Rural Tourism and Reverse Migration: Reviving Uttarakhand's Villages with special reference to Chamoli District of Uttarakhand

Mr. Deepak Kumar, Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Soban Singh Jeena University, SSJ Campus, Almora[1]

Dr. Indra Mohan Pant, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Soban Singh Jeena University LSM Campus, Pithoragarh[2]

Abstract

This research article investigates the capacity of rural tourism to mitigate migration in Uttarakhand, specifically focusing on the Chamoli district of the Garhwal region. The paper uses secondary data sources, e.g., policy papers, census data, Palayan Aayog reports, and other data sources for reference. Covid-19 The pandemic was a turning point for villagers to return to their native village, which changed the rural community at large. It explores government policies, community-led initiatives, and the socio-economic impacts of tourism-driven livelihoods. During Covid-19 we saw migrants establishing livelihood sources for themselves and for others in the village itself. By analyzing successful case studies and identifying systemic obstacles in this approach, the paper provides strategies for integrating tourism with environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic development. The study positions rural tourism as a cornerstone for the revitalization of Uttarakhand's rural communities.

Key words: Tourism, livelihood, migration, Covid-19, reverse migration

Introduction:

Migration in Uttarakhand has been a pertinent issue since the establishment of the state. People from the state migrate to other states and out of the country for jobs, education, and health care opportunities. According to the Uttarakhand Palayan Aayog's recent February 2023 report, the state witnessed a negative decadal growth of -1.67% in its population, which means the population is declining due to out-migration. Chamoli is the birthplace of the Chipko Movement and attracts nature lovers as well as pilgrims. pilgrimage sites like Badrinath, Hemkund Sahib, Joshimath, and three of the Panch Prayags: Karnaprayag,

Nandprayag, and Vishnuprayag, that come as points of interest for the devotees on their pilgrimage tour. The district is hilly and is the 2nd largest district in the bank of Alaknanda.

Objectives:

1. Analyze the impact of rural tourism on reverse migration in Chamoli.
2. Identify challenges in implementing tourism policies effectively.
3. Propose sustainable strategies for maximizing rural tourism benefits.

Literature Review

Rural Tourism as a Tool for Economic Development

Rural tourism revitalizes economies by diversifying income sources and mitigating rural poverty. Carvalho et al. (2017) emphasized community-driven tourism, highlighting its ability to generate income through local handicrafts, homestays, and guiding services. Perry (2014) advocated for integrating tourism with sustainable agricultural practices, an approach that could be relevant to Uttarakhand's agrarian economy.

In India, Khan and Ahmed (2016) documented how tourism empowered communities in Himachal Pradesh and Kerala by creating employment, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering entrepreneurship. These studies underscore tourism's potential to alleviate challenges like youth migration in Uttarakhand.

Comprehending Reverse Migration:

Following COVID-19, reverse migration—the movement of urban migrants back to their rural homes—has become more common (Gupta & Yadav, 2020). Many people moved back to rural areas because of economic uncertainties and job losses in the urban centers, creating prospects for rural regeneration and revitalization. Das and Sahoo (2019) suggested policy interventions to improve rural infrastructure and generate jobs by connecting reverse migration to elements like environmental degradation.

Linking Rural Tourism with Reverse Migration:

Tiwari and Kumar (2018) argue that rural tourism can curb migration by offering alternative livelihoods. In Chamoli, government initiatives in trekking and eco-tourism have supported livelihoods through homestays, guiding, and local crafts (Rawat & Prasad, 2020). However, Singh and Sharma (2021) cautioned that tourism's potential depends on infrastructure, skills development, and community involvement.

Challenges to Sustainability:

Sustainability refers to the use of natural resources in such a way that it does not harm the environment. Bhattarai and Khanal (2018) highlighted risks such as environmental degradation and cultural erosion due to unregulated tourism in the region. Bansal (2017) and Bose and Chakraborty (2019) have recommended community-led, eco-friendly tourism models to balance growth with conservation. In Uttarakhand, promoting low-impact tourism can mitigate threats to fragile ecosystems and cultural heritage, and it can provide jobs to the locals.

Methodology:

The study utilized secondary data sources:

1. Government reports and policy documents.
2. Media articles (Travel Turtle, Economic Times, CNBC-TV18).
3. Statistical data on tourism and migration trends.
4. Online platforms (eUttaranchal, TripAdvisor).
5. Report from the Uttarakhand Migration Commission.

Findings:

Connectivity:

Government policies such as Char Dham Railways and All-weather Road have improved the connectivity in Chamoli. It is surrounded by Bageshwar and Almora from the Kumaun Region in the South, Rudraprayag and Tehri from the West, and in the North, the mighty Himalayan range is present. The 2018 policy by the government of Uttarakhand has improved the connectivity in the region. **(Government of Uttarakhand Year 2018)**

Homestays: Over 2,000 homestays, including many in Chamoli, have significantly increased local incomes while fostering cultural exchange between visitors and residents.
(eUttaranchal, 2023).

Trekking:

The trekking sites shortlisted to avail benefits under the scheme include Ghuttu, Buddha Kedar in Tehri district, and Richak, Gangi, Pujar, Sendwal, Chaitwan, Jogiyada, Bhaat, Akva, Malla Gavna, Talla Gavna, Buddha Kedar, Koti, Pisvaad, Pantwari Baandasari, Teva, Autand, and Devalsari in Pantvadi. Dar, Nangling, Saun, Dakar, Dugtu, Paangu, Bundi, Koonji, and Kooti in Pithoragarh district; Tapovan, Ringi, Subhai, and Saldhar under district Chamoli; and Dilmi and Daira villages under Pithoragarh district. The notified villages will benefit in compliance with the provisions and conditions of the Trekking Traction Center Homestay Scheme 2020 **(BW Hotelier, 2023).**

Environmental Challenges: Sustainable tourism is the need of the hour as we see the incident of the Joshimath landslide in the past year. (CNBC-TV18, 2023).

Community Engagement in Tourism: Local participation in tourism has improved the lives of locals in this region. (TripAdvisor, 2023).

Discussion:

It demonstrates how tourism is the driving component behind reverse migration.

1. Economic Empowerment: It diversified livelihoods and opened new pathways away from agriculture. An estimated increase of 30-40% in income as reported by Chamoli families transiting from agriculture to tourism activities (Rawat & Prasad, 2020).

2. Youth Engagement: Hindustan Times (2023)

Tourism provided employment to the young as guides, craftsmen, and hospitality workers, thereby forging a connection to where they belonged or were from.

3. Women's Empowerment: Homestays, crafted by females, were one such management opportunity that led to achieving financial independence and social identity for the women. (eUttaranchal, 2023).

4. **Cultural tourism** enables reviving traditional crafts and festivals, leading to enhanced prestige for local culture **(String-Germain, 2011; Bose & Chakraborty, 2019).**

5. Community Cohesion: The collaborative projects of tourism helped in building social relations and reshaping the fragmented communities (Singh **& Sharma, 2021).**

Barriers to Implementation

- **Infrastructure Gaps**: Roads, electricity, and the internet are not that great, though (Travel Turtle 2023).

  Environmental Risks: CNBC-TV18, 2023) Unchecked tourism can have adverse impacts on delicate ecosystems.
- **Skill Gaps**: Tourism is held back due to a lack of proper foundations in hospitality and marketing (Hindustan Times, 2023).
- **Overdependence on Tourism:** Agriculture and handicrafts may diversify economies and reduce vulnerability towards tourism fluctuations (Das & Sahoo, 2019).

- **Inclusivity:** Tourism policies must focus on ensuring that benefits from tourism accrue to marginalized groups (Swiss Tourism Board, 2020).

Policy Recommendations:

1. Development of infrastructure (roads, digital connectivity, healthcare).
2. Implement eco-tourism guidelines to promote sustainable tourism.
3. Provide hospitality and management skills training programs.
4. Build financial support and own messages through public-private partnerships.
5. Design proactive disaster readiness tactics.Financial and logistical help to reverse migration.
6. **Tailored Planning:** Migration and tourism data are crucial for planning. Use migration tourists, etc., to plan in the UK Migration Commission, 2023.

Conclusion:

The case of Chamoli again highlights the huge potential to reverse rural migration and boost our economy through tourism. It is therefore important to invest resources in addressing infrastructure gaps and environmental challenges. Collective initiatives that blend government policies, community involvement, and sustainability can use tourism to transform Uttarakhand into a prototype for the revival of rural life.

References:

1. Travel Turtle. "Uttarakhand on the Path to Escalate Tourism and Reverse Migration with Infrastructure," 2023.

2. Economic Times. "Uttarakhand Rural Tourism to Facilitate Reverse Migration," 2023.

3. CNBC-TV18. "Joshimath Land Sinking: Homestay Owners Affected as Tourism Takes a Hit in Uttarakhand," 2023.

4. BW Hotelier. "Residential Facilities for Tourists to be Set Up in Remote Rural Villages," 2023.

5. Hindustan Times. "Uttarakhand Tourism Dept Selects 29 Hill Villages for Trekking Clusters," 2023.

6. eUttaranchal. "Uttarakhand Homestay Scheme," 2023.

7. TripAdvisor. "Chamoli District, Uttarakhand: Travel Reviews and Visitor Experiences," 2023.

8. Uttarakhand Migration Commission. "Second Interim Report on Migration and Development," 2023.

9. Government of Uttarakhand. "State Tourism Policy," 2018.

10. Swiss Tourism Board. "Revitalizing Alpine Villages through Sustainable Tourism," 2020.