



**Department of Geography**  
**Kargil Campus**  
**University of Ladakh**  
Saliskote Khumbathang Kargil (Ladakh)

**Geographical Field Study Tour to Zanskar Valley - A Journey of  
Exploration and Enlightenment**

Report by the Department of Geography, Kargil Campus, University of Ladakh

**INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Geography, Kargil Campus, University of Ladakh, orchestrated an enlightening and captivating four-day field study tour to Zanskar Valley from September 20 to September 23, 2023. This academic expedition aimed to deepen students' understanding of geographical phenomena, emphasizing both the natural forces shaping the region and the profound cultural heritage nestled amidst its rugged terrain.

**Day-1: A Riverside Education**

On the morning of September 20, 2023, the students of PG Geography 1<sup>st</sup> semester, along with faculty members of the department, embarked on a four-day geographical field trip to Zanskar Valley.

The journey commenced promptly at 7:30 a.m. from the university campus, brimming with anticipation and curiosity about what lay ahead in the Zanskar Valley. Our first significant stop was on the bank of the mighty Suru River at a place known as *Karpo Khar*. Here, the faculty members took the opportunity to provide a comprehensive briefing on fluvial landforms and delved into the intricacies of landform evolution and formation, emphasizing the crucial factors of structure, process, and time. The students were made to identify some landforms created by fluvial/river action such as rapids, cataracts, watermarks, river meander, etc. The students were given exposure on how field trips provide a 'real-world' opportunity for students to develop and extend their geographical thinking and add value to classroom experiences. The insights given by the faculty members were invaluable in helping the students understand the natural forces shaping the geography of this region.

After this informative session, the group headed towards the next destination. After two hours of traveling, took a break for a well-deserved lunch, soaking in the breath taking scenery and natural landscape. Energized and ready to continue the exploration and resumed the journey towards Zanskar.

The next halt was at the base of the awe-inspiring *Parkhachik* Glacier. The faculty members once again took the lead, showcasing the glacier's grandeur and explaining its formation and enlightened the students about the various landforms sculpted by the glacier's relentless movement. It was a unique opportunity for them to witness the **dynamic forces of nature in action.**



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As the day progressed, the journey pressed on, and the travels led to the charming town of *Rangdum*. It was here that decided to call it a night, resting and rejuvenating for the adventures that awaited the group in the days ahead.

The atmosphere throughout the first day of the trip was one of excitement and learning. All the students thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The faculties' guidance and expertise added immeasurable value to the students' understanding of geographical phenomena. The group eagerly anticipated what the following days in Zaskar Valley had in store for them as they retired for the night in Rangdum.

This marked the end of the eventful first day, which was filled with exploration, education, and appreciation for the natural beauty of region's geography.

## Day-2: Glacier Dynamics and Cultural Immersion

On the second day of geographical exposure tour, the faculty and enthusiastic students embarked on a journey from Rangdum, one of the coldest places in Ladakh, to the awe-inspiring region of Zaskar. This educational adventure offered a unique opportunity to witness the fascinating landscapes, study glacier dynamics, delve into cultural heritage, and explore geological formations.

The highlight of the day's travel was the visit to *Drang Drung Glacier*, a natural wonder in the heart of the Himalayas. Drang Drung Glacier has garnered attention for its alarming loss of approximately 6.5 square kilometers between 2000 and 2020, further, this glacier experiences an annual reduction of 0.6 meters reported as per the study conducted by 2021 batch student Ms. Raziya Banoo as a part of her PG Dissertation. This unfortunate trend emphasizes the urgency of addressing climate change and its impact on our planet's fragile ecosystems.

Students, equipped with scientific instruments and guided by experienced faculty, had the unique opportunity to study the glacier up close. They observed various glacier landforms, gaining insights into the dynamic processes shaping these frozen giants. It was a first-hand lesson in the realities of climate change and the vital importance of preserving our natural environment.

Continuing their journey through the breath taking landscape, the students also visited Rangdum Monastery. Rangdum Monastery is a Tibetan Buddhist monastery belonging to the Gelugpa sect, situated on top of a small but steep sugarloaf hill at an altitude of 4,031 m. Here, the students were immersed in the cultural ethos of the area, gaining a deep appreciation for the spiritual heritage that thrives amidst the challenging terrain.

Furthermore, the students were treated to a lesson in geology as they witnessed different types of folds and learned how they are formed. The geological formations in the region are a testament to the immense forces that have shaped the Himalayas over millions of years.



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The day ended as the group reached Zanskar Valley, having covered a four-hour journey from Drang Drung Glacier, where the group retired for the night, eager for the adventures that awaited.

## Day-3: Exploring Man-Environment Relationships

On Day 3, the study tour commenced with the visit to the *Stongdey Monastery* in the morning. The gompa was founded in 1052 by Naropa's disciple, the famous translator Lama Marpa Lotsawa (1012-1097). It was taken over by the Gelugpa about four centuries later and became dedicated to Je Tsongkhapa. It is the second largest monastic institution in Zanskar, with a community of about 60 Gelukpa monks.

The view from the Stongdey monastery located at the hilltop gave the panoramic view of the Padum town and its adjoining villages. Along with the beautiful view of the Zanskar valley, there were lot of geographical as well as cultural landscape that could be explored from the monastery. The faculty members briefed the students about the process of river meandering (Zanskar River) and the formation process of alluvial fans and its associated landform features. The purpose of the visit to the Stongdey monastery was to know about the Man-environment relationship in Geography. The students were exposed to the idea of Environmental Determinism, Possibilism and Neo- Determinism through live examples by faculty members.

Man-environment relationship is one the important paradigm of Human Geography. The idea was to expose the students to how the physical environment shapes the socio-cultural lives of the people in the region and vice versa. Later the students also visited the Sheela Waterfall in the afternoon. The faculty members also briefed the students about the processes involved in the formation of waterfalls, and how this waterfall helped the locals in providing livelihood and income through tourism.

After a day of intensive field-based observation and learning, we paused and took a halt at the tranquil banks of the Zanskar River.

## Day-4: Reflection and Return

On last day of the tour, the students along with the faculty members returned from Zanskar Valley to Kargil Campus-UOL. This geographical tour represented more than just an educational experience; it was a powerful reminder of the need for environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and the pursuit of knowledge. The students not only discovered and explored the different geographical landforms but also actively engaged with locals and shared responsibility to protect and cherish the region's natural environment.

*End of Report*

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