

Life in Kargil after Zojila Tunnel:

Special Correspondant

Ladakh

" The exclusion of a region develops sense of alienation and the region gradually slacks in parallence with the rest of the nation. Aligorical to this, after decades of innate-phenetic, optimistic demands, the much reverie of Ladakh has been manifested, as the Zojila Tunnel project is to be inaugurated very soon....This day will be remembered in Ladakh's history as a rejenuvation of Indianness when Ladakh will be truly experiencing indieness- independent of exclusion, nepotism and the long-challenging hostile environment..."

read, a leading state newspaper, as a Ladakhi driver was struggling through, in broken words. The keywords "Zojila Project" and "inauguration" made him realise enough that the Tunnel will soon be inaugurated.

He had faced too much of the austere Zojila pass and this news left him beaming- his bliss knew no boundaries. He blue the horn and surged to one of the passengers, to read out the paper to him. The passenger, impatient to unravel further reads with a surge of excitement,

"....This much awaited tunnel will bring about inclusion of Ladakh on the state-forefront and realise its potential in different economic and social sectors..."

(Other passengers too crowd and the anxious two decide to discuss on the ride)

The passengers were diverse too with different stories interwoven with the pass. Everyone had number of questions and intrepretations to put forth. The Driver, acknowledging the aged passenger, next to him, asks him, " Apo Haji, What do you think, Life will be in Kargil after Zojila tunnel? "

"Decades ago, we were demanding. Supplies faced shortage, health system worsened, governance manipulated and due to alienation, accountability abysmally low. It is obvious that drivers will get all season income and you will be charging less (smiles floating). Patients like me, will get anytime access to the outside world and our children will too get better & inclusive education. And above all, the ruling class will no longer be shielded by infrastructure shortcomings. They can no longer practice nepotism of the quantum as quondam & this will enforce more accountability. Moreover, Tourists will flood more and Kargil will again revive as a transit camp."

Meanwhile, another passenger (who was impatient) interruptingly, narrated that last year he and his acquaintances couldn't appear for a state-level exam because of Zojila blockade and this left them bereft of an opportunity. He further adds that communication will get a major boost and Kargil will undergo a nuanced transition to realise "Digital India", as an integral part of. More employment will be generated, particularly in the service sector- Tourism industry will bloom. This will further bring radical transformations, the pervert mindset of the society will change & an overhauling of the economy is due.

"...But the all season accessibility of Ladakh will substitute the local workforce, thus more likely to deprive them of their hypostasis....."

reads another passenger. He explains, " Due to low skill of local labors and also their mushrooming in only few skills (masonry, carpentry, etc), it will provide no competition to outsiders to fill these voids and will further lead to disparity of wage b/w locals and non-locals. Moreover, the tunnel will ensure long term jobs in Ladakh, thus affecting the sustenance of local labors too "

" Outsiders charge very high and due to lack of competition from locals, they have monopolised few skill areas. But looking at the demographic dividend, (we are experiencing it now) I think that what the youth will benefit of this tunnel will overdo the cons side where labors are usually aged." remarks the aged passenger.

(Discussions unravel further and symbolise the dawn of a new era)

The paper is left on the verandah and the wind rustles through the pages, eager to blow the long-awaited news to far moors, across valleys, moors and crags.

The wind carries the message,

" ...Though the Tunnel infrastructure will be a precursor to boost tourism but remedial & precautionary measures should be there to encapsulate sustainable Tourism. It is a dynamic industry that requires multi-pronged approaches to keep check and balance on the magnitude of anthropogenic pressure that goes beyond the sustainable capacity of the delicate environment and gives birth to various social and environmental concerns. The poor infrastructure of the town, especially poor drainage system will be drastically affected by tourist inflow, generating enormous wastes, which in turn will reflect the poor quality of tourism industry in the town, as the other town (Leh) is facing now. Currently, the town has abysmally low standards of planning, infrastructure, skill and modern facilities which will derail the expectations of a sustainable and qualitative tourism industry.."