

Socio-Economic Status of The Street Vendors of Hilly Region: A Case Study of Yumthang Valley, Sikkim

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Abstract: Sikkim is a very beautiful landlocked Indian state lies in the Greater Himalayas. It is a least populous state (28th) of India with the 2nd smallest state according to area. Tourism industry can be considered as the main economic activity of Sikkim due to its beautiful natural scenario and diverse social and economic culture. It is can be considered as the backbone of the state's economy. Yumthang valley situated in the largest district of Sikkim, i.e. North Sikkim, which connects the 'Zero Valley' with the central part of Sikkim. The socio economic status of the street vendors of Yumthang valley has been selected for the present study. Purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of tourism on their economic activities. We collect primary data by directly visiting them with schedule and interview; secondary data are collected from various sources for the research. From the research it is found that the women empowerment is very strong in the region while the literacy rate and annual income is very low in comparison to other parts of Sikkim. This paper will help to understand the socio-economic status and their livelihood condition of street vendors of Yumthang valley.

Keywords: Tourism, Socio-Economic condition, Street vendors, Empowerment, livelihood.

I. Introduction:

Sikkim is gifted with a rich biodiversity and a variety of natural resources. The state has been aiming to pursue an eco-friendly sustainable development process during the last 30 years. With 523 species of orchids, 28 mountain peaks, 21 glaciers, 227 lakes and wetlands, one national park and six wild life sanctuaries, Sikkim is emerging as a popular tourist destination in India. Sikkim is also the largest producer/exporter of large cardamom (Elaichi) accounting for about a half of the total world production. However, a stagnant agriculture and steadily declining industrial activity have severely hampered the development process. The government has been at the center stage of development and has been involved in every sphere of activity. Since non-government employment opportunities are minimal, the government has become the principal employer. This has put the government under severe fiscal stress.

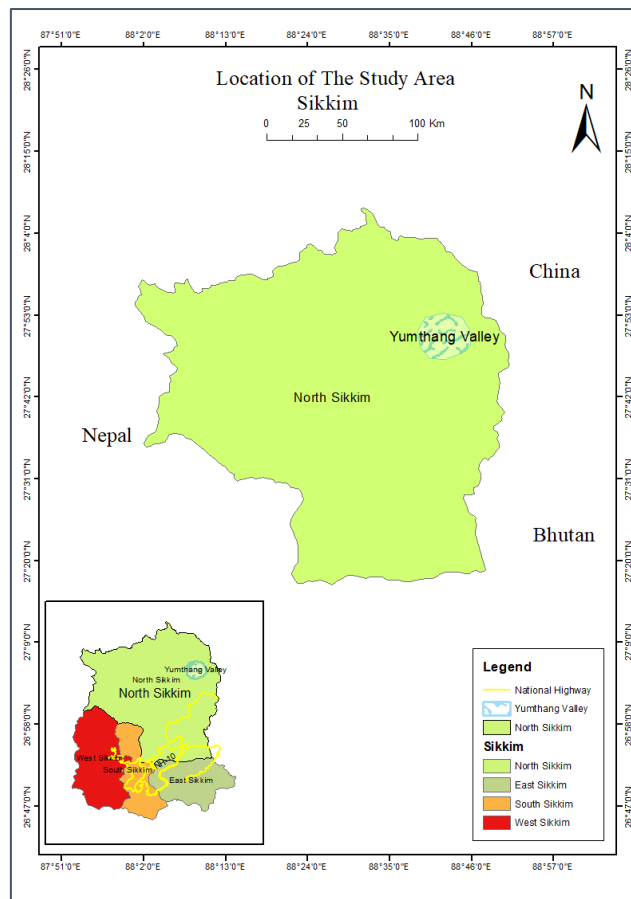
Tourism is the most viable and feeding industry in Sikkim in view of its abundant natural and cultural resources. The government has recognized the importance of tourism and has declared it a thrust sector in its policy documentation. The upsurge of tourists in this hilly region has definitely contributed to a major extent in socio-economic upliftment of the locals at large. There are many natural sites which attract tourists to this region. That's why, the accessibility to such attractions including requisite infrastructure building would become imperative for overall promotion of tourism activities in the area.

Tourism Industry is the main economic source of Sikkim. Therefore, it can be considered as the backbone of Sikkim's economy. Tourism is an important source of employment – both direct and indirect to vast section of people in the State and is also important for earning valuable foreign exchange. The wide variety of natural beauty that the State is blessed with in addition to a pleasant climate all through the year has made Sikkim a focal point of tourist attraction both from the various States of India and foreign countries. The State Government plays a vital role in development of tourism in the State. It takes an active interest in developing tourism, as it is reflected from the guiding principles for the Tourism Sector in the State.

In 2015, Sikkim fully implemented organic farming statewide, becoming India's first "organic state", while in 2016, it restricted the usage of plastic water bottles (in government functions and meetings) and Styrofoam products, becoming India's "cleanest state".

II. Study area:

Sikkim is placed between latitudes of 27°5' N to 20°9' N and longitudes of 87° 59' E to 88°56' E. The Indian border of Sikkim is shared only with the state of West Bengal.



Our study area is a part of North Sikkim district which official name is Mangan District. Its district headquarter is Mangan. Location of the district is 27°31' N, 88°32' E. It is the seventh least populous district in the country. North Sikkim is the largest among four district of Sikkim, with an area of 4226 km² and total population is 43,709 with the density of 10/km²(according to 2011 census). The study area Lachung is at a height of above 8600 ft. it is about 50 km from Mangan. There are no railway connections and lines in Sikkim. The nearest railway station is located in Siliguri and New Jalpaiguri. New Jalpaiguri (NJP) railway station is located 125 km away from Gangtok and Siliguri is located 114 km away.

Most of North Sikkim is restricted to travelers and permits are needed to visit these areas. The area, which shares a sensitive border with the people's republic of China is heavily patrolled by the India army. However, in view of exquisite scenic beauty, a large number of tourists have stated visiting the region overcoming all sorts of hardship. Often unregulated tourism become a major conservation issue in fragile ecosystem such as high mountains.

III. Objectives:

- To study the socio economic condition of street vendors of Yumthang Valley.
- To study the impact of tourism on Socio-Economic activities.

IV. Methodology:

Methodology is a process of achieving information and data analysis. Various methods are applied various factors needed for the purpose of this report. We basically used primary and secondary data. The present study is mainly based on survey method. It is both descriptive and analytical in nature.

The methods are:

1. Selection of the study area,
 2. Preparation of survey schedule,
 3. Collection of primary and secondary data,
 4. Analysis of collected data,
 5. Preparation of the maps
1. Selection of the study area: The main cause of selecting Yumthang valley to study about the livelihood of street vendors. Moreover, they occupied an important position in tourism sector. And the vendors of Yumthang valley have been able to set an example over the physiographic barriers in the field of survival.
 2. Preparation of the survey schedule: Schedule and questionnaires have been prepared for the vendors, the local people to collect the information.
 3. Collection of primary and secondary data: Primary data are collected directly by us and it is a fresh and original from the field. Primary data is collected through the means questionnaires and schedule. Secondary data are collected mainly from published sources, like -
 - Research papers, books, newspaper and journals.
 - Different Govt. and Private websites etc.
 4. Analysis of collected data: After collection of data, we analyze the data sets and represent it by using different types of diagram.

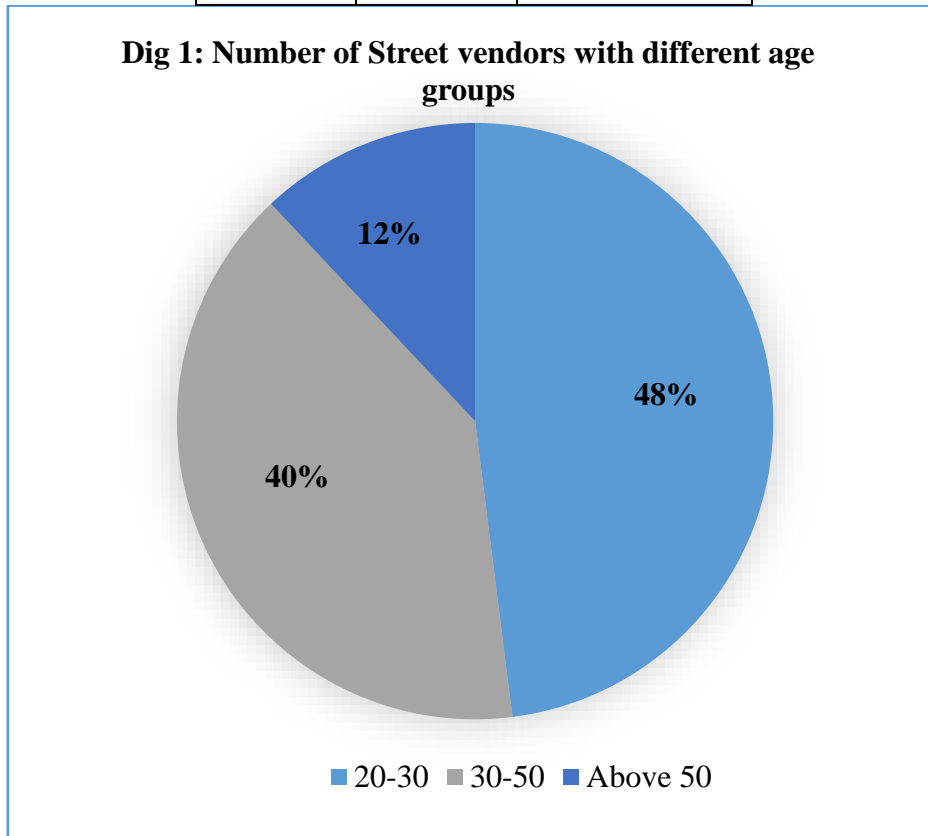
5. *Preparation of the maps*: Numbers of maps are prepared for the purpose, like base map of the region.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

a. Age - sex structure of street vendors –

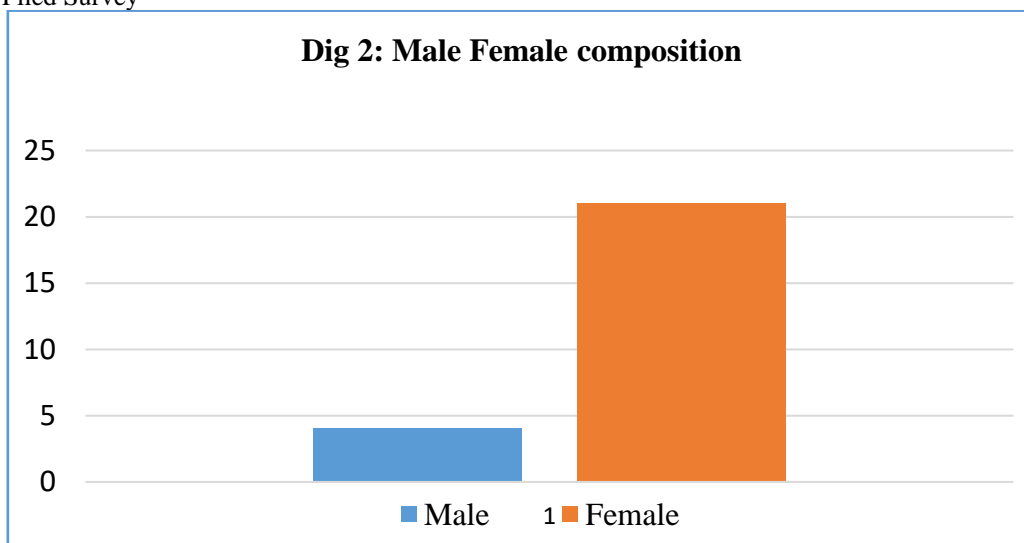
During our survey we found that vendors are from different ages. We divided these age groups into three categories, which are-20 - 30, 30 - 50, and above 50 years.

Table 1: street vendors of different age groups		
20-30	30-50	Above 50
12	10	3



From the analysis of our surveyed information we found that 48% of the total vendors belonging from 20-30 age group, other 40% belonging from 30-50 group and rest 12% are from the age group of above 50 years. Which means 12 people are between 20-30 age group, 10 people are between 30-50 group, and rest 3 people are from the group of above 50 years.

Source: Filed Survey



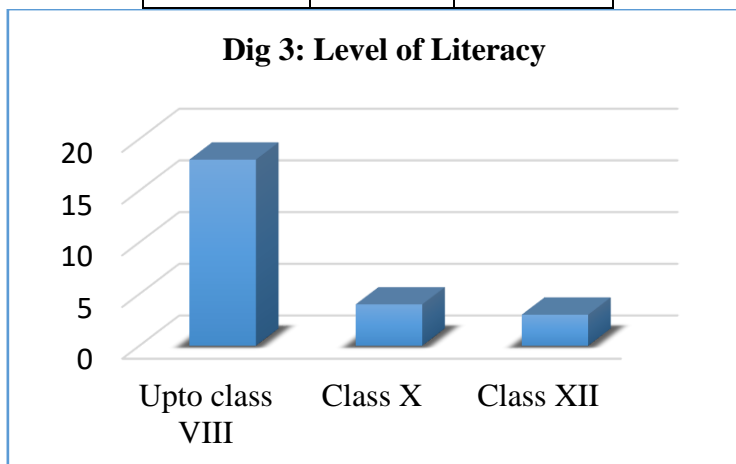
Within all this groups, 84% of vendors are female and 16% are male i.e. 21 vendors are female and 4 vendors are male. From this point of view, we can say that in the study area Yumthang valley, North Sikkim, females are broadly contributing to the socio- economic activities. It is also found from our survey report that 76% of the shop owners are married and remaining 24% are unmarried.

Source: Filed Survey

b. Level of literacy –

From the survey we have analyzed the literacy rate of that street vendors in three categories. Which are up to class VIII, X pass and XII pass. According to them, due to lack of better education facilities in Yumthang valley, some interested people are unable to do study after 12th.

Table 2: Educational Qualification of street vendors		
Up to class VIII	Class X	Class XII
18	4	3



The analyzation of educational qualification level based on above categories and collected data are mentioned below -
Source: Filed Survey

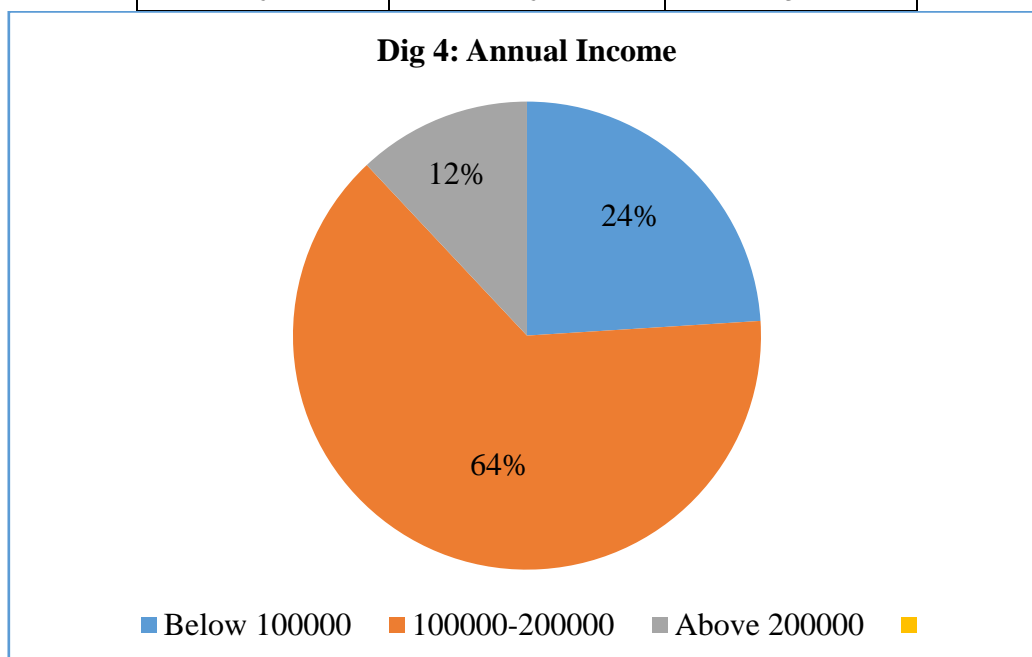
c. Income –

The street vendors are directly or indirectly depend on tourists who visited in or passed through Yumthang Valley, So, tourist are the main source of income for the vendor’s family. For our survey, we randomly visited 25 street stall and collect the data in our study area.

The street vendors sell different types of food items and goods such as Momo, Maggi, Biscuits and Cakes, Tea and coffee, water, wine and alcoholic items; gloves and caps etc. Apart from these selling goods, they also rent out warm clothes and boots to tourists for 150 to 200 rupees per cloth or boot. The price of items is comparatively higher than the other states of India in this region or entire the state.

The annual income pattern of street vendors of the study area is again classified into three groups, which are as follows –

Table 3: Annual Income of street vendors		
Below 1,00,000	1,00,000-2,00,000	Above 2,00,000
6	16	3



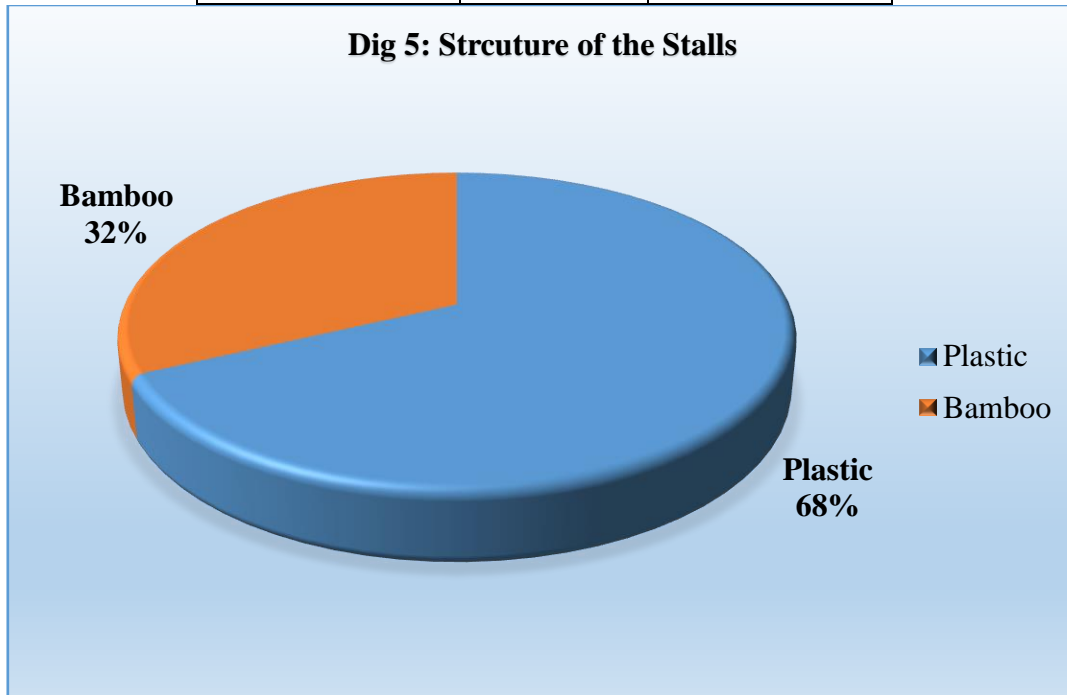
Source: Filed Survey

The above data stated that the majority of vendors are lies between 1,00,000 to 2,00,000 rupees of annual income. During the period of COVID-19 Pandemic, vendors were facing a high amount of losses from their stall.

d. Structure of the stalls –

During our study we observed that the stalls were not well constructed. To construct the stall, they used the materials like plastics and bamboo. Due to their less income patter street vendors were not able to build their stalls by concrete.

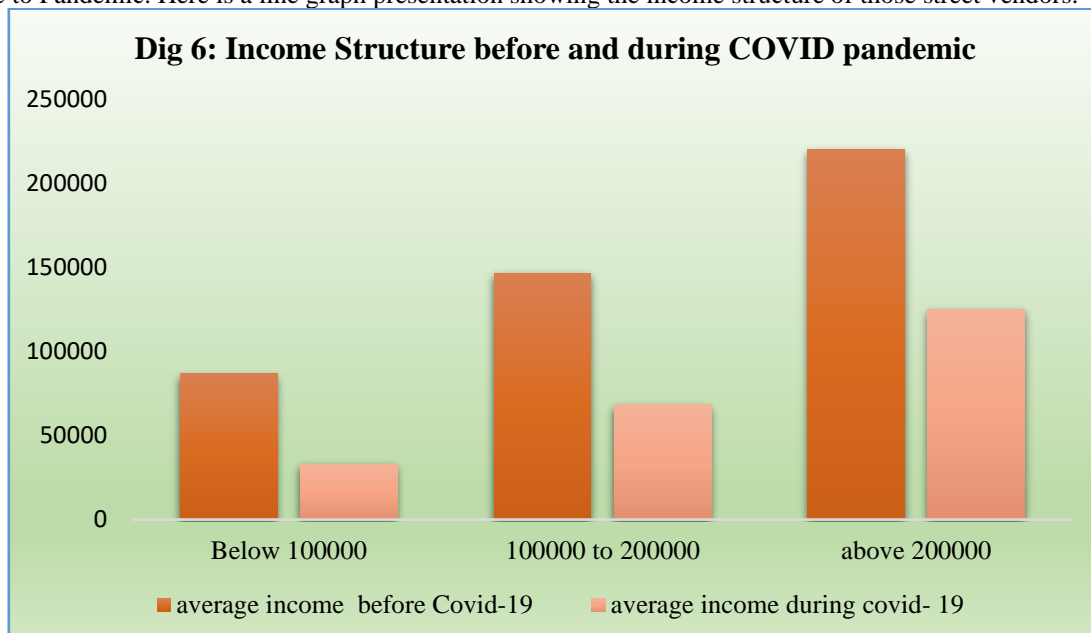
Table 4: Materials used to construct their stalls		
Concrete	Plastic	Bamboo
0	17	8



Source: Filed Survey

e. Impact on tourism during covid pandemic –

With the outbreak of the global COVID-19 Pandemic, the Tourism industry of Sikkim has fall down to very worst condition. The government takes initiatives to shut down the tourism sector of the State till October, 2021. Which can have a serious negative impact on Sikkim’s economy. The step leads to the uprising of economic problem such as Unemployment to the population of the State. As earlier mentioned that tourism is the backbone of Sikkim’s economy. Due to the COVID-19 pandemics, it resulting in widespread unemployment and social imbalance. As the state, our study area Yumthang valley also faced a lot of problems due to Pandemic. Here is a line graph presentation showing the income structure of those street vendors.



Source: Filed Survey

Some of the people are new as a street vendor in this area due to the pandemic situation. They lost their jobs and started a small stall there to earn money for their family.

f. Problem facing by street vendors –

There are many problems faced by street vendors of Yumthang valley, which are usually not can be seen the plain region. can be broadly classified in three categories such as physical, economic and social problems.

Climate and Physiography: The north Sikkim district is a highly mountainous region with altitude of 3700 meter in yumthang valley. Which cause a heavy snowfall in between the month of October to March. Yumthang valley is a narrow patch that surrounded by high mountain ranges and Lachung river passes through the valley. The valley also has no agricultural suitable area. These climatic and physiographic barriers create more problems in the region.

Transportation and communication: Due to very high altitude, road facility and communication facility such as mobile network and postal services are not good in Yumthang valley. The region continuously faces the problem of narrow and one route connection, landslides etc.

Tourist during winter season: Due to the heavy snow fall the valley covered with snow layer from December to February, which cause shut down the tourism industry during this time period. Street vendors are mainly dependent on tourist that's why their income going to very less in this season.

Medical facility: Due to less population and bad transport and communication facility, the region has no medical facility. The only source of medical facility provided by military camp, near Yumthang valley natural reserve which is almost 18 km from Yumthang valley.

Lack of other economic activities: There is no potentiality to grow other economic activities like agriculture, food production, industries etc. in that region due to physiographic and climatic condition. That's why the region completely based on tourism industry.

Domination of local community: The region is completely dominated by a local community known as Kami. It leads to improper implementation of government policies in Yumthang valley.

g. Future prospect –

If the transport facility is converted into two road connectivity from one road, it may increase the number of tourist per year in the region. Which will ultimately cause higher income for the street vendors.

Government can imply some subsidies like Tax relaxation, Providing loans at low interest rate etc. for the street vendors. It will help to develop the socio economic condition of the people.

If the government can negotiate with the dominating local community, they can apply more useful policies for both tourists and the local people of Yumthang valley.

VI. Findings –

- The economic activities of Yumthang valley, i.e. stalls are managed by women.
- Women empowerment is very strong in the region, while the stalls are not well constructed.
- From the collected data, the average annual income of these 25 stalls are came out as 1,50,950 rupees. So we can consider that the average annual income of all street vendors of the study area are nearly 1,50,000 rupees.
- Literacy rate is very low in comparison to the central Sikkim, i.e. Gangtok.
- The area is more traditional due to the high rural concentration with all rural living in scattered hamlet settlement.

VII. Conclusion –

After the analyzation, we have find that the livelihood condition of people of Yumthang valley is not very good, mainly in winter season. The number of tourists become very less in winter season and the connection and communication with outer world is almost cut offed. As a result, their income is greatly reduced because of the decreasing number of tourists. Due to the communication and connectivity problem, food and other essential goods cannot be send to them sufficiently from the outer world. The electricity supply is also not good in this region. If these problems can be solved, then it will become a very good region for tourism purpose and which will boost up the economic growth of these street vendors as well as other peoples of that area.

VIII. Reference –

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