a Khampagar monastery, Young lama schools (2), a Buddhist philosophy college and a Charitable multispecialty hospital. There is one big main square situated in the centre of the village.

Observation by the Team

While entering the village, a signage board displaying “No smoking zone” and warning text was fixed on the main gate. At about 11:00 am when team members entered the village



without prior intimation, no persons including the tourists were found smoking and chewing tobacco products. The team members visited each street in the residential colony, shops, hospital and restaurants. The restaurants were visited strategically during lunch hours. No advertisement boards, posters or stickers of tobacco products were found in the shops. No smoking aids such as ashtrays, matchboxes/lighters were found in

Fig 3: Signages displayed in the public places the tea stalls and restaurants. Many posters quoting “Smoke Free Zone” and warning text were pasted at the shops and public places of the village. There were no cigarette butts or beedi ends, empty pouches of gutkha or khaini lying the village premises. One of team member became a dummy customer for cigarette at some shops; all shopkeepers denied the sale and use of tobacco products in the village. All shopkeepers disclosed that the village community under the auspices of H.E. 9th Khamtul Rinpoche has decided not to sell and use any tobacco products in the village. The team member also asked a *biri* from a labourer; he warned the team member not to use any tobacco substance in the village.

Meeting with Village community leaders and community

The team members after completing the surprise visit sent a message to the secretary of Tibetan Craft Community Mr. Yeshe Chogyal. Mr. Yeshe Chogyal arranged a meeting at his office. Tenzin Wangmo, Sonam Wangdak from Tibetan Craft Community, LP Negi and Ramzor Negi from Khampagar Monastery, Namgyal Lodoe, Dechan Chodon, and Rinchen Dolma from Youth Association attended the meeting. Dr. Harjeet Singh- a medical officer of local *Janani* Multispecialty hospital and Ex. Principal SHFWTC Parimahal was a special invitee in the meeting. The team members explained their purpose of the visit to the community leaders. Mr. Yeshe revealed that the villagers at Tashi Jong had been facing a problem of shortage of water

supply for years. Due to financial constraints, villagers approached a Ranchi based organization named *Saptrishi*. Mr. Harjeet Singh from the above said organization reached the village Tashijong a year back as a consultant to operationalise the “Safe Water Project” for the village and finally the project was completed on 15/7/2011 and problem of shortage of water supply was solved. Mr. Yeshe and other community leaders further added that Mr. Harjeet Singh while in Tashijong noticed that despite the holiness status of the place and local people’s willingness to avoid tobacco use; few peoples and outsiders mostly tourists use to smoke and chew gutkha in the village. Mr. Harjeet Singh gathered the public opinion regarding the ban on sale and use of



tobacco products within the village premises. Most of the people were waiting for this opportunity as the *buddhist* philosophy does not support any addiction. The Tashi Jong Settlement officers, Tashi Jong Youth Association and Khampagar Monastery monks took the lead, discussed the issue with each villagers, religious leaders, and the shopkeepers as well. The current tobacco users were also consulted; many of them were ready to quit smoking and *gutkha* chewing at once. A resolution to the effect that from now onwards smoking is banned in the village was passed unanimously. The tobacco vendors of the village were little concerned about the available stock of the

Fig 4: Villagers setting the fire to tobacco products

Photo courtesy: Yeshe Chogyal

tobacco products with them. Mr. Harjeet Singh and villagers collected the money and purchased all the tobacco products at market rate for Rs.60,000/- and burnt them in the main square of the village in front of large gathering including local people, school children, religious leaders, media personnel and tourists. The shopkeepers and the tobacco users made a pledge in the presence of H.E. 9th Khamtul Rinpoche not to sell or use any tobacco products in future. The village was declared a Smoke free village on 20th July 2011. The signages boards were displayed

in the entry points of the village and all major public places including the hospital, schools, shops and streets. No native of the village or outsiders including the tourists are allowed carry or use any tobacco products (cigarette, *beedi* or any chewable tobacco). All the representatives of the Tibetan Youth Association and Tibetan Craft community assured that the tobacco free status of the village will be maintained at any cost as the villagers have shown strong commitment to protect the people and generations to come. Regarding the sustainability of the tobacco free status, the community leaders revealed that they will ensure it through the discussion and counselling. According to the representatives from Khamagar monastery, H.E. 9th Khamtul Rinpoche will provide teachings and lessons regarding the tobacco use and its harmful effects more frequently to the villagers and visitors. All the people in the village are keeping a close watch for the act of tobacco use and smoking. The villagers have also urged the Department of Health and Family Welfare to provide technical support in relation to evidence based awareness generation, challaning procedures.

The team also got an opportunity to talk to Mr. Honsaru Ram Chauhan- *Pradhan* of Gram Panchayat *Jhikli Bheth* under which village Tashijong is situated. Mr. Chauhan narrated the same story of volunterism and leadership and applauded the Tibetan community for this act; he showed his commitment to replicate the same model in his whole panchayat. He urged the government to facilitate the community leader of the village, so that the people throughout the state keep themselves motivated to work for the cause. The team also interacted with the shopkeepers regard; all showed their commitment to never indulge in tobacco business, all showed deep faith in their religion which bars all kinds of addiction. Tenjin Namgyal- one of the leading shopkeepers in the village Tashijong revealed that although I shall have great loss financially due to ban on sale of cigarettes, but he reiterated that he shall respect the teachings of the H.E. 9th Khamtul Rinpoche and decision of the community.

Team members interacted with the villagers at their homes, they narrated the same version of volunterism; many of them were smoker before but all of them declared that they have quit the use of tobacco products completely after 20th July 2011 only; and all are committed to never use it again and would not allow any body to sell or use in the village premises. A 67 year old man named Chodo disclosed that “although I never smoke in my life, but I use to chew gutkha for past 10-12 years, now since community has decided the ban on sale and use in the village; I welcomed the idea and now I don’t have any urge for the gutkha. Mrs. Sonam a

resident of House No H78 in Village Tashijong revealed that the local community has done a remarkable job by putting a ban on sale and use of tobacco products, now she is relaxed that her 12 years old son can be prevented from addiction of tobacco products.

Recommendation

There is no doubt that the village Tashijong is observing an absolute prohibition on sale and use of tobacco products (both smoking and chewable) within the village premises. There is zero tolerance for smoking in the public places in the village. The villagers are not using any tobacco products outside the village also; although there is no full proof mechanism in place to assess it, but villagers, community leaders and monks call it self regulation by the *guruji* teachings and inner self. There is also no mechanism in place for challaning of defaulters; but the community in the Tashijong village can be sensitized for COTPA-2003 by the Department of Health and Family Welfare, HP.

Keeping in view of the above facts, the village Tashi-jong in Tehsil Baijnath Distt Kangra Himachal Pradesh can be declared a “Tobacco Free Village”. This recognition will be pioneering in making Himachal Pradesh state- a tobacco free one in coming years and a model to follow for others in the country.
