

Footprints On Alpine Trails: Socio-Cultural And Environmental Transformations Among Gujjars And Bakarwals Through Trekking Tourism In Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Trekking tourism has become a significant aspect of adventure tourism in Kashmir, attracting global travelers with its scenic trails and unique experiences. This study provides a sociological analysis of the impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, indigenous pastoralist groups that are integral to the region's cultural heritage. Using a descriptive and qualitative approach, the paper explores how trekking tourism contributes to economic opportunities such as employment and entrepreneurship for these communities. The findings of the research reveal that trekking tourism has positively impacted the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities by providing new job opportunities, improving financial stability, and shifting younger generations away from traditional pastoralism. However, concerns exist regarding the erosion of cultural practices and environmental degradation due to increased tourism. The influx of tourists has also led to changes in attire, language, and dietary habits. Some benefit, others face inequalities in tourism-related employment. The study emphasizes the need for better government policies to balance tourism growth with community welfare and cultural preservation.

KEYWORDS: Trekking, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Social structures, Cultural identity

INTRODUCTION

Trekking tourism, a key segment of adventure tourism in Kashmir, presents a sociological framework to analyze its impact on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, indigenous pastoralist groups deeply connected to the region's ecological and cultural fabric (Ahmed, 2021). These communities, which comprise 11.9% of the state's population according to the 2011 census, have sustained their livelihoods and identity through nomadic traditions intertwined with the mountainous landscapes of Kashmir (Bashir & Sharma, 2024). Their way of life revolves around livestock rearing, with sheep, goats, and cattle forming the foundation of their economy. Seasonal migrations between lower valleys in winter and alpine pastures in summer are a testament to their adaptive strategies and ecological harmony (Aijazi, 2018; Byers & Shrestha, 2022). From a sociological perspective, trekking tourism introduces both opportunities and challenges for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. On one hand, it creates avenues for economic engagement, such as employment and entrepreneurship; on the other, it disrupts their traditional lifestyle and cultural identity (Baloch, Shah, Kiran, & Mahar, 2023). The interplay between tourism and tradition has sparked significant changes in the communities' social structures. For instance, armed conflicts in Kashmir have already restricted access to traditional pasturelands in regions such as Anantnag, Ganderbal, and Baramulla, further complicating their economic and cultural sustenance (Dar & Haryana, 2014).

Education emerges as a critical yet challenging aspect of the transformation. Sociological studies indicate that literacy rates among Gujjars and Bakarwals remain alarmingly low, with 15 mountainous districts where Bakarwal populations are concentrated showing literacy rates below the indigenous average of 50.6% (Chowdhary, 2014). The tension between traditional nomadism and modern educational aspirations exemplifies the community's struggle to adapt preserving their cultural identity. The sociological impact of trekking tourism also extends to environmental stewardship. The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have long lived in harmony with natural ecosystems, showcasing sustainable practices that contrast sharply with modern consumerist tourism models (Bhat & Shyju, 2014). However, the growth of tourism has led to conflicts,

particularly in conservation areas like Dachigam National Park, home to the endangered Hangul (Kashmiri stag). Here, tourism and conservation efforts often come into direct competition with the communities' traditional grazing rights, creating friction between ecological preservation and cultural practices (Bashir & Sharma, 2024). The sociological dynamics of trekking tourism also reflect broader issues of assimilation and cultural commodification. Tourism offers economic benefits, it often imposes pressures to settle into modern economic frameworks, risking the erosion of traditional values and practices (Dar & Das, 2023). At the same time, tourism can catalyze the commodification of cultural identity, where traditions are showcased as attractions, often devoid of their intrinsic significance to the community. Addressing these complexities requires a balanced approach that incorporates sociological insights to ensure sustainable tourism practices. This involves fostering economic opportunities through trekking tourism respecting and preserving the cultural integrity of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. Such strategies should align with their role as environmental stewards and promote educational and social development without undermining their traditional lifestyle (Baloch, Shah, Kiran, & Mahar, 2023; Ahmed, 2021). By acknowledging the nuanced interplay between tourism, culture, and ecology, the sociological analysis highlights the potential for trekking tourism to contribute to the sustainable development of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities safeguarding their heritage amid the forces of globalization.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review is a comprehensive summary and evaluation of existing research on a specific topic. It synthesizes previous studies to provide a foundation of knowledge, identify areas of prior scholarship, and highlight gaps in the current understanding. The process is crucial for positioning new research within the broader academic context, ensuring that it builds upon existing work and addresses unexplored or underexplored areas. Research on trekking tourism's impact on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir has gained attention in recent years, particularly regarding how these activities influence social identity, cultural practices, and community dynamics. However, significant gaps remain in the literature, especially concerning the specific socio-cultural and political context of these communities. A notable gap is the lack of region-specific research, as most studies on trekking and tourism have focused on broader regions, overlooking the unique dynamics of the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes. A much of the existing research does not fully explore the evolving role of trekking in shaping these communities identity, particularly in the context of socio-political changes in Kashmir. The study aims to address these gaps by providing a qualitative analysis of trekking tourism among Gujjar and Bakarwal youth, focusing on its cultural significance, challenges, and motivations. The study seeks to contribute valuable insights into the sociological implications of tourism on these communities in Kashmir.

Wani, I. A. (2025) offers a compelling exploration of the challenges faced by Bakarwal women in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly during trekking and seasonal migration in the Sonamarg Mountains. Through personal experiences, the chapter highlights how these women suffer not only from gender-based discrimination but also from the pressures of trekking and seasonal pastures. The book chapter provides valuable insights into their resilience and the socio-economic impacts of neoliberal policies on their traditional lifestyle. Hillman, (2019) explores the challenges faced by female trekking guides in Nepal. The research addresses key issues such as the learning process, physical injuries, and gender discrimination that these women encounter in their employment. It highlights the resilience and determination of female trekking guides, shedding light on their efforts to navigate a male-dominated industry and improve their working conditions.

Bashir and Sharma (2024) explore the development of ecotourism in Jammu and Kashmir, focusing on its potential for sustainable tourism practices. They highlight the importance of preserving natural landscapes promoting trekking and ecotourism. The authors argue for the integration of local communities, such as the Gujjar and Bakarwals, in the ecotourism framework to ensure sustainable development. The research is particularly relevant to understanding the balance between tourism growth and environmental conservation. Baloch et al. (2023) examine the intersecting challenges and opportunities that tourism faces within the context of the Kashmir conflict. The study discusses how tourism, particularly trekking, could help in economic development but also presents challenges due to political instability. By addressing these complexities, the authors offer critical insights on how tourism could potentially support both economic recovery and social cohesion in Kashmir, balancing local heritage and political realities.

Byers and Shrestha (2022) discuss the challenges in conserving alpine ecosystems amidst the rise of adventure tourism, including trekking in the Himalayas. Their research highlights the pressures exerted on fragile ecosystems and local communities, stressing the importance of sustainable tourism practices. The work provides useful context for understanding the environmental challenges faced by the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in regions where trekking tourism is growing, offering recommendations for mitigating negative impacts on both people and nature. Ahmed, A. (2021) doctoral dissertation explores the socio-cultural shifts among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities of Poonch District in Jammu and Kashmir. Through an in-depth analysis of social change, the study provides valuable insights into the impact of modernization, migration, and socio-economic transformations on the traditional lifestyle of these communities. The Study offers a nuanced perspective on the interplay between transhumance and contemporary pressures, which is relevant to understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of trekking tourism in Kashmir. Bhat and Shyju (2014) analyze the prospects of ecotourism development in Ganderbal District, Jammu and Kashmir. They emphasize the potential for adventure tourism, including trekking, to contribute to both local economic development and conservation efforts. The authors focus on the importance of community involvement and environmental protection, offering a critical examination of how tourism can be managed sustainably in ecologically sensitive areas like Ganderbal, a region home to the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. Dar and Haryana (2014) examine the tourism potential in Jammu and Kashmir's border destinations, assessing how tourism could drive economic and social development in these areas. They discuss the challenges faced by communities like the Gujjar and Bakarwals in balancing traditional livelihoods with the demands of tourism. Their work offers insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of trekking tourism in Kashmir, emphasizing the need for sustainable tourism models that respect local cultures and heritage.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the economic opportunities created by trekking tourism for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir.
2. To analyze the impact of trekking tourism on the cultural traditions and heritage of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities.
3. To evaluate the changes in the social structure and lifestyle of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities due to trekking tourism.
4. To examine the perceptions of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities regarding the benefits and challenges of trekking tourism.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Trekking tourism in Kashmir, particularly in districts like Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, and Kulgam, has seen significant growth, drawing both domestic and international visitors to its pristine landscapes. The surge in adventure tourism has brought economic opportunities but has also raised socio-cultural challenges for indigenous communities, particularly the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes. Traditionally dependent on pastoralism and seasonal migration, these communities are increasingly integrating into the tourism economy, often as guides, porters, or hosts. The shift provides supplementary income; it also disrupts traditional lifestyles, cultural practices, and social cohesion. The socio-economic benefits of trekking tourism, such as employment and improved infrastructure, are not evenly distributed, often leading to inequality within the communities. The environmental degradation caused by unregulated trekking activities threatens the fragile ecosystem these tribes rely upon for their livelihoods. Cultural commodification and external influences risk diluting their unique traditions and heritage. The study aims to explore the multifaceted impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, focusing on socio-economic opportunities, cultural erosion, and environmental challenges. The research seeks to identify strategies for sustainable tourism development that preserve these communities' cultural identities fostering equitable economic growth.

METHODOLOGY

The research selected a sample size of 95 individuals, including trekkers from the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, residing in four key districts: Baramulla, Anantnag, Budgam, and Kulgam. The sample size is justified based on the demographic distribution of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in these regions, which are known to have a higher concentration of these indigenous pastoralist groups. According to the 2011 Census and other regional studies, Baramulla, Anantnag, Budgam, and Kulgam are among the primary districts in Kashmir where Gujjar and Bakarwal populations are significantly concentrated, with a strong presence in the mountainous regions where trekking tourism is most prevalent (Bashir & Sharma, 2024). The

choice of these districts ensures the inclusion of individuals who are actively involved in trekking tourism, providing a comprehensive view of the socio-economic and cultural impacts of this activity on their communities. The sample size of 95 is considered adequate as it allows for a detailed exploration of the experiences and perspectives of these communities, ensuring diversity within the sample. Both purposive and random sampling methods were employed to capture a broad range of participants, including those with varying levels of involvement in trekking tourism. The approach helps to mitigate bias and ensures that the findings accurately reflect the dynamics within the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, particularly in the districts where they are most impacted by trekking tourism. The sample size of 95 individuals is well-suited for the study, providing robust data reflecting the geographical and demographic realities of the Gujjar and Bakarwal populations in these districts. The research aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural and economic changes these communities are experiencing due to trekking tourism.

AREA OF THE STUDY

The study offers a sociological analysis of trekking tourism and its impact on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir. It investigates how the influx of trekking tourists has affected the socio-economic conditions, cultural practices, and traditional lifestyles of these semi-nomadic pastoralist communities. The research is centered on the Kashmir region, focusing on districts such as Baramulla, Anantnag, Budgam, and Kulgam, which are known for their rich cultural heritage and popular trekking routes. The Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes, traditionally dependent on livestock and seasonal migration, face unique challenges as tourism increasingly intersects with their ways of life. The study aims to explore how trekking tourism has influenced their economic activities, cultural identity, and social dynamics, examining the balance between preserving traditional practices and adapting to the changing tourism environment. Through this analysis, the research sheds light on the broader implications of trekking tourism on these communities and the region's socio-cultural fabric.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Reflecting on the changing dynamics of indigenous communities in the face of growing tourism, the study offers a sociological analysis of the impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir. These communities, traditionally grounded in a nomadic pastoral lifestyle, are encountering both challenges and opportunities as trekking tourism increases in the region. Trekking tourism presents economic prospects through cultural exchange and authentic experiences, it also brings concerns such as environmental degradation and the disruption of traditional practices. The study is crucial as it aims to explore the complex relationship between tourism and the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes, focusing on how trekking tourism influences their social structures, livelihoods, and cultural identity. By examining these impacts, the research seeks to offer strategies for sustainable tourism that can promote the socio-economic development of these communities preserving their cultural heritage. The findings aim to provide valuable insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and the communities themselves, advocating for a balanced development approach that aligns tourism growth with cultural conservation and environmental sustainability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for analyzing trekking tourism's sociological impact on Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir integrates complex socio-economic perspectives examining the multidimensional interactions between indigenous pastoral societies and tourism development. Rooted in understanding the unique social structures of these semi-nomadic tribes, the framework explores economic transformation, cultural preservation, and social structural changes through interdisciplinary lenses of structural functionalism, cultural anthropology, and economic sociology. By critically analyzing tourism's potential as an alternative economic opportunity, the research investigates how these marginalized Himalayan communities negotiate traditional lifestyles with emerging tourism dynamics, focusing on mechanisms of cultural resilience, economic adaptation, and social mobility. The theoretical approach considers contextual challenges including historical political instability, limited developmental opportunities, and the nuanced processes of cultural commodification, ultimately seeking to comprehend how trekking tourism influences indigenous community identities, economic strategies, and social transformations within the complex geographical and cultural landscape of Kashmir.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

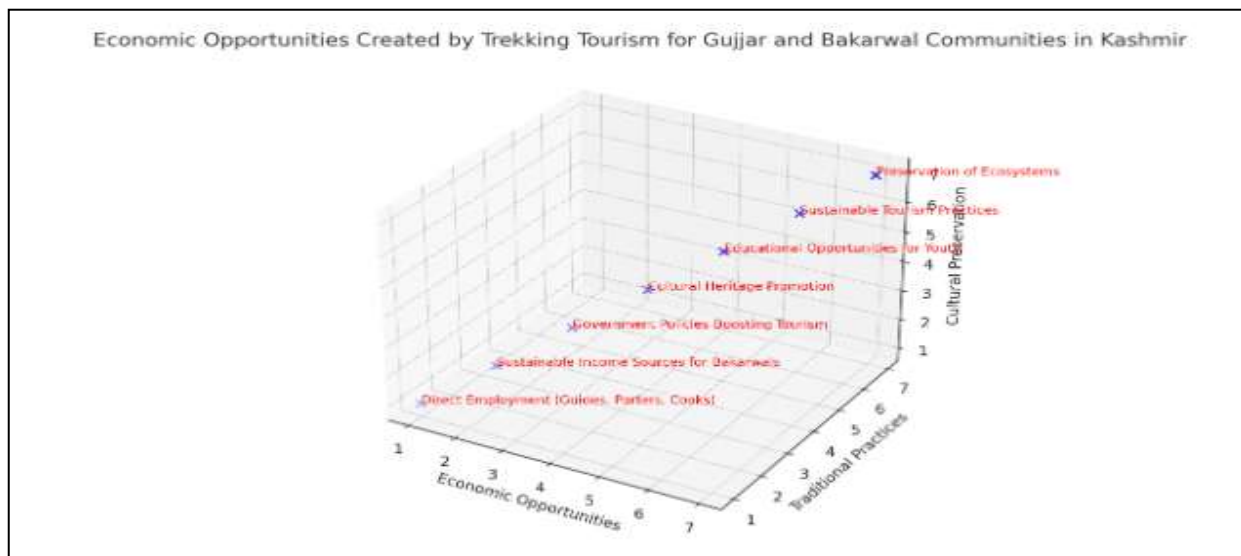
Economic opportunities created by trekking tourism for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir

Kashmir's breathtaking landscapes have transformed trekking into a powerful economic force, particularly benefiting the indigenous Gujjar and Bakarwal communities (Nag, 1999). These semi-nomadic tribes, historically known for their seasonal migrations and pastoral lifestyle, are now experiencing significant economic opportunities through trekking tourism (Jackson, 2005). As trekking has emerged as a major attraction in Jammu and Kashmir, it offers direct and indirect economic benefits for these communities. The tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir contributes approximately Rs. 8,000 crore annually, accounting for nearly 7% of the region's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) (Geneletti & Dawa, 2009). Between 2021 and 2023, the tourism industry grew at an impressive annual average rate of 15.13%, creating substantial opportunities for local communities (Huddart & Stott, 2020). Trekking, in particular, has become a critical economic driver in areas where the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities reside.

The most prominent trekking routes is the Kashmir Great Lakes Trek, which crosses alpine meadows, crystal-clear lakes, and rugged mountain passes (Javid & Muthukumar, 2024). This trail provides multiple economic benefits to the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes, including direct employment as trek guides, porters, cooks, and home-stay hosts (Malik & Bhat, 2015). The communities leverage their traditional knowledge of the land to guide tourists, share their rich cultural heritage, and offer hospitality, all of which lead to new economic opportunities preserving their traditional lifestyles (Jamal & Namkha, 2022). For the Bakarwals, a tribe traditionally known for nomadic herding, trekking has introduced new sustainable income sources (Kohli, 2000). The Bakarwals traditional migration routes now intersect with popular trekking paths, offering them the opportunity to support tourists continuing their pastoral lifestyle (Kucharski, 2015). The shift is a key factor in transforming their way of life into a sustainable economic model, where tourism coexists with their traditional practices (Rao, 2002). Government policies, such as the Comprehensive Tourism Policy (2020) and the Industrial Policy 2021, have played a significant role in boosting the tourism sector, particularly trekking (Rajput & Jadhav, 2023). These policies have provided the tourism industry with industrial status, which has led to the creation of over 50,000 jobs annually and is expected to attract approximately Rs. 2,000 crore in investments (Różycki & Dryglas, 2014). Trekking routes in regions like Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, and Kulgam, which pass through traditional Gujjar and Bakarwal territories, are benefiting from this growth, as they attract tourists eager to experience the region's natural beauty and cultural richness (Malik, Pazir, & Mushtaq, 2019).

Figure 1.1 Opportunities created by trekking tourism for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir

Source: Primary Data



Incorporating trekking tourism into the local economy brings more than just direct financial gains. Local communities are engaged in preserving their cultural heritage promoting tourism, ensuring that they maintain control over their traditions and way of life (Seth, 2019). Trekking tourism offers educational opportunities for young members of these communities, such as learning English, hospitality skills, and environmental awareness (Pandey, 2022). The Jammu and Kashmir government's focus on sustainable tourism practices ensures that the growing trekking tourism industry does not compromise

the region's fragile ecosystems (ManjuDwivedi, 2018). By encouraging responsible tourism, including waste management and preservation of cultural sites, the government ensures that the benefits of tourism are both long-lasting and equitable for indigenous communities (Parvaiz, 2020). The integration of local people into the trekking tourism ecosystem allows for a model of economic development that respects traditional lifestyles and promotes sustainable growth. Trekking has become a key economic driver in Kashmir, particularly for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in District Ganderbal, Anantnag, Kulgam, and Baramulla (Chowdhary, 2018). By capitalizing on the region's stunning landscapes and traditional knowledge, these communities are not only gaining financial benefits but also contributing to the preservation of their cultural heritage (Ahmed, 2021). The rise of trekking tourism offers a sustainable model of economic development, blending modern opportunities with traditional ways of life, ensuring both economic growth and cultural preservation for generations to come.

Table1.1 Frequency distribution on Socio-Economic and Cultural Impacts of Trekking Tourism on Gujjar and Bakarwal Communities in Kashmir

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	No Idea (%)	Total (%)
Trekking tourism has provided new employment opportunities for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities	55.8% (53)	32.6% (31)	11.6% (11)	100% (95)
Income from trekking tourism has improved the financial condition of families in the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities	50.5% (48)	40.0% (38)	9.5% (09)	100% (95)
Trekking tourism has led to a decline in traditional cultural practices among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities	53.7% (51)	37.9% (36)	8.4% (08)	100% (95)
Trekking tourism helps in promoting the cultural heritage of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities to outsiders	65.3% (62)	28.4% (27)	6.3% (06)	100% (95)
Trekking tourism has brought changes in the traditional social roles within Gujjar and Bakarwal families	62.1% (59)	26.3% (25)	11.6% (11)	100% (95)
Young members of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities prefer jobs related to trekking tourism over traditional pastoral activities	72.6% (69)	22.1% (21)	5.3% (05)	100% (95)
Trekking tourism has increased awareness among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities about environmental conservation	66.3% (63)	24.2% (23)	9.5% (09)	100% (95)
The overall benefits of trekking tourism outweigh the challenges faced by the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities	56.8% (54)	41.1% (39)	2.1% (02)	100% (95)
Trekking tourism has negatively impacted traditional occupations such as cattle rearing and pastoralism	67.4% (64)	23.2% (22)	9.5% (09)	100% (95)
The influx of tourists has influenced the dress, language, and food habits of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities	51.6% (49)	45.3% (43)	3.2% (03)	100% (95)
Trekking tourism has strengthened the sense of community and cooperation among the Gujjar and Bakarwal people	40.0% (38)	51.6% (49)	8.4% (08)	100% (95)
The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have become increasingly dependent on trekking tourism for their economic survival	49.5% (47)	46.3% (44)	4.2% (04)	100% (95)
Are there any measures by the government to balance the growth of trekking tourism and the welfare of Gujjar and Bakarwal communities?	40.0% (38)	33.7% (32)	26.3% (25)	100% (95)
Do you think the growth of trekking has changed the lives of Gujjars and Bakarwals in a positive way?	49.5% (47)	41.1% (39)	9.5% (09)	100% (95)

Table 1.1 indicates the responses gathered from 95 participants regarding the socio-economic and cultural impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities across the districts of Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, and Kulgam. A significant majority (55.8%, 53 respondents) agreed that trekking tourism has created new employment opportunities for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, highlighting its role as a vital economic driver. However, 32.6% (31 respondents) disagreed, suggesting that these opportunities may be limited to certain areas or individuals with specific skills, leaving others excluded. Half of the respondents (50.5%, 48 respondents) acknowledged an improvement in financial conditions due to

tourism income, though 40.0% (38 respondents) indicated no such benefits. The disparity could be attributed to uneven distribution of tourism revenues or a lack of direct involvement of some community members in tourism-related activities. 53.7% (51 respondents) believed that trekking tourism has led to a decline in traditional cultural practices, 37.9% (36 respondents) disagreed. The decline may stem from the adoption of modern practices and the influence of tourists, those who disagreed might perceive cultural adaptation as part of their evolution rather than a loss.

An encouraging 65.3% (62 respondents) felt that trekking tourism helps promote the cultural heritage of these communities, indicating that tourism can create awareness and appreciation for local traditions among outsiders. However, 28.4% (27 respondents) disagreed, feeling that cultural promotion may be limited or overshadowed by other aspects of tourism. Over 62.1% (59 respondents) agreed that trekking tourism has altered traditional social roles, which could be due to the increasing involvement of younger and more educated members in tourism activities, shifting traditional family structures. A notable 72.6% (69 respondents) observed that younger members prefer tourism-related jobs over traditional pastoral activities. The preference may result from better economic prospects and reduced physical labor compared to pastoralism.

A strong majority (66.3%, 63 respondents) acknowledged increased environmental awareness due to tourism, indicating that interactions with environmentally conscious tourists or exposure to conservation programs might influence their attitudes. While 56.8% (54 respondents) agreed that the benefits of tourism outweigh the challenges, 41.1% (39 respondents) disagreed, pointing to unresolved issues such as cultural disruption, environmental degradation, and unequal benefits.

Most respondents (67.4%, 64 respondents) believed that tourism has negatively impacted traditional occupations like cattle rearing. This could be because trekking tourism demands time and resources that were previously allocated to pastoral activities, leading to a decline in these practices. About 51.6% (49 respondents) felt that tourism has influenced the dress, language, and food habits of these communities. The influx of tourists brings exposure to new cultural norms, which might gradually replace traditional ones. Only 40.0% (38 respondents) agreed that tourism has strengthened community cooperation, while 51.6% (49 respondents) disagreed. This could be due to competition for tourism-related jobs or unequal distribution of tourism benefits, causing divisions within the community.

Around 49.5% (47 respondents) felt that the communities are becoming increasingly dependent on trekking tourism for survival. The reliance may arise because tourism provides relatively steady income compared to traditional livelihoods, but it also introduces vulnerabilities tied to tourism fluctuations. Only 40.0% (38 respondents) believed that the government has implemented measures to balance tourism growth and community welfare, while 26.3% (25 respondents) were uncertain. This highlights a perceived lack of targeted policies or visible interventions to address the challenges faced by these communities. Nearly half (49.5%, 47 respondents) agreed that trekking tourism has positively changed the lives of these communities, but 41.1% (39 respondents) expressed skepticism. This reflects a mixed impact; where some individuals benefit greatly others continue to face challenges related to displacement, environmental degradation, or cultural shifts. These responses highlight the complex relationship between trekking tourism and the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. Economic and cultural opportunities coexist with significant challenges. Addressing these issues requires inclusive planning, equitable benefit-sharing, and active government intervention to ensure sustainable development for all stakeholders.

Gender Dynamics in Trekking Tourism

Trekking tourism in Kashmir's Baramulla, Anantnag, Budgam, and Kulgam districts has generated complex gender-specific impacts for Gujjar and Bakarwal women, presenting a nuanced landscape of socio-economic transformation. Traditional pastoral communities have historically experienced marginalization, trekking tourism offers emerging economic opportunities for women, enabling limited (Caparros, 2018) but significant participation in guide services, handicraft marketing, and home stay management. However, these opportunities are constrained by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, low literacy rates, and persistent cultural barriers that restrict women's mobility and economic independence. Women continue to face challenges in educational access, with minimal (Dutta, 2002) infrastructure supporting their skill development and professional advancement in tourism sectors. The gendered dynamics of trekking tourism simultaneously challenge and reinforce existing social hierarchies, creating spaces for incremental empowerment maintaining traditional community boundaries. Despite limited economic engagement, Gujjar and Bakarwal women strategically negotiate tourism interactions, leveraging their traditional (Wani, 2025) ecological knowledge and cultural expertise as potential economic assets. The intersection of tourism, gender, and indigenous identity reveals a complex process of gradual social transformation, where

women's roles are being subtly redefined through economic interactions, though substantial structural changes remain constrained by historical socio-cultural limitations.

Policy framework for trekking tourism

The policy framework for trekking tourism in Kashmir integrating Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, developed between 2020-2021, encompasses a comprehensive approach targeting sustainable development, community engagement, and ecological preservation. The Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Policy of 2020 emphasizes promoting adventure tourism prioritizing local community involvement through (Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department, 2020) initiatives like tribal tourism circuits, home stay incentivization launched in 2020, and capacity-building programs targeting indigenous pastoral communities. Key policy elements include developing community-based ecotourism models, ensuring equitable economic participation for marginalized tribes, and implementing sustainable practices that minimize environmental degradation. The 2021 Industrial Policy strategically aims to diversify tourism offerings beyond traditional recreational models, incorporating adventure, cultural, and ecological tourism dimensions protecting the fragile Himalayan ecosystem. Specific provisions focus on infrastructure development, skill enhancement for (Wani 2022) local communities, and creating alternative economic opportunities that align with the traditional livelihood patterns of Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes, thereby balancing economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental conservation.

Impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir

Trekking tourism in Kashmir has emerged as an influential force with the potential to significantly impact the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. These semi-nomadic tribes, with their deep cultural ties to the region's rugged landscapes, face both opportunities and challenges due to the growing influx of tourists. On one hand, trekking tourism offers new economic avenues such as guiding, hospitality, and the sale of local products, improving living standards and providing an income boost. On the other hand, it poses threats to their traditional way of life, cultural practices, and the delicate environmental balance that these communities have maintained for generations. Therefore, it is essential to manage trekking tourism in a way that maximizes its positive effects mitigating the potential negative impacts on these communities (Pandey, 2022).

POSITIVE IMPACTS

Economic Upliftment

Trekking tourism presents a significant economic opportunity for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, providing income through roles such as local guides, porters, cooks, and home stay hosts. These employment opportunities can help improve living standards by increasing access to basic necessities like food, healthcare, and education, leading to better economic outcomes for these rural communities (Parvaiz, 2020).

Community Development

With the increase in tourism revenue, the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities can invest in infrastructure improvements. The funds generated through tourism can be directed toward building essential community facilities such as schools, healthcare centers, and providing access to clean drinking water, which are critical in remote areas. These infrastructural advancements can have long-lasting benefits for the communities (Rajput & Jadhav, 2023).

Cultural Preservation

The tourism industry has also encouraged a renewed interest in the unique culture and traditions of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. As tourists visit to experience their customs and way of life, this can result in greater awareness and appreciation of their heritage. The growing cultural visibility has the potential to foster pride and a desire to preserve these traditions for future generations (Rao, 2002).

Empowerment

By engaging directly with tourists, members of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities can gain a sense of empowerment. They are able to control the narrative of their culture and heritage, managing how their traditions are presented to outsiders. The direct engagement fosters a sense of agency, helping these communities take charge of their own development and ensuring their voices are heard (Rożycki & Dryglas, 2014).

Environmental Awareness

Through responsible tourism initiatives, trekking tourism can serve as a platform for environmental education. Tourists are often educated about the fragile ecosystems of Kashmir, which can lead to more sustainable practices and greater respect for

the environment. This heightened awareness can benefit both the communities and the broader ecosystem by promoting conservation efforts (Seth, 2019).

NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Disruption of Traditional Lifestyle

Trekking tourism brings economic benefits; it also risks disrupting the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. The increase in tourist numbers can strain grazing lands, forcing these communities to adapt by either settling in one location or changing their traditional migration patterns to accommodate tourism. These shifts can erode their way of life and cause cultural dislocation (Shah, 2013).

Cultural Commodification

There is a concern that the commercialization of the cultural practices of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities could dilute the authenticity of their traditions. Over-exploitation of cultural elements for tourist consumption may lead to a loss of cultural significance, turning meaningful practices into mere spectacles for entertainment. The commodification can weaken the intrinsic value of their heritage (Sharma, 2020).

Environmental Degradation

Unregulated tourism can have detrimental effects on the environment, especially in remote areas where the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities traditionally reside. Issues like littering, pollution, and overgrazing can damage the fragile ecosystems upon which these communities depend. Such environmental degradation can undermine the natural resources that have sustained their livelihoods for centuries (Singh, 2023).

Social Tensions

The growing number of tourists can also create social tensions between the local communities and visitors. Cultural misunderstandings, conflicting expectations, and differences in values can lead to friction. The intrusion of tourists into these communities' private spaces can create feelings of resentment, especially if the benefits of tourism are not equitably shared or if local customs are disrespected (Spate, 2019).

MITIGATING NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Community-Based Tourism

To ensure that the benefits of tourism are fairly distributed, community-based tourism models should be promoted. Empowering the local communities to manage their tourism ventures allows them to maintain control over their cultural practices and ensures that they receive the economic benefits directly. It also fosters cultural sensitivity among tourists, promoting mutual respect (Suri, 2014).

Sustainable Tourism Practices

Sustainable tourism practices are essential to preserving the environment and local customs. Responsible tourism guidelines should be established, focusing on minimizing the environmental footprint of tourism activities. This includes reducing waste, preventing overgrazing, and protecting sacred and sensitive areas. By aligning tourism with sustainable practices, the negative environmental impact can be reduced (Ul Islam, 2013).

Capacity Building

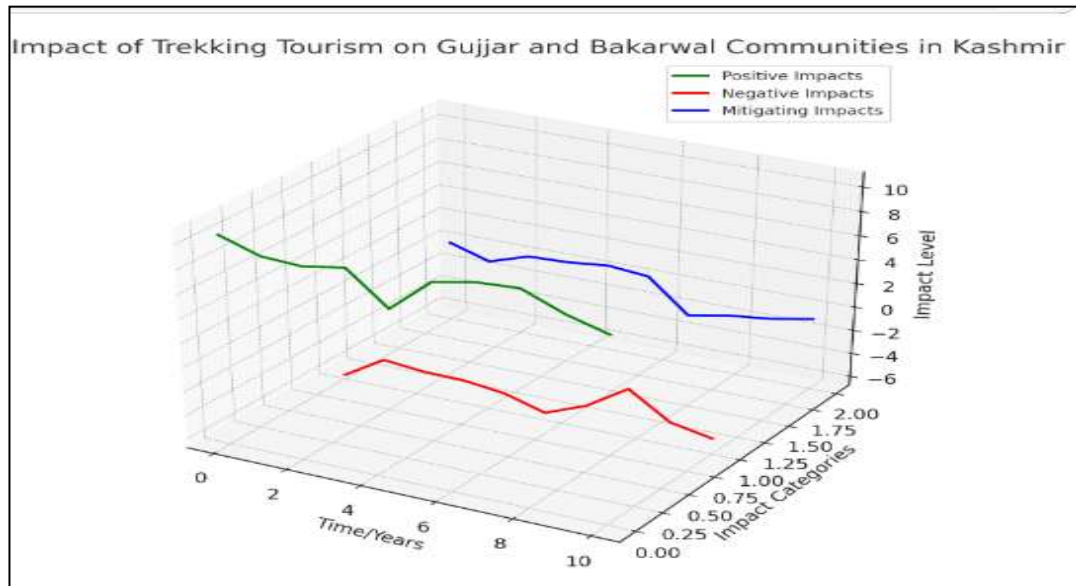
Training community members in tourism-related skills such as guiding, hospitality and basic language skills can enhance their participation in the industry. This not only improves the economic potential of these communities but also ensures they are active participants in shaping the tourism landscape. Providing local youth with these skills helps integrate them into the broader socio-economic framework preserving their cultural identity (Verma, Gandhi, & Dash, 2019).

Strict Regulations

Implementing clear regulations regarding tourist behavior is crucial to protect both the environment and the local community. These regulations should address issues such as waste management, respectful behavior, and limitations on access to sensitive cultural and natural sites. By ensuring that tourists adhere to guidelines, the communities can continue to thrive without facing undue pressure from tourism activities (Wani, 2024). Trekking tourism in Kashmir offers significant economic opportunities for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, but it also presents a range of challenges that need to be carefully managed. The key to success lies in striking a balance between economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. By promoting community-based tourism, sustainable practices, and capacity building, the benefits of tourism can be maximized minimizing its potential negative effects. Through responsible tourism management, the Gujjar and

Bakarwal communities can navigate the evolving dynamics of their traditional way of life in a way that both respects their heritage and provides opportunities for future generations (Wani & Ravi Kumar, 2019).

Figure 1.2 Impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir



Source : Primary data

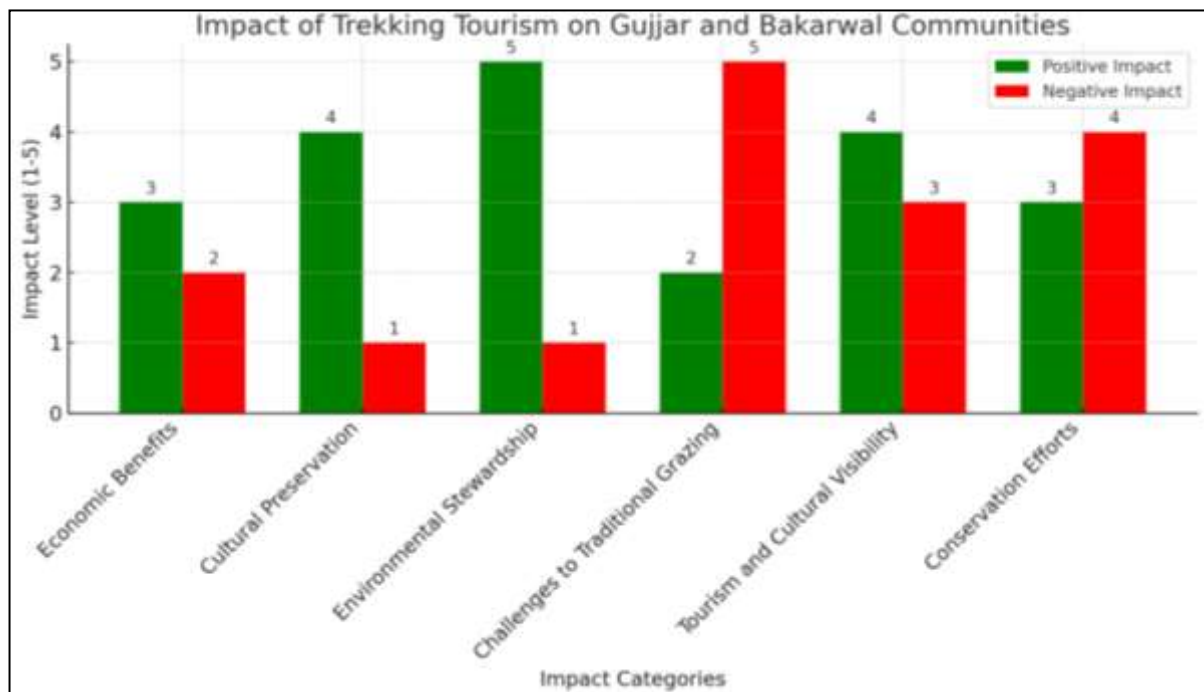
Trekking Tourism of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities

A profound journey across the stunning landscapes of Kashmir, the Kashmir Great Lakes Trek reveals the complicated link between tourism and the indigenous Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. This trek is only available to those who are interested in it. From generation to generation, these semi-nomadic tribes, which make up twelve percent of the region's total population, have been an essential component of the natural and cultural fabric of Kashmir's rugged terrain (Jackson, 2005). These pastoral villages offer a one-of-a-kind opportunity to get insight into their traditional way of life through the hiking routes that traverse districts like as Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, and Kulgam (Jamal & Namkha, 2022). Shepherds from Gujjar and Bakarwal communities graze their livestock on the high-altitude meadows throughout the summer months, which stretches from July to September (Javid & Muthukumar, 2024). The practice creates a living tapestry of cultural preservation and environmental stewardship (Kohli, 2000). The ramifications of trekking tourism for these communities are both significant and difficult to manage. On the one hand, it provides chances for economic connection and trade between different cultures. In order to preserve and exhibit the distinctive way of life of the local shepherds, trekkers frequently interact with them, enjoying traditional Kashmiri tea and feeling the warmth of their hospitality (Kucharski, 2015). A wonderful educational resource for tourists is the extensive ecological knowledge and sustainable practices that are practiced by the communities (Malik, 2015).

The growing number of tourists has, however, also resulted in the emergence of certain difficulties. In particular, the northwestern districts have seen their customary grazing routes limited as a result of the deadly violence that has been taking place in the region (Malik & Bhat, 2015). It is now even more difficult for them to maintain their traditional way of life as a result of the proliferation of tourism and conservation activities (Malik, Pazir, & Mushtaq, 2019). They are often needed to navigate new grazing grounds and adapt to changing environmental and economic landscapes (Manju Dwivedi, 2018). Communities such as the Gujjar and Bakarwal are well-known for their profound understanding of the environment, which has been passed down from generation to generation (Nag, 1999). A healthy relationship with nature is maintained by them, which is in stark contrast to the current consumerist ways that are prevalent in the world today (Pandey, 2022). They do not believe in private property ownership (Parvaiz, 2020). Their way of life conveys a comprehensive grasp of ecological balance, despite the fact that it is frequently considered "backward" by the standards of the modern era (Rajput & Jadhav, 2023).

Figure 1.1 Trekking Tourism on Gujjar and Bakarwal Communities

Source: Primary Source

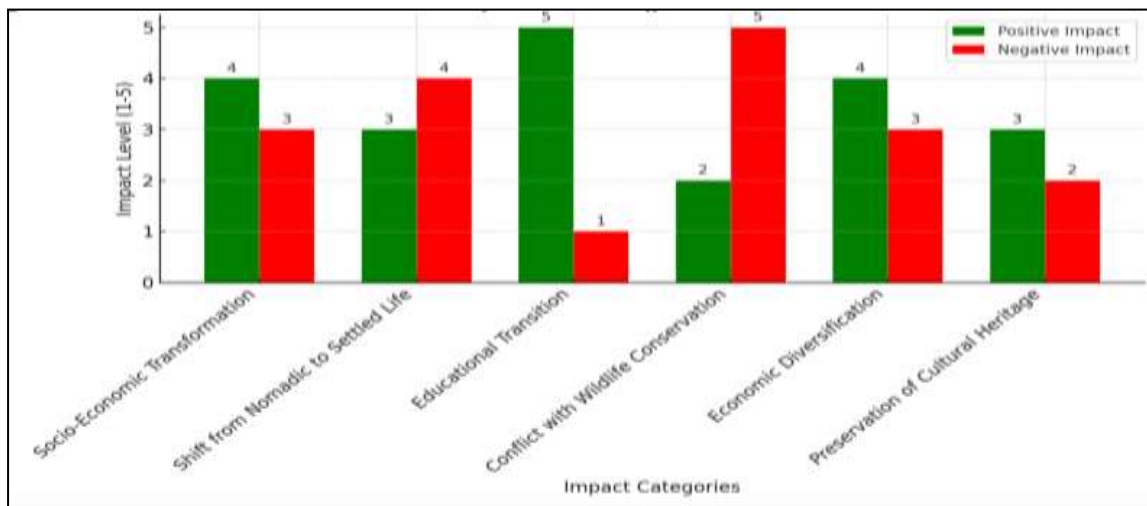


Through the Kashmir Great Lakes Trek, the possibility for responsible tourism that respects the cultural legacy of the local community is demonstrated. The requirements for the journey, which include limiting camping in order to conserve biological fragility and getting permissions where necessary, are evidence of a rising understanding of the importance of preserving both natural and cultural landscapes. When it comes to these villages, the influence of trekking tourism is complex. This is a threat to their traditional way of life, despite the fact that it opens up income prospects and increases cultural visibility. To ensure that the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities' centuries-old cultural practices are not marginalized by tourism development, policymakers and tourism developers need to give priority to the interests and rights of the Gujjar and Bakarwal, respectively. Despite the fact that Kashmir is still in the process of developing as a tourist destination, maintaining a delicate equilibrium between the preservation of cultural traditions, the conservation of the environment, and the development of the economy continues to be an essential factor in ecotourism.

Changes in the social structure and lifestyle of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities due to trekking tourism

The enchanting landscapes of Jammu and Kashmir host the wonderful Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes, making for a magnificent tapestry of nomadic heritage and resilience with cultural transformation. As pastoral tribes, which form 12% of the state population, as stated in the 2011 Census (Sharma, 2020), they are long-standing constituents of this social fabric, which represents their way of life that is interlinked with mountains and its livestock. The Gujjars and Bakkarwals have traditionally been transhumance pastoralists, migrating between the summer pastures of Kashmir and Ladakh and the Jammu plains during winters (Singh, 2023). Cattle rearing were central to their traditional lifestyle: Gujjars focused primarily on cattle, whereas Bakarwals focused on sheep and goats (Spate, 2019). The nomadic lifestyle has been deeply integrated into their cultural identity based on Islamic traditions of "Sunnah" and "Khanabadoshi," or nomadism (Suri, 2014).

Figure 1.2 Changes in the social structure and lifestyle of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities due to trekking tourism



Source: Primary data

Over the past few decades, trekking tourism has significantly influenced their social system and life, especially in districts like Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, and Kulgam (Ul Islam, 2013). Tourism, therefore, brings both challenges and opportunities to these groups. They are in search of real experiences related to the Gujjar and Bakarwal way of life; they are gradually economically diversified away from pure pastoralism (Verma, Gandhi, & Dash, 2019). The communities are witnessing deep socio-economic transformations. Education has emerged as an important change catalyst with increasing awareness about formal schooling that challenges their traditional migratory patterns (Wani, 2024). The census data also shows that literacy rates of Gujjars and Bakkarwals remain low, and dropout rates are increasing with rising education levels (Wani, 2022). Such educational transition is making many families opt for a more settled lifestyle (Wani & Ravi Kumar, 2019). Armed conflicts in the region have further accelerated these changes, restricting access to traditional grazing lands and forcing adaptations (Wanie, 2020). Many Bakarwal families have been compelled to seek alternative pastures, sometimes leading to conflicts with wildlife conservation efforts, such as in the Dachigam National Park (Weare, 2007).

The economic landscape is also changing, their primary source of income is still livestock, most Gujjars and Bakkarwals are slowly getting into agricultural and non-agricultural sectors (Malik, 2015). Trekking tourism provides new economic opportunities to them, and they can take advantage of their in-depth environmental knowledge and traditional hospitality (Malik & Bhat, 2015). These communities are not just passive recipients of change but active negotiators of their future (Malik, Pazir, & Mushtaq, 2019). The resilience is seen in the balance between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to modern challenges (ManjuDwivedi, 2018). The government and local authorities have a significant role to play in supporting the transition, ensuring their rights, and facilitating their integration into the broader socio-economic framework (Nag, 1999). As tourism continues to gain momentum in Kashmir, there is that interesting intersection in the traditional and transformation paths of Gujjar and Bakarwal communities - a very complex dynamic related to how cultural preservation interfaces with the adaptation process toward a transforming world (Pandey, 2022).

Perceptions of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities regarding the benefits and challenges of trekking tourism

Gujjar and Bakarwal are deep in the heart of Kashmir's majestic landscapes. They stand as a deep cultural tapestry deeply interwoven with the mountainous region (Sharma, 2020). They are nomadic pastoralists constituting about 12% of the population of Jammu and Kashmir, traveling the challenging Himalayan landscapes with their livestock (Singh, 2023). Their way of life has embodied a unique way of balancing human existence with nature (Spate, 2019). The Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes have a remarkable knowledge of the environment, with generations passing down complex knowledge about the terrain, wildlife, and environmental dynamics (Suri, 2014). Their traditional transhumance lifestyle involves seasonal migration between lower valleys in winter and higher pastures during summer, driven by the need to sustain their herds (Ul Islam, 2013). Concerning trekking tourism in the districts of Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, and Kulgam, these communities feel a mix of both opportunity and challenge (Verma, Gandhi, & Dash, 2019). Tourism can create an alternate source of income for travelers through cultural exchange being allowed to experience their traditional way of life (Wani, 2024). For example, the Nafran Valley Trek is one that can provide meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities (Wani, 2022).

However, the communities also face strong barriers. The protracted regional conflict has limited their historical pastures, especially in the northwestern districts of Baramulla, where they now have to seek alternative pastures (Wani & Ravi Kumar, 2019). This results in tensions with forest departments and the government authorities, which perceive their traditional practices as environment disruptive (Wanie, 2020). The Gujjar and Bakarwal are multilingual communities and basically speak Gojri; they have a deep spiritual bonding with their environment (Weare, 2007). The people's lifestyle challenges the paradigm of modern development, their way of living being largely communal and environmental (Malik, 2015). In fact, they do not believe in private land holdings as activities are carried out in step with natural rhythms (Malik & Bhat, 2015). Study, for instance, by a scholar like Dr. Javaid Rahi, reveal linguistic diversity and cultural endurance amongst them (Malik, Pazir, & Mushtaq, 2019). A study within Ganderbal district, engaging 81 households, established complex social dynamics and varying languages spoken within these settlements (Manju Dwivedi, 2018). Their economic model is mainly based on livestock rearing, where cows, goats, and sheep are their main source of income (Nag, 1999). Tourism offers them the opportunity to preserve their cultural identity achieving economic sustainability (Pandey, 2022). By providing authentic cultural experiences, trekking tourism can help document and celebrate their unique way of life, which may help to mitigate economic marginalization and promote cultural understanding (Parvaiz, 2020). The future of Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in the tourism landscape of Kashmir depends on collaborative approaches respecting their traditional knowledge, their environmental rights, and sustainable economic opportunities that can be aligned with their cultural values (Singh, 2023).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Trekking tourism has transformed Gujjar and Bakarwal economic landscapes, enabling diversification from traditional pastoral activities to tourism-related services like guiding, home stays, and handicraft marketing.
2. Indigenous communities strategically navigate tourism interactions by selectively representing cultural practices, commodifying traditional knowledge, and developing hybrid identities that balance preservation and economic adaptation.
3. Tourism engagement has disrupted traditional social hierarchies, empowering younger generations, increasing female economic participation, and creating new leadership models based on tourism expertise.
4. The Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes demonstrate a profound ecological understanding through their intricate relationship with nature, characterized by sustainable forest interactions and traditional knowledge preservation. Their deep connection involves actively contributing to forest conservation, guiding ecological navigation, and maintaining a delicate balance with their natural environment through generations of inherited environmental wisdom.
5. The findings indicate that numerous respondents experienced enhanced financial conditions attributable to money derived from trekking tourism, signifying a beneficial economic effect on families and contributing to their overall well-being.
6. The data indicate that a significant proportion of participants perceive trekking tourism as contributing to a deterioration of traditional cultural practices, implying that contemporary influences are altering their cultural identity.
7. The data indicate that trekking tourism has transformed conventional familial social roles, illustrating shifts in dynamics as younger generations increasingly participate in tourist-related activities and depart from pastoralism.
8. The data indicate that numerous young community members favor employment in hiking tourism over conventional pastoral activities, reflecting a shift in career goals motivated by enhanced income prospects and less physical effort.

9. The findings indicate that contacts with environmentally conscientious tourists have heightened local awareness of environmental conservation, implying that trekking tourism can enhance community understanding of ecological challenges.
10. The data indicate that alterations in attire, language, and dietary practices have transpired as a result of tourist influx, reflecting the impact of exterior cultural norms on the Gujar and Bakarwal people.
11. The findings indicate that numerous respondents perceive an increasing reliance on trekking tourism for their economic sustenance, which raises concerns regarding the vulnerabilities linked to such dependence for income.
12. The findings indicate that participants perceive government attempts to balance tourism growth with community welfare as inadequate, highlighting the necessity for more effective policies and actions.
13. The findings indicate that some respondents acknowledge the good effects of trekking tourism on their life, others encounter obstacles associated with cultural changes and environmental deterioration, illustrating a spectrum of experiences.
14. The findings indicate that a substantial number of participants perceive that employment opportunities in tourism are not uniformly accessible to all community members, implying inequities in the benefits derived from tourism-related activities.

Suggestions for Sustainable Tourism for Socio-Economic Upliftment and Cultural Preservation

Trekking tourism in Kashmir has brought significant opportunities for economic growth and cultural exchange, particularly for the Gujar and Bakarwal communities. However, its rapid growth has also led to socio-economic and cultural challenges that threaten the well-being and heritage of these indigenous groups. Addressing these issues requires a balanced approach that promotes sustainable development preserving the unique identity of these communities. In light of this, the following suggestions are proposed to mitigate the socio-economic and cultural impact of trekking tourism on the Gujar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir, particularly in Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, and Kulgam, are as under:

1. Develop comprehensive community-led home stay programs that empower Gujar-Bakarwal families, creating sustainable economic opportunities preserving traditional architectural styles and providing authentic cultural immersion experiences for responsible trekking tourists.
2. Create specialized guided trekking experiences integrating traditional Gujar-Bakarwal ecological knowledge, navigation techniques, and ancestral landscape understanding, enabling tourists to learn indigenous environmental management practices.
3. Establish robust handicraft cooperatives that document, preserve, and commercially promote traditional Gujar-Bakarwal textile, woodwork, and metal craft skills, ensuring cultural heritage monetization and intergenerational knowledge transfer.
4. Design immersive educational trekking programs highlighting pastoral heritage, showcasing nomadic lifestyle complexities, traditional migration patterns, and sustainable land management techniques practiced by Gujar-Bakarwal communities.
5. Implement comprehensive skill development workshops focusing on sustainable tourism management, hospitality standards, language skills, and entrepreneurial capabilities for community youth.
6. Create specialized eco-tourism training programs leveraging community's profound forest ecosystem understanding, wildlife interaction knowledge, and traditional navigation techniques for professional guide development.
7. Develop innovative livestock-based tourism experiences demonstrating traditional herding practices, animal husbandry techniques, and cultural significance of pastoral economic models.
8. Design community-managed eco-parks generating sustainable revenue streams protecting traditional grazing lands, biodiversity conservation, and maintaining ecological balance.
9. Establish specialized waste management and sustainable infrastructure training programs addressing environmental conservation, tourism impact mitigation, and community-driven ecological preservation strategies.
10. Create targeted scholarship programs supporting younger community members' education in tourism, conservation, hospitality, and environmental management disciplines.

11. Design culturally sensitive exchange trekking programs facilitating meaningful interactions, mutual understanding, and respectful engagement between tourists and indigenous communities.
12. Develop adaptive livelihood strategies seamlessly integrating traditional pastoral practices with contemporary tourism and economic opportunities.
13. Implement transparent, fair compensation mechanisms ensuring equitable revenue distribution among community members participating in tourism and conservation initiatives.
14. Create specialized wildlife and forest conservation roles utilizing community members' traditional ecological expertise and indigenous landscape management knowledge.
15. Develop comprehensive infrastructure improvement programs leveraging eco-tourism revenue for healthcare, educational, and community development initiatives.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

At the intersection of tourism, culture, and social change, the study provides a pioneering sociological inquiry into the impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Kashmir. As these nomadic groups find their traditional routes and habitats increasingly traversed by adventure tourists, the research explores how trekking tourism reshapes their socio-economic realities, cultural identities, and patterns of mobility. The study is significant in highlighting the nuanced ways in which these communities negotiate modernity—balancing cultural preservation with economic adaptation. By focusing on underrepresented voices, it addresses a critical gap in existing tourism and tribal studies literature, offering insights into displacement, environmental stress, livelihood transformation, and evolving gender roles. In doing so, it calls for inclusive and context-sensitive tourism policies that safeguard indigenous rights and promote equitable, sustainable development in ecologically and culturally fragile zones. This work not only enriches sociological understanding but also contributes to policy debates on responsible tourism in conflict-affected and marginalized regions.

CONCLUSION

The majestic landscapes of Kashmir, home to the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, present a vivid tapestry of cultural richness and natural beauty, deeply intertwined with centuries-old pastoral traditions. These semi-nomadic tribes, known for their resilient way of life, have long maintained a profound connection to the land through their seasonal migrations between the summer pastures of Kashmir and Ladakh and the winter plains of Jammu. However, the rise of trekking tourism in the region has introduced both opportunities and challenges, altering the socio-economic fabric of these communities. As tourism continues to grow, understanding its impact on the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes is crucial in ensuring that their cultural heritage and traditional lifestyles are preserved amidst the forces of modernization. Exploring the socio-economic and cultural impact of trekking tourism on the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities reveals a complex interplay of benefits and challenges. Economically, tourism has created new opportunities for trade, hospitality, and cultural exchange, allowing these communities to leverage their unique knowledge of the environment and traditions to engage with visitors. However, this growth in tourism has also placed pressure on their traditional practices, especially regarding grazing lands and the shift toward more settled lifestyles. The introduction of education has further accelerated this transformation, with many families opting for formal schooling, leading to an eventual departure from their nomadic roots. The cultural traditions and heritage of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have been both enriched and threatened by trekking tourism. Increased cultural visibility has allowed these communities to showcase their customs and way of life, the external pressures from tourism and conservation efforts have led to the erosion of certain practices. The social structure of these communities has seen significant changes, with trekking tourism acting as a catalyst for both social mobility and conflict over land use and wildlife conservation. Despite these challenges, the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities continue to demonstrate resilience, adapting to new socio-economic landscapes striving to preserve their heritage. Trekking tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities; it also offers valuable insights into the evolving relationship between indigenous cultures and modern development. The balance between economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation is delicate, and it is imperative that tourism development in Kashmir takes into account the rights, needs, and traditions of these communities. By fostering responsible tourism practices, policymakers and stakeholders can ensure that the rich cultural legacy of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities is preserved for future generations allowing them to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

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