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Tourism's Footprint On Society: A Socio-Cultural Analysis Of The Upper Beas Basin (UBB) In Kullu Valley.

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Abstract

The Upper Beas Basin of Kullu valley has experienced a rapid growth in number of visitors in the past few decades, i.e., from a mere 10,000 visitors in the 1960's (Singh, T.V 1989) to more than 28 lakh in 2022. (HPTDC 2022). This has resulted in an uncontrolled and unplanned growth of tourism related infrastructure, crowding, congestion and pollution. All this is having a deep impact on the regions environment, economy and society, raising questions of long term sustainability of tourism in the region. As such, the paper tries to assess the impacts of tourism especially on the social and cultural aspect of the region. Socio-Cultural impact assessment is crucial for tourism sustainability because it helps identify and mitigate potential negative effects on local communities, cultures and traditions. By understanding these impacts tourism development can be managed in a way that benefits both visitors and the host communities, ensuring long-term sustainability and harmony between tourism and local cultures. The study clearly demonstrates positive and negative impacts on the socio-cultural aspects of the Upper Beas Basin. Among the negative impacts one sees changes in the occupation, social values, family structure etc. There is a weakening of community bonds, degeneration of social value systems, commercialization of culture, increase in crime and moral laxity. The positive impacts on the other hand were preservation and revival of certain culture and traditions, spread of new ideas (cultural exchange), increasing awareness of the significance of education and a desire to improve their living standards.

KEYWORDS: Upper Beas Basin (UBB), Tourism, Sustainable tourism, Mountain, Socio-cultural impacts,

Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a major phenomenon of modern society and it has immense economic and social significance. It is gaining increasing recognition for its significance in improvement of local economies and is appreciated for its contribution towards poverty alleviation. Tourism today is an effective instrument for generating employment, earning revenue and foreign exchange, environmental conservation, infrastructure development for enhancing preservation, conservation, and rejuvenation of culture and tradition, thereby facilitating overall development.

According to UNWTO (SF-MST), Draft 2024, "Tourism is a socio-cultural and economic phenomenon related to movement of people outside their usual place of residence. It has an impact on the economy, the natural and built environment, the local population at the place visited and the visitor themselves." While Sustainable tourism, "is tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts whilst addressing the needs of the visitor, the industry, the environment and

the host communities". Sustainable tourism therefore implies assessing positive and negative impacts on a regions environment, economy and society, and minimizing negative impacts for the long term sustainability of tourism in a region.

Tourism Impact research reveals that mountain tourism is one of the fastest growing but least understood forms of tourism. Mountains are made of sensitive ecosystems with limited tolerance and low carrying capacity; aggressive tourism activities create serious problems. Its impacts on society, economy and environment are not fully comprehended (Chander, R., 2018), therefore raising questions about its long term sustainability.

Study Area

The area chosen for study is one such Himalayan region located in the Beas Basin of Kullu Valley of Himachal Pradesh. Rich natural and cultural heritage of Upper Beas Basin makes it an ideal tourist destination. Physical attraction of Upper Beas Basin in Kullu Valley comes by way of its location in central Himachal Pradesh, in the heart of Pir Panjal Range. Beas River forms central, north- to-south axis of Upper Beas basin. Watershed of Upper Beas Basin has been taken as the study area, extending from Rohtang Pass (3978m) in the north to Raison (1350m) in the south covering an approximate length of 41 kms and width of 45 kms. The area extends between 32° 3' N and 32° 23' N latitudes and 76° 55' and 77° 21' E longitudes. It covers a total area of approximately 1123 sq kms. (Figure 1.1)

The region has experienced unanticipated growth in tourism leading to serious consequences. This accelerated growth of tourism has had substantial impact on the region's economy, society and environment threatening the long-term sustainability of tourism and livelihood that it supports.

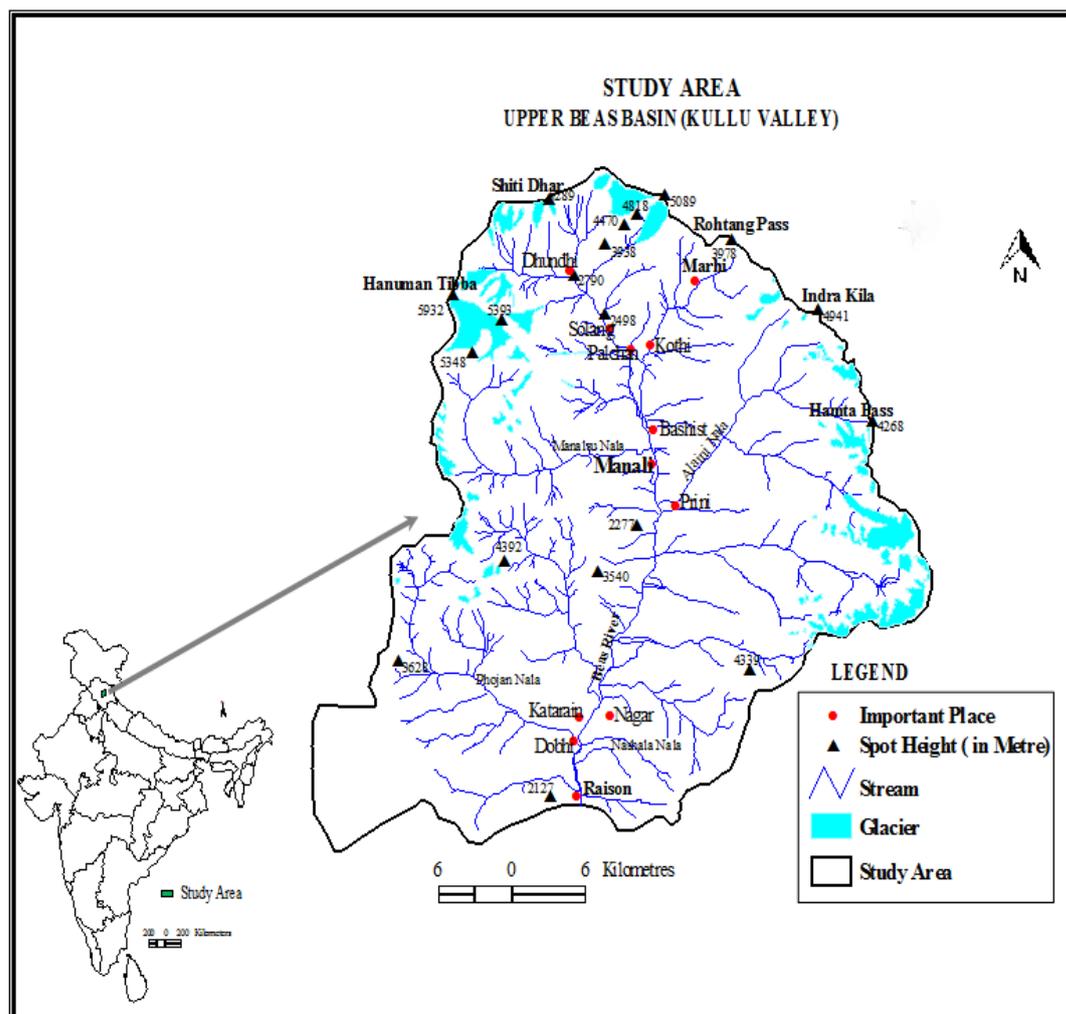


Fig1.1: Study Area, Upper Beas Basin, Kullu Valley, H.P)

Objective of study

The accelerated growth of tourism in the region is having substantial impacts on the regions environment, economy and society. The paper therefore tries to assess especially the socio-cultural impacts of tourism growth in the UBB. Socio- Cultural impact assessment is crucial for tourism sustainability because it helps identify and mitigate potential negative effects on local communities, cultures and traditions.

Method

To attain the above objectives, data has been obtained from available secondary sources like tourism related literature on UBB, tourism data, policies and plans from HPTDC etc. Data regarding perception of natives on probable impacts of tourism on the socio-cultural aspects of the region was generated with help of questionnaires canvassed through primary survey. For this purpose native from different back grounds, age-groups were interviewed.

1. Communities Perception towards Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism

The Social and cultural impacts of tourism are the ways in which tourism is contributing to change in value systems, individual behaviour, family relationships, collective lifestyles, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organizations. In simplified terms socio-cultural impacts are “people impacts”, they are about the effects on the people of host communities of their direct and indirect association with tourists (Wolf, 1997). The socio- cultural impacts are the outcome of particular kinds of social relationships that occur between tourists and the hosts because of their coming into contact. It has also been observed that direct contact is not necessary for impacts to occur and the mere sight of tourists and their behaviour may induce behavioural changes on the part of permanent residents. (Matheson and Wall, 1982).”

Though tourism is a recent phenomenon in the upper Beas basin, socio-cultural impacts have been considerable, yet it is to be understood that these socio-cultural changes are not solely due to tourism. The role of forces of modernization, education, exposure to media etc cannot be undermined. Based on survey, a qualitative change in lifestyle experienced by the local population due to development of tourism in the region was observed. A number of changes have been identified, prominent among them were:

1.1 Impact of Tourism on Traditional Clothing

Modification in the traditional lifestyle and in consumption patterns of the locals was evident. The natives strongly feel that tourism is responsible for westernizing their society and bringing changes in their lifestyle especially dress, food habits, way of thinking and behavior. The effect is visible more on the youth than the older generation. During the interview, majority of the locals (more than 95%), wore non- traditional clothes with the exception of a few older members who wore traditional clothes as they feel more comfortable in them.

Traditional clothing can now be seen mostly during festivals, marriages, religious functions and ceremonies. The change in dress is a result of the “demonstration effect” of tourists on the local folk, especially the youth. In addition, the locals also say that making of traditional clothes (woollen) takes a lot of effort and time, while the non- traditional offers wide variety of cloth to choose from in terms of fabric and price and is readily available (fabric, readymade cloth).

1.2 Impact of Tourism on Food Habits

As for food habits, majority of the locals interviewed had adopted non-traditional food. The locals are now supplementing their traditional food with non- traditional food like bread, jam, cheese, coffee, packed butter, noodles etc. With increasing prosperity, barley is not preferred as a staple diet now, the use of horse chestnut flour and flour made out of acorns of Kharsu oak tree is almost negligible. The consumption of a very popular traditional food *sattu* (roasted barley flour) *phimbara*, a kind of buckwheat porridge, etc are on the decline.

Upper Beas Basin has experienced a major shift in the type of crops cultivated in the region. Instead of traditional crops, locals are now cultivation commercial crops like fruits and vegetables. As a result, the scarcity in availability of certain traditional crops has made them rare and hence expensive. For example, the locally grown red rice (Jattu) is a rare commodity now and it costs more than Rs 300 per Kilogram at present.

However, tourism has helped in the revival and popularity of certain traditional dishes. One such dish is the *Siddu*, (stuffed cake, made of barley flour), *Aksu* (steamed rice balls), *Gichee* (kind of rice pudding), *Phempra* (kind of stew) and *Ghiu Baadi* (butter oil and roasted wheat flour). *Dham*, is another local buffet served during the local wedding is gaining popularity in restaurants. In many ways these modifications in lifestyle is basically due to the “*demonstration effect*” which is defined as ‘the introduction of foreign ideologies and ways of life into societies that may not have been exposed to tourist lifestyles.’ (Bryden, 1973). Unfortunately, the youth are most susceptible to this effect.

1.3 Impact of Tourism on Social Values

Social values refer to the principles, beliefs, and norms that shape interactions and behaviors within a society. These values guide individuals and communities in their relationship with each other and within the broader society, influencing decisions actions in various spheres of life. In the case of the Upper Beas Basin it was observed that the participation of natives in tourism is affecting not only their social values, but also individual behaviour and family value systems.

The basis of mountain social system is a tradition of co-operation. From times immemorial, the locals of Upper Beas basin have survived on the policy of inter-dependence and mutual help. In general, the natives had a peaceful and harmonious co-existence. With the development of tourism, a general disruption of community bond and degradation of social values has started already. Development of tourism has no doubt brought economic prosperity in the region but this distribution of benefits is extremely uneven. Some people have become very rich economically whereas those who have not benefited from tourism are still poor. As such, an entrepreneurial upper class has emerged in the otherwise homogenous social structure. Tourism has given birth to class formation in the society and the division is based on economic status. A craze for materialistic things has begun. As economic activities increases, the feeling of competition and professional jealousy is also creeping in. People who have not benefitted much because of tourism are getting envious and frustrated.

Earlier the community bond among the residents of the Upper Beas Basin was very strong. Labour intensive work; such as sowing and harvesting was carried on by traditional social strategies; such as, reciprocal labour relationships and reciprocal community relationships. (Ham,1997). As tourism and other tertiary activities are developing and greater integration with the market is taking place, the mutual help, co-operation and interdependence is decreasing. In addition to this, the presence of foreign tourist is encouraging a materialistic and individualistic culture leading to weakening of family, communal and religious bonds. With independent sources of income, the youth are moving away from the traditional family bonds and seeking an independent lifestyle.

1.4 Impact of Tourism on Cultural Monuments and Assets

The responses of the natives of the study area were on the positive side as far as preservation of cultural monuments, cultural assets and their fairs and festivals, music, dance and dress was concerned. They felt that tourism has helped their society in rediscovering and reviving their tradition and crafts, as these act as a tourist attraction.

During the course of interview, they cited few examples to support their statement, for example tourism has helped renovate the Naggar castle, which was otherwise in a dilapidated state, Thawa Temple (Naggar), Manu temple in old Manali village, Hadimba Devi temple and Vashisht Rishi temple in Vashisht village to name a few. People have now realized the importance of historical and religious places in attracting tourists and therefore have started highlighting such assets by fixing signboards and putting detailed information. Tourism has also helped revive procession of valley gods during the

Dusshera festival when the temple grants were abolished after India's independence (Singh, T.V, 1989).

The other benefits accruing to culture and heritage in the state are:

- i) Declaration of different fairs and festivals as national and state level fairs and resultant financial assistance available to them from the Government of India and the State Government,
- ii) Wide publicity and financial assistance available to the historical monuments in the state and the promotion of handicrafts due to increased tourist arrivals.

The earliest research available on this area is by Singh (1989). The survey conducted by him shows that people were happy with the projection of their monuments and culture due to tourism activities (Batta, 2000).

It also became evident during the survey that the preservation and maintenance of religious places is done with the help of contributions made by tourists. To preserve other cultural assets like the handicrafts (shawls, mufflers) geo-tagging has been introduced to maintain the authenticity of the local products. The government has also set up co-operative societies and training facilities in the field of handicrafts to preserve and promote it. Another effort to save culture of the region is the declaration of the festival of Dusshera as an international fair. Dusshera, which is a major cultural event and attracts a large number of tourists helps preserve the cultural assets. Apart from the display of traditional culture like dance, music and dress the artisans (crafts people) of the valley like weavers, potters, basket makers, iron smiths, etc sell their hand made products during this festival. Tourists and locals both take interest in this. Thus, such festivals help in projecting the cultural assets and add to the revival and preservation of traditional art and skills and prove a boon for tourism industry.

1.5 Status of Crime, Drugs and Moral Values

The field survey reveals that locals believe that crime, drug addiction and moral laxity occur due to tourism in the Upper Beas Basin. According to the locals, crime, drug addiction and moral laxity has increased due to tourism in the UBB. This problem according to them is more prominent in villages closer to Manali town, where foreigners/hippies reside due to availability of cheap boarding and lodging facilities and drugs. The interaction of youth with foreign tourist (hippies), easy availability of the drug Cannabis Sativa (Charas) and the increasing the aspirations of the local youth are the major reasons behind rising drug addiction/smuggling, and increasing crime rate in the valley.

A report in the Statesmen (2009) says, "Apart from the breath taking beautyKullu Manali region has also been dubbed as a "drug -haven. According to Sandhu (1990), "the increase of tourism has brought about increased crime in the region." This is typical of many tourism destinations in developing countries. The other aspect of cultural change observed is increase in moral laxity due to incidences of prostitution in the study area.

1.6 Architecture and Settlement Pattern and Function of villages

A change in architecture, settlement pattern and function of villages was witnessed in the study area during the field survey. According to the locals increasing incomes from tourism, forces of modernization, easy availability of home loans, and prospects of better earning through construction of modern houses in villages by simply turning it into a home stays or renting out rooms to tourists have brought about these changes.

Thus modern houses, hotels, guest houses, home stays have started coming up gradually in villages and turning them into tourist hubs. As such, the function of villages is also seen changing from one being residential to commercial due to tourism.

In addition to the above mentioned changes, the locals have raised concerns regarding the fear of change in settlement pattern in the study area. Earlier houses were built on marginal lands and villages were compact in nature. But now, the construction is spreading into the surrounding fertile agriculture land and orchards. However this expansion is unplanned in most villages, leading to complications like traffic jams, crowding and congestion along with problems of waste management and pollution. As such, one is witness to rapid change.

1.7 Commercialization of Culture

Other impacts that the locals fear and have raised their voices against is the issue of commercialization of culture and deterioration of art forms. The locals have specified that there are professional groups in their villages who perform the traditional folk dance of Kullu Valley in different hotels on demand and also charge a certain amount for their performance. They voiced that certain modifications have been introduced not only in the traditional dance but also in the music and songs to make it more appealing and suit the market. They fear that commercialization of culture may lead to loss of traditional dance forms, songs and music when it is purely done for commercial purpose.

The traditional handicrafts like shawls of the Upper Beas Basin are also under threat as they are being copied and produced on large scale by factories (power looms), and sold at much cheaper rates. Similarly, religious processions, which were earlier, taken out only during festivals and important occasions are being taken out during summer and winter carnivals to display culture and attract tourists. In a way, commercialization of religion is also taking place. The locals have also pointed out that in their culture, religious art has never been sold or produced for sale but mass tourist demand has degraded some religious objects to mere wares for sale. As such, commercialization induced competition, duplicacy and mass production threatens the authenticity of traditional art and craft along with commercialization of religion. Impact of tourism was also visible in non-material art forms (folk dance) and produced what is called a 'fake culture'.

On the positive side, some respondents claimed that that the tourist art market was a positive force, that a strong symbolic value was still attached to the products and that it was conducive to the survival of traditional culture.

1.8 Impact on Religious Practices and Values

Among other aspects of culture being affected by tourists, the locals believe that tourists sometimes tend to influence religious activities. Most of the tourist visits the region for its natural beauty and to learn about its religion and culture, and as such, tourists tend to visit the important religious sites. In the process, either intentionally or unintentionally they disturb the religious activities of the region. Moreover, tourists seldom try to find out the cultural and social aspects of the region before travelling to the region and tend to play with the religious sentiments of the people. This problem according to the locals was created more by foreign tourists, whose understanding of local culture was lesser and also because of the cultural difference. For a westerner, "religion, knowledge and emotions are sold and consumed just like material goods" (Eppler, 1983). Tourists going to the temples and monasteries often disturb the priests and monks performing their religious duties and prayers by clicking photos and making noise. They make them self-conscious and can disrupt their prayers.

The locals have however also pointed out that tourists over the years have brought about changes in the attitude of the priests and lamas. Locals have also complained that tourists are being given more preference in comparison to locals in temples and monasteries, as they tend to donate more. As such, they are now becoming more and more materialistic and less religious. This discrimination against the locals is creating resentment against the tourists, as they do not get to worship their deities.

1.9. Impact on Self Esteem of Locals

Among the other impacts, the natives gave lowest ranking to questions such as whether locals were feeling inferior or getting frustrated on seeing affluent tourists. The main cause of frustration among the locals was due to the low paid and ordinary jobs that they got in the tourism Industry. According to them the better and high paying jobs were being given to the more qualified and trained professionals from outside the region.

1.10. Impact on Women

When asked whether tourism was helping in empowering women. The response was yes from the locals. It was observed that the widening of employment and earning opportunities for both young people and women has decreased their dependence on other members and helps them dictate their own lives. With an independent source of income, women have begun to have an increased say in decision-making within the household. Thus, tourism is helping in the empowerment of the hill women to a certain extent. They are also contributing to the family income and helping in improving living standards. However, in some cases, this has created strains in intra-family relationships but it would be wrong to regard all such changes as undesirable.

As such, tourism provides an opportunity even to the least skilled and disadvantaged group of people and especially women by way of employment and therefore tourism has been acknowledged as a potential industry for poverty alleviation and women empowerment. Tourism as such is not only building up their confidence levels it is also helping them improve their business skills like bargaining, keeping accounts, salesmanship, marketing etc. along with increasing say in the family matters.

Conclusion

Though tourism has had an adverse impact on the social values and undesirably affected the youth on the one hand, it has benefitted the society to some extent on the other hand. Locals appreciated that contact with tourists has helped them in thought exchange and cultural sharing. The presence of foreign tourists has resulted in a widened dimension, broad thinking and spread of new ideas. One of the most important impacts has been the realisation of significance of education among the locals. As the interaction of locals with the educated tourists increases their desire to study is also increasing. The locals have started realizing that the prospect of getting a good job in tourism industry as well as other tertiary activity increases with education. The desire for improving language skills especially English has been expressed by the locals so they can interact better with the tourists especially foreigners. In the long term, this will certainly enhance the local's ability to deal with the expanding market economy.

Another major change in social aspect has been an awareness to raise the standard and quality of living after seeing rich affluent tourists. Under the influence of outsiders, the quality of food, clothing and other facilities used at home has improved especially for those who can afford it. Those with increased incomes want to get the modern gadgets, which can make living more convenient.

Very few local people would have got an opportunity to visit the regions outside the country. Most of them would have never been able to get an insight into the culture and traditions of people of developed nations. Therefore, the flow of tourists has widened the horizons of the local people. Even though their understanding of foreign culture is very superficial but still they have an idea.

Culturally too there have been positive impacts of tourism on the region. Locals have realized that tourists from all over are visiting their land for its culture, religion and landscape. This has inculcated an awareness of the value of local culture, social customs, community bonds and religion. The people now want to preserve these features as far as possible. It has to some extent resulted in the revival of old traditions and customs, which the younger generation was losing.

Finally, on the economic front, tourism has helped the locals improve their incomes by supplementing their incomes in addition to income from farming and horticulture. Tourism is now adopted as an additional source of income thus contributing to the livelihood security of the local population. Since diversification of economic activity is the basis of economic sustainability for rural areas, tourism is helping in this area of promoting economic sustainability in the region.

Thus, it can be seen that the increased tourism flow to the upper Beas Basin has brought mixed changes in the social and cultural aspects. This has led to changes in the occupation, social values, family structure

etc. Among the negative impacts were the weakening of community bonds, degeneration of social value systems, commercialization of culture, increase in crime and moral laxity. The positive impacts on the other hand were preservation of culture and traditions, spread of new ideas, increasing awareness of the significance of education and a desire to improve their living standards.

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