

On Homestays and Conservation in Ladakh - Sherab Dolma interviewed

Author - Ashish Kothari, transcribed by Max Harder, Published on - 22.11.2019



Conversation with Sherab Dolma, resident of Saspotse village, Ladakh, who runs a homestay. The interview was conducted by Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh, and translation was provided by Tsewang Namgail of [Snow Leopard Conservancy - India Trust](#), which has enabled the village to set up several homestays. Watch the interview - this has been transcribed by Max Harder, an intern at Kalpavriksh.

Transcription

Ashish Kothari: *We are talking to Sherab Dolma, in Saspotse village, Ladakh. Sherab, could you briefly introduce yourself?*

Sherab Dolma: My name is Sherab Dolma, the name of the village is Saspotse.

Ashish: *And what are you doing here?*

Sherab: I am working with the Ama Chokspa which is the women's alliance in this village. We have been doing a lot of work, be it village development; be it education, development of the education system here; handicraft, how to make additional income. We also have been running the Himalayan Homestays, all the women especially, so we feel really empowered now because it's bringing income. We don't need to rely on our husbands, for example, for petty cash, and we send our kids to good schools. All the other women in the village and I feel really special and we feel empowered and we really enjoy the work, and like it when people come from outside, sharing news and views. Similarly, the foreigners or all the tourists who are coming here, they enjoy it too. It's a very good arrangement that the tourists are enjoying, and it's generating income. The homestays have been very successful here. And the garbage issue had been a big problem here because of the increasing number of tourists. Nowadays, we collect all the plastic toffee wrappers or biscuit wrappers ... empty plastic things that we find on the agricultural fields. We collect them, and then put it all in these garbage bins that the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust has put in place at different locations in the village. That has been very useful in keeping the village clean.

Ashish: When did it start?

Sherab: Maybe ten years, maybe a little bit less, I think...

Ashish: **How long have you been doing it yourself?**

Sherab: We had all started together, so the nine homestays in this village, they had all started together. I think it has maybe been in 2013–14 that it started.

Ashish: **What else do you plan to start in the village?**

Sherab: Until now all the women have been running the homestays – of course, the men help sometimes – but now the aspiration is to have all the youths from the cities back in the village and then let them run the homestays and really they this is a great income generation opportunity. We are talking to the youths now, how to generate income just by being in the village, so they don't need to go outside. It's a good way of bringing them back for the development of the village so that they understand all the issues, which will help in developing the village further by the youths.

Ashish: And what do they feel about the snow leopard?

Sherab: Our attitude towards the snow leopard has completely changed in the last few years, ever since these programmes were put in place. Earlier, we didn't know what a snow leopard was, for example. We had heard about it, maybe some of us had seen it when people took their livestock up in the mountains, if there were some depuration caves, then some people might see them. But generally, most of us didn't know what the snow leopard was, or ibex for that matter. Today everyone – including the youth, women, elders – everyone is taking an interest because there are people coming, looking for them, trying to understand them, so we also become curious in the process. We also want to learn about the snow leopards, so we really feel good when people come to see the snow leopard and the wildlife here. People come and spend time with us?. Not only from outside, foreigners and tourists from other parts of India, but Ladakhi youth are also coming to see the snow leopard, they feel really good. I think it's a good way of integrating Ladakh in a way, that the Ladakhi youth understand the village life within Ladakh, not just outside. So domestic tourists, we really find it very fascinating and very nice to see people from outside, from many places. They also enjoy looking at the farming system, in our houses, how we do the day-to-day work and they also engage in cooking. They really have a good time here and when they leave, a lot of people leave crying. They have such a fantastic time, will never forget this. It's an unforgettable experience for them also which they will cherish for a long time.

Ashish: *Jullay*, thank you, *jullay*.