

Changing Structure of Mining in Himachal Pradesh: A Case Study of Khanyara Slate Mines

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Abstract:

The slate is such a versatile material, it has been, and is still being used for many different applications. It has been used in more practical ways in the past, such as blackboards, tabletops, and mantelpieces for fireplaces, roofs, and many other residential uses. There are also many different industrial uses such as electrical slate. The uses of slate have changed slightly over the years. Today, slate is being used for aesthetically pleasing purposes such as crushing slate to use on driveways, for slate floors, and still being used in slate roofs. Although the uses of slate have changed over time, the bottom line is that it is still being used in many different products for many different purposes, and proves to still be strong in more ways than one. During the field survey many photographs have been taken to prove the part of the huge environmental impact that the quarries have on the area. The landscapes of Khanyara have changed drastically due to the quarrying practices. This paper particularly focuses on how Khanyara has

transformed from a self-sufficient resource user to a dependent village consequent upon the role of state in resource allocation.

Key words: Slate, Aesthetically, Field Survey, Environmental Impact, Quarries, Landscapes, Khanyara.

INTRODUCTION

Resource availability defines the economic potentiality of a place, as natural resources are closely associated with the well being of people. Man has been using natural resources since time immemorial. The growth of population coupled with economic greed has resulted natural resources to be exploited at a rate higher than ever before. The distribution and access to resources among different sections of society further brings into picture the differences at which resources are extracted. To see this complexity more in detail it would like to infer a case study of a village in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES

Slate mining forms the mainstay of economy of Khanyara even now. State mining which people report has been in practice here since past 200 years is the profession which almost every household has someone who has expertise even now. The objectives of the paper are:

- To take a look back into the history of mining in Khanyara.
- To assess the role of state in changing the face of mining structure in the region.

PLAN OF STUDY

The study is an expression of socio-economic household survey done in December 2013. The theme of the survey was “Rural

Transformation” aimed to see how; over the years villages have experienced transformations. The causal factors and the impact of the drastic changes, which to a rural society is hard to bear, was given a due attention. The villages were covered as following:

- Khanyara Khas and Sokni Da Kot
- Juhal and Bangotu
- Dharamkot and Bhagsunag (municipal areas)

Each villages among mentioned has a characteristic attached to it, which explains the life of a particular village. Khanyara is famous for a low-grade mineral called slate used as roofing tiles. Juhal and Bangotu the villages largely occupied by earlier transhumance practicing Gaddies (now only a few members of the settled households which practice transhumance) on the other hand Dharamkot and Bhagsunag introduces itself as an area of tourist attraction which people stay in for very long time sometimes. Leisure in terms of doing drugs remains one of the motives among tourists. As slate quarries are situated 11 to 15 km northeast of Dharamshala, Distt. Kangra (HP), extending from an area of 4.6 km from Khanyara to Bhagsunag in the west extending further west, the present study limited to the mining only.

DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

Database includes the primary data as collected during field survey. Data include aspects like housing conditions of the workers employed in mining, the source of livelihood, price of slates sold, salary of the miners, and nature of work people is employed. The study includes the observations, interactions with the villages, miners, focused group discussions, and discussions with the local leaders of Panchayats. A limited set of data as applicable is used to show the scenario of mining and

the history followed by discussion on the role of state in changing structure of mining.

QUARRYING: THE REACHES OF KHANYARA

The Khanyara slate quarries are located on the southern slopes of Dhauladhar and formed an economic base for the villages situated in the vicinity of the same. The height of the quarries ranges from 1800 to 1950 m and covers Maunjhi, Manauni and Churan Valleys. The valley in local language is known as Khad, which are names given to small rivulets such as Maunjhi, Manauni, and Churan Khad all tributaries of Beas. The figure 1.1 shows the location of the areas surveyed in Kangra District of Himachal.

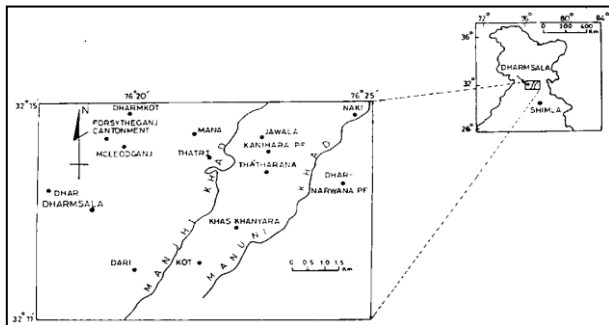


Figure 1.1 Study Area

Source: Article “Utilization of Slate Mine Waste: A Study”.

The mining in the village has been practiced long before at the time when India was a colony. As per our interaction with the locals they estimate the mining to be the activity practiced since last 200 years. Informally slate mining is believed to be initiated in the year 1855 but it was in 1867 commercial extraction of slate started by a private company called “Kangra Valley Slate Co. Ltd.” in an area of 146 Hectare mining was confined to hill folds called Maunjhi and Manauni Khads. British colonial government for the first time transferred

partial control over land to the landowners in 1867-68 where the Khanyara slate mines were located. Landowners controlled the land and paid the colonial government a land tax. Meanwhile, landowners leased out the land to a British investor, Mr. Robert Barkley Shaw started up the Kangra Valley Slate Company for 100 years. This company facilitated the landowners as well as the villagers with the compensations.



A Google Image of the Study Area. The Exposed Patches on the Image Show the sites of Mining.

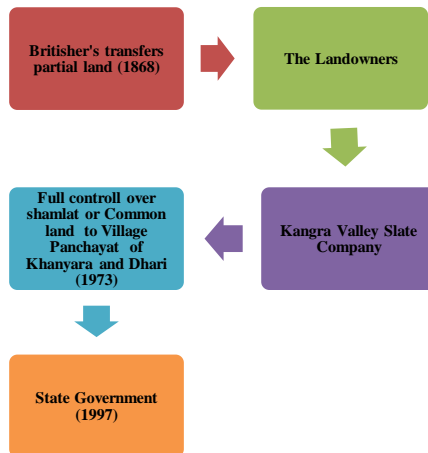


Figure 1.2 The Flow Chart Showing Transfer of Land since 1868.

As stated by Nesar Ahmead, in his article “Artisanal and Small Scale Mining in Asia - Pacific Case Study Series”, (2007) the Kangra Valley Slate company tried to stop payments to

villagers in 1930 but Panchayat after discussing their case with the Lahore High Court who ruled the company sorted out with the matter and continued to get compensation. Soon after India got independent the locals were given full control over the common land and with the introduction of Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act 1953, Dari and Khanyara village Panchyats were given the rights to exert control over. The Panchyats concerned started leasing land to local villages, which could gain them from the small business in hand. In 1971 again Khanyara and Dari faced disputes over the mining ownership rights which later were settled after on the condition sharing the benefits equally by forming “The Khanyara-Dari-Slate Quarry Board” where both the Panchyats had their representatives headed by the village Chief/ Pradhan on six month rotation basis. The board granted short term leases on 11 months operating period, initially in 1973 which led to authorization of as many as 650 quarry leases in operation of authorized area of approximately 625 hectares. With this method only workers mined more than 400 pits manually.

KHANYARA-DARI SLATE QUARRY BOARD AND KHANYARA

The board constituted by joined representatives from Dari and Khanyara was further assigned with the job of supervising mining operations maintaining a record of slate production rates, royalties from mining ventures along with awarding of mining contracts to villagers. Method of extraction is till date manual (traditional) by using crowbars, chisels and digging tools often using blasting materials and the pit size of about 3-4 m down dip. The slates are split along cleavage and dressed into various sizes

The laborers for mining to the area migrated in long way from as far as Nepal, Jammu and Kashmir, Lahul and Spiti and from the other side of Dhauladhar range in Chamba. On an

average around 10,000 workers would join the jobs as laborers from outside (the estimates of proprietor of Dhauladhar Enterprises -a slate mine Contractor) per year. About 10 to 15 labourers worked each pit, earning over a value of 50 million rupees (a pit month value). The workers supporting mining indirectly were not included the labour, had they been include as well the number of labour would increase 3-4 times as per Nesar Ahmead. As pointed out by various studies-the stoneworkers usually employed outdated and highly wasteful mining practices. Ashok Sharma spells out the share of waste generation to 50-70 % though people differ in allocating this share.

Notwithstanding performance of local community based management the fragile environment is another aspect which catches our attention and it questions the sustainability of the local means of livelihood, i.e. mining. Quarrying is highly a waste generating activity and the leased out land which per individual ranged somewhere between 50-150 hectare/individual expanded further into forest. Locals argue that no clear demarcation was made among the forestland and the area allocated for mining. During our interaction with the locals and stoneworkers themselves I found out people to be blasting hard rock out in order to further split and dress the slate. The blasting is practiced both by skilled and unskilled labourers with very limited safety precautions which sometimes result in fatal accidents.

The fragile environment as this is a zone susceptible to very high risk (hazard) and the illegal mining in the area highlighted the problem of environment and safety resulting from mining practices. The villagers and the leaders as complained to the board members who themselves were members of the board resorted to mining to be under the ambit of state mining rules and regulations which Central Mining Research Institute (CMRI) finds otherwise. According to the report of a study by CMRI, the provisions of the mines and

minerals (Regulations and Development) Act, 1957 and mines act was been disobeyed. It also observes the lacking in terms of adequate technology and know-how to practice mining in an area susceptible to hazards. Another area which was unsettled included the wages of workers, which were based on the negotiations between contractors and labour. Also prominent was the fact that the contractors themselves were working along with their workers hence gaining a huge profit on part of contractor.

The setup thus gave way to lift the position of the lower castes and the marginalized sections of society, which on part of the upper castes felt uncomfortable as they say. The share of the profits was enjoyed by both Dari and Khanyara village equally. The figure 1.3 speaks of the earnings of Dari and Khanyara village, which were shared sometimes directly for the community, based projects.

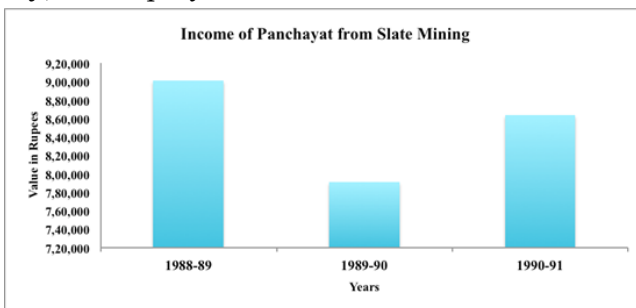


Figure 1.3 The Graph Representing the Income of Panchayat from Mining as per CMRI.

The state as an intervening mechanism has attempted twice before 1997 to take control of the resources jointly controlled by Dari and Khanyara. Using politics of environment was issuing notification under the Indian Forest Act 1927, which called for the suspension of Panchayats 30 year title rights firstly in year 1927 (won by Panchayats in 1971) and secondly in 1974 when a new act called The Himachal Pradesh Village Common lands (Vesting and Utilizations) act 1974 was brought into

force. The final verdict in both the cases was in favor of the Panchayats.

BAN ON MINING AND THE STATE

Later to the realization of Panchayat board mining was stopped which a small group of villagers joining All India Kisan Sabha, the peasant front of communist party of India rose against but the Panchayat on the pretext of serious ecological threats and safety of the locals took matter to court where Panchayat was given statement in favour of them. The impact of the ban on digging the quarries were both positive and negative, which I will take up later.

Now to the end of it in 1997 a lawyer Trisha Sharma, filed a court case against Panchayats on the claims quarrying to be illegal stating that mining activities were against the safety of both environment and population, as it caused pollution in the Beas and Ravi rivers. The Panchayat and the locals lost their wealth and property, which by right should have belonged to them having regulated the illegal and environmental safety aspect of mining. The mining operations were thus halted under the Himachal Pradesh Minerals (Vesting and Rights) act 1983 which have provision of government liable to take control of common lands. On 13th September 1995 Supreme Court imposed a ban on the slate mining and stopped the digging in mines completely. Ban was revoked on certain conditions which included area allocated to limited to 25 hectares, no objection certificate from state pollution control board and the consent of the last owner of the mining (Panchayats) as according to the revenue records Panchayats are still listed as the real owners of mining land. The government of Himachal Pradesh- Department of Industries now exercises the control over mines and intends to distribute the mining leases to a group of nominated individuals and companies. The allocation of land now is characterized by rich and upper classes having much of

chances to get a lease and hence biased. The whole gamut of complex relationship between population resource and environment is modified largely by the intervention of state as oppressor, which exerts power and influences the process of resource allocation. As we talk to the people in village Khanyara people report that the high class, influential people exercise control over mines as they can easily fulfill the conditions under law and the though the area limited to operational mining is 25 hectares but illegal mining is practiced still in many pits.

The center state politics is long been modifying the process of who controls the resources. BJP, which was the ruling party in center in 1997 when ban on mining was imposed, supported the state government granting permission to resume mining on a 25 Hectares strip of land, even though locals were against. Now the Panchayat Darin and Khanyara have split into 3 Panchayats each but the mining area of 625 hectares still remains under the names of Dari and Khanyara. Remaining four Panchayats are surprisingly unhappy over the fact that industries if resumes the quarrying would result in the fight between wealthy classes and business interests over control of land ownership and mining rights from the hand of deprived community.

On the one hand whereas the politics between UPA and BJP over who controls the mining land results into hope of people results in unexpected hopes of people on the other hand it is locals who anyways have to face the consequences.

KHANYARA - A VILLAGE OR THE SUBURB

The success of this community based management system was such that the Panchayat was one the richest in whole Asia continent. And according to Nesar Ahmead (2007) the earning went up to Rs. 5 lakh per annum. The riches of villages could be understood more from the fact that “working in mining was

given priority over government jobs”. As we spoke to the current bank manager, PNB Mr. G.D. Gandhari in Khanyara he said, “when PNB the only branch in Khanyara till date was opened in 1977, I was posted as bank clerk and my pay scale (Rs. 480/month) was less than a mule puller (Rs. 500/month) employed in mining so parents preferred me not to take up the job but mining as it earned more. And I had to join the job as against my parent’s wish.” The environment, infrastructure and the facilities which the village possess supports the fact more so as we enter the area all the items ranging from fast food, medicine, general stores electricity etc. to the fancy clothes shops are available within the village. To my mind having all this in a village is an aspect, which attach to the economy of Khanyara a management extraordinarily different from other villages. The self-reliance and local resource use along with local institutions could be better learned from this village, as we know it.

Khanyara Dari Slate Quarry Board later took up various developmental projects ranging from repairing of the roads, construction of rest house for the miners, set up a bed hospital, expanding and renovation of schools, etc. Presence of bank in a village that too as early as 1977, the English wine shop which is situated right at the entrance of Saukani Da Kot brings questions in our mind as to how a village could posses the facilities which to an average Indian village would seem otherwise alien.

PRESENT SCENARIO

Speaking of the recent scenario the productivity of the slate extraction from a discussion with the villages and the Pradhan is very high which indeed have an impact on the environment. The transport of the slates is largely dependent upon the ponies each carrying 100 slates per trip. The payment per pony is fixed at Rs. 200-300 daily per pony. There are different sizes of

slates, which are produced, and the rates vary according the smoothness and the quality of slate. Workers have to work deep inside the valley for one season (the summer) with all the hardships and the profit makers are the contractors who exercise control over the mines. As laborers not much read have no other option than to work in mines they risk their lives even working for the contractors practicing illegal mining. Labor immigration as told by the locals is still prevalent as it provides seasonal employment though much less in number than before.

The government has now recognized the mule pullers as the laborers and is paid a fixed amount of salary. The rate of payment to the labours is daily basis depending upon the time spent on the mines in dressing. One working from 9 to 3 pm is paid Rs. 200 and that working till 5 is paid Rs. 300. The timings of blasting are also fixed by government but we could hear the blasts ourselves when we went to survey the mining locations in Thatharna Dhar.



Photographs taken from study area during field survey (December, 2013).

The table 1.1 shows the families dependent on the different sources of livelihood among the people surveyed on the mining

spots. The 42 out of 45 workers working as stoneworkers are dependent completely on mining. Only 3 persons have source of livelihood other than mining. The table 2.1 shows the period of time, which a worker is employed in the profession of mining, the age group 0-25 shows the highest number of cases 28 out of 45.

Table 1.1 The Source of Livelihood among Stoneworkers Surveyed at the sites of Mining

Source of Livelihood			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mining	42	93.3	93.3
Agricultural labourer	1	2.2	95.6
Non-Agricultural labour	1	2.2	97.8
Artisan	1	2.2	100.0
Total	45	100.0	

Table 1.2 The Table Showing the Years since Labourers are Employed in Profession of Mining

Working Tenure (in year), 2013			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0-25	28	62.2	62.2
25-50	13	28.9	91.1
50-75	4	8.9	100.0
Total	45	100.0	

CONCLUSION

The mining boom experienced by Khanyara has left a mark on the society till now as the social evils like drugs and alcohol has become a nuisance to the families in Khanyara. The enrollment rate in the village after ban has suddenly seen a spurt according to villagers and is going in for higher education rather than generations earlier when people had no option but to work on mines, though the locals also complain of literate unemployed. Both boys and girls are treated equally and given equal rights in the family; this is more so true in the Gaddi families who are given an important position in the family. The youngsters have got addicted to the drugs and alcohol resulting into unwanted social behavior. The people are of opinion that

the higher castes and rich people find it easy to find job in quarrying due to affluence but lower castes that don't have access to resources and the contacts have to work either as MNREGA worker or as daily labour in Dharamsala. The policy of auctioning land out to contractors also have favored already rich who have become agents of exploiting the poor. The look at the settlement approves of the riches, which quarrying brought to the village along with other amenities enjoyed but now the land is passed on to both Himachali and non-Himachali. The concern of the government that fragile environment should be prevented from being destroyed and degraded further but what of the hydel projects which have blocked the Maunjhi Khad at two places and an upcoming project on Manauni river (on stay) just by the Villages and vicinity of slate mines.

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