

Exploration of Mutually Beneficial Relationship Between Tourism and Heritage Based Enterprises in the Himalayas

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Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing global tourism markets. Culture-based and creative industries (such as weaving, pottery, painting, carving/sculpting, etc.) are increasingly being used to promote hitherto isolated and unpopular/unknown regions as tourist destinations. Many locations are now actively developing their tangible assets (monuments, heritage sites, artifacts, etc.) and intangible cultural assets (dance forms, folklore, traditional wisdom, natural healing techniques, etc.) as a means of developing comparative advantages in an increasingly competitive tourism scenario, and to create local distinctiveness in the face of globalisation.

This paper examines the growing relationship between tourism and culture in the Himalayas, and how culture can be fostered to make the Himalayan areas more attractive to tourists as well as helping the communities in preserving their fast disappearing heritage and earning livelihood through tourism. It explores how these aspects can be portrayed as USPs (Unique Selling Points) to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of these regions for promoting tourism. Trends in tourism sector in the Himalayas and the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the culture in the Himalayas have also been discussed.

Policy interventions have been suggested to enhance this mutually beneficial relationship, using some case studies that illustrate the different facets of the relationship between tourism, culture and regional attractiveness. The challenges of marketing these regions as tourist hubs have also been considered and conclusions have been drawn on how a strong link between tourism and culture can be fostered to change the perception of the Himalayas from merely being remote, hilly, under-developed regions to culturally rich and vibrant regions. The paper focuses on how tourism sector can be boosted in these areas by highlighting the cultural/geographic uniqueness and in turn how these regions will gain from tourism in terms of preservation of cultural knowledge, art forms, obtaining a source of livelihood and creating a sense of integration among the local communities with the rest of country/world.

Tourism scenario in India and the Himalayas:

Cultural heritage of the Himalayas is unique and has remained untouched for generations by the outside world. It consists of rich tangible and nontangible heritage, which has evolved, with the passage of time. This rich cultural heritage can be promoted as tourism attraction and used as a mode of generating alternate livelihood for Himalayan states. Communities are developing their cultural assets as a means of developing vantage points and to highlight their markedly unique indigenous heritage to attract the global tourist population.

Tourism in India is one of its largest service industries. The vivid geography of India with unique and diverse cultural wealth attracts tourists from all over the world. Tourism has been a major contributor in the GDP in recent years. Tourism has contributed to INR 5,651 billion or 6.4 percent to the country's GDP in 2011 and accounted for 7.8 of total employment (WTTC, Travel & tourism economic impact 2012, India). There have been many drivers that have helped the tourism industry flourish, like increase in infrastructure, government initiatives, access to information etc. The tourism industry is expected to grow by 8 percent and contribute approximately INR 13,000 billion to GDP by 2022 (WTTC, 2012).

The high mountain range of Himalayas has fostered some of the world's unique culture and traditions. These cultures have remained intact and unchanged for generations due to lack of accessibility and remoteness. Closed for years, these areas now attract a growing number of foreign tourists due to their unique culture and splendid natural beauty. The Himalayan region may be considered to be a cultural complex, a composite of several cultural cosmoses rolled into one.

Linkages between Tourism and Culture:

According to Urry (2001), and Richards and Wilson (2006) culture has become an essential element of the tourism system. Cultural tourism is also frequently quoted as being one of the largest and fastest growing segments of global tourism, growing since the 1990s at rates twice faster than overall tourism industry (WTO, 2004)

According to Stebbins (1996:948), "Cultural tourism is a genre of special tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological"

Culture and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship, which can strengthen attractiveness and distinctiveness of a place. Tourism not only opens doors for tourists to explore a place and its elements; it also provides a platform for the native residents for income and livelihood generation which in turn strengthens and supports the rich heritage and its indigenous produce. All kinds of tourism involve culture, because people from two different cultures interact in terms of language, history, exchange of ideas, etc.

Culture tourism is fast growing and reaching new heights. With advancement in communication and transportation facilities, tourists are exploring new and unknown culture and tradition like that of the Himalayan states. Rising education levels also enable more people to access culture, while the effects of globalization create more interest in distant culture as well as local heritage (De Haan, 1998). This linkage between culture and tradition should be promoted and new opportunities should be explored so that they complement each other effectively.

Tourism Trend and Tourist Profile in the Himalayas:

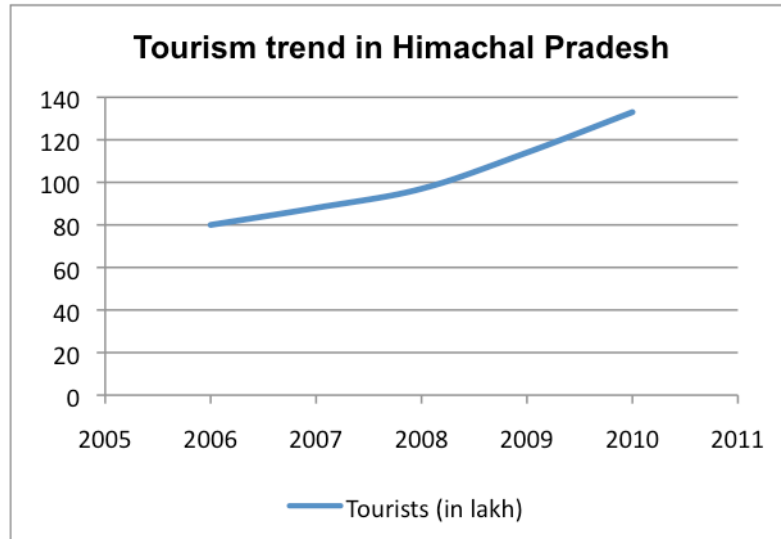
The uniqueness of the Himalayas is evident from the people inhabiting these regions, people who have been isolated and whose cultures have been unexplored by many. The interesting and diverse culture followed by the people inhabiting the Himalayan region adds to the geographical splendor that the region offers. One must also recognize that there is huge diversity in culture even in the Himalayan region and also, the Himalayas are not a homogenous region. The Himalayas have been divided into three zones (Western, Central and Eastern Himalayas), each with their distinct geographical, social and cultural differences. Moreover, there are lateral and vertical differences in the regions in each zone too. Vertical variation predominantly results from ecological factors, whereas lateral variation is due to different ethnic groups and migration. These cultural and geographic variations make the Himalayan region an interesting area of exploration for cultural tourists.

The data below depict the tourism trend and tourist profile in the Himalayan regions:

1. Western Himalayas

The western Himalayas comprise of diverse climatic and topographic conditions, cold deserts, barren mountains and rivers, which provide much scope for adventure. Main tourist attractions in the Western Himalayas are Leh, Kashmir, Srinagar, Shimla and Manali. Buddhist heritage sites, beautiful valleys with various flora and fauna, coupled with the local traditional culture, attract tourists every year.

Himachal Pradesh is one of the most visited tourist destinations in India. Apart from popularity of key tourist destinations such as Shimla and Manali, contributing factors to increasing tourism in this region are: easily available information, better accessibility from mainstream cities/states – rail and road connectivity, good hotels/resorts and pleasant climate. However, other places like Lahaul & Spiti are less visited because of lack of information to tourists, difficulty in accessing these areas and hostile climatic conditions.

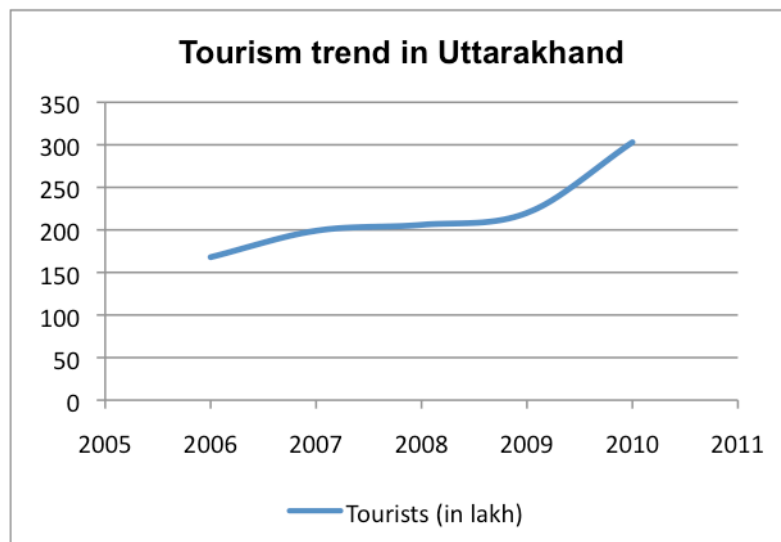


(Source: KPMG report on Himachal Pradesh, 2011)

Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir has also increased from approximately 93 lakh tourists in 2009 to 131 lakh tourists in 2011. Jammu and Kashmir has good rail, road and air connectivity and offers beautiful landscapes, flower gardens (Tulip garden, being a recent addition), lake stay options and is a popular destination in winter as well for tourists seeking adventure and sports (skiing) activities. Similarly, Leh-Ladakh has also become a hotspot for tourists with religious/spiritual orientation and adventure (water sports, trekking) oriented tourists. However, tourist flows fluctuate in these regions due to harsh winters and threats from terrorist organisations.

2. Central Himalayas

The state of Uttaranchal lies in the lap of central Himalayas. It is a region of outstanding natural beauty. The high Himalayan ranges and glaciers cover most of the northern parts of the state. It is a sacred place for many religious pilgrims. The unique Himalayan ecosystem plays host to a large number of animals (including bharal, snow leopards, leopards and tigers), plants and rare herbs. The rivers, Ganga and Yamuna originate from the glaciers of Uttaranchal, and are fed by innumerable lakes, glacial melts and streams in the region. The tourism industry is a major contributor to the economy of Uttarakhand.

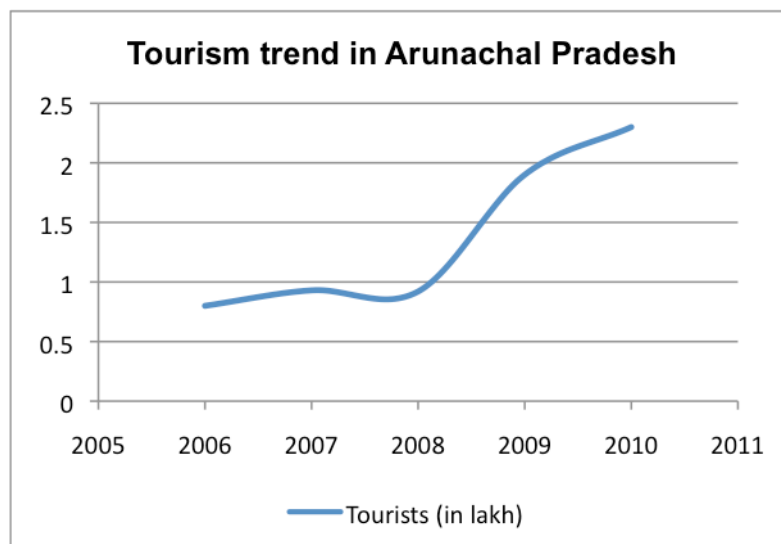
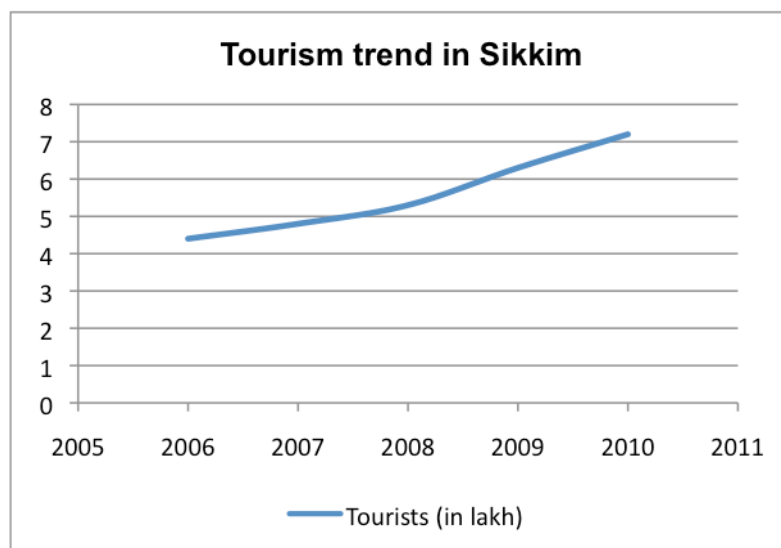


(Source: KPMG report on Himachal Pradesh, 2011)

The tourism trend of Uttarakhand shows an increase in the number of tourists visiting the place. 70% of all the tourists visiting Uttarakhand visit Haridwar. Tourism in the Central Himalayan belt is mainly propelled by people seeking religious and spiritual knowledge and experience. Pilgrimage is also undertaken as a part of fulfilling cultural beliefs and traditional rites/rituals followed by people since decades.

3. Eastern Himalayas

In the eastern Himalayas, major tourist attractions are Sikkim, Darjeeling and Arunachal Pradesh, among others. Darjeeling and Sikkim, nestled in the heart of the great Himalayas are arguably the most popular tourist destination in northeast India. This region has been bestowed with distinguished flora and fauna.



(Source: www.tourism.gov.in)

Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are one of the greenest states in India with rich natural and cultural heritage. They are fast picking up pace and are attracting tourists from all over the world. The region was earlier difficult to access but now with improved accessibility, the tourist inflow is increasing year after year. Tourism in these areas is being promoted by emphasis on spiritual experience, the scenic beauty, art forms and giant statues of deities and art depiction in monasteries, options for adventure activities – trekking, rafting, paragliding, etc.

Role and Impact of Tourism on Culture:

Positive impacts:

The modern mass tourism of the 21st century has had an enormous influence on the local economy. The increase in the tourist inflow increases the revenue earned by the district and state. To further promote tourism, the state invests a part of the revenue earned in improving infrastructure such as roads, airports, accommodation facilities, eateries, emergency services such as hospitals, etc. These activities create employment opportunities for the local people as well as helps in improving their mobility and accessibility to essential services and their standard of living. This is a circular flow of money from tourists to local people and the state, and the flow of money back into these areas in the form of investment by the state, which is a very critical component for the development of these remote and hilly regions. This cyclical process brings about economic benefits to the people by helping them to acquire a source of livelihood and/or start their own business that serves the tourists. Increased revenues and investments also lead to social benefits to the population in the form of better health care services, education, better power and water availability.

The local youths in the Himalayan regions who are familiar with the hilly mountain tracts and skillful in maneuvering in rivers, use these skills by being employed as trekking guides, guides for sightseeing and rafting operators. Adults and women in the community set up individual businesses for selling or renting supplies, selling souvenirs to the tourists or setting up eatery stalls. In this process of interaction with the tourists, they inform tourists about the history, social life, cultural practices, beliefs and rituals followed in the region. This not only increases the knowledge base and enriches the experience of the tourist, but also instills a feeling of pride among locals about their culture and traditions. The need for sharing their cultural knowledge with outsiders also means that local people remain in touch with traditional knowledge and practices and feel a sense of belonging to their heritage and cultural roots.

Cultural industries have also evolved due to the increasing inflow of tourists in the Himalayan regions. Demand in the market for their art and craft works has helped in the continuation of traditional cultural skills. Marketing and commercialization through tourism has provided an economic motive to these cultural actors to continue these traditional cultural forms and give these forms of art/craft/dance/songs a new lease of life. The increasing visibility and popularity of these cultural attributes, in turn, promotes tourism in these regions. For example, hand spun-woven Kashmiri shawls made out of Pashmina wool, dance forms and songs and cuisines from Kashmir are well known in some parts of India and are becoming popular internationally. Media coverage about these cultural factors creates an interest among domestic and international tourists in visiting these places. Similarly, exquisite locations and paintings and wood carving and forms of dance during the traditional new year are important USPs to attract tourists in Arunachal and Sikkim.

Religious and spiritually inclined people find haven in the sacred places in Uttarakhand and Ladakh. These places have developed a brand name of their own, often seen in advertisements published by tour operators. For example, "Spiritual Ladakh", "Mountainous and Majestic Sikkim", "Vibrant Gujrat", etc. Such branding helps to not only target niche groups who are spiritually/culturally/adventure-inclined, but also builds a popularity base for attracting domestic and international tourists looking for a 'different and unique' experience. Thus, culture and tourism have a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship.

Negative impacts:

Though tangible and intangible benefits have been accrued to the Himalayan regions because of increased tourist traffic, there are also some negative side-effects due to the cultural dilution that takes place through exposure to other people/cultures and also tourism promotion initiatives that are not well thought out. Some trends that have accompanied the growth of tourism are: resentment towards 'outsiders' among local communities, changing perception and attitudes among youth leading to cultural lag between youth and elders of the community, disruption to community harmony and familial bonds, to name a few.

Goering Peter, in his article on response to tourism in Ladakh, mentions that the openness and friendliness that Ladakhis have traditionally shown to visitors has been eroded by the commercialization of their culture and their understandable resentment toward the invading crowds. Theft, virtually unknown in traditional Ladakhi society, is now a common complaint among urban tourists and trekkers alike, and children now plague visitors for handoutsⁱ. He further states that by observing foreign visitors in Ladakh, the young Ladakhis in particular, develop a perception that all Westerners are rich, they work very little, and the West is a paradise of consumer goods. Young people begin to despise the thinking of their parents and rush to embrace whatever is seen as modern. This creates a cultural lag between the youth and elders in the community and eventually leads to disharmony in the family and breaking of familial bonds.

In other tourist areas, government initiatives in tourism development have been guided by international patterns of developing tourist destinations. For example, casinos and gambling activities are major tourist attractions in South East Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, and some mainstream tourist hubs in India, such as Goa. Following suit, Sikkim government established the state's first casino in March 2009, and seven casino licenses are being considered by the state governmentⁱⁱ. While it is true that this would create enormous revenues and employment for the local population, casino-related crimes, gambling addiction, indebtedness caused by acquiring money for gambling, and the consequent disruption in the cultural values, social and family bonds due to these activities also needs to be considered.

Tourism also creates polarization on economic lines in these regions, as people with better financial resources are able to invest in setting up small businesses or establishing market linkages to promote their products whereas people dependent on subsistence agriculture do not really reap the benefits of tourism. An incidence of social tensions created due to tourism was due to the inequitable distribution of the receipts from tourism and the leakage of tourists' expenditures out of Ladakh. This created a conflict especially between Buddhist Ladakhis and Muslims from the valley of Kashmir. During the summer of 1989, these tensions reached the boiling point. The Buddhist population of Ladakh began demonstrating in force for greater autonomy from the government of Jammu and Kashmir state, which is overwhelmingly Muslim. In the Buddhist sectors, where Muslims and Buddhists have coexisted peacefully for years (at least since silk route times), the unrest led to a polarization of the society along religious lines. Violence between protesters and the state police resulted in the deaths of four Ladakhis. Leh was placed under curfew for most of the summer, and tourist arrivals plummetedⁱⁱⁱ. This society that lived in harmony for decades is now at risk of disintegrating on economic lines.

Recommendations for Enhancing the Symbiotic Relationship between Tourism and Culture:

Pilgrimage tourism:

The tourist trend and profile in the western and central Himalayas indicates that much of tourist inflow is generated due to places of religious and spiritual significance. There is a huge potential in Uttarakhand for the promotion of pilgrimage/religious tourism and also in Lahaul-Spiti and Leh-Ladakh for spiritual tourism. Though the state government takes initiatives to provide basic infrastructure and accommodation to tourists visiting shrines in the peak seasons, services need to be organized and streamlined better to improve the tourists' overall experience, which will create a customer base and popularity by tourists' blogging, word of mouth publicity, etc.

Temple/Monastery stay programmes can be started in these places of interest for religious and spiritual tourists. Facilities could include low-cost staying options, sermons/spiritual discourse, meditation centres. Tie ups can be made with local yoga instructors and spiritual healers to conduct wellness camps for domestic as well as foreign tourists.

The model of Temple Stay Programme of the Republic of Korea could be applied here. The main highlights of this programme are, it allows visitors to learn about traditional Korean culture and Buddhism firsthand while experiencing the beauty of local temples. The success of this programme in attracting tourists as well as in creating awareness about Buddhist culture can be gauged from the fact that the number of temples in the ambit of this program grew from 33 in 2002 to 122 this year.

More than 170,000 people took part in the program in 2010^{iv}. Future plans include introduction of new programs targeting people with distinct interests in programs on temple food and multiculturalism and healing programs for people dealing with divorce, unemployment and other problems.

On the same lines, programmes initiated in the western Himalayas could focus on mental and spiritual well being, serving nutritious and organic diet, cooking modules on traditional/vegetarian cooking, physical and spiritual well being through Yoga/Art of Living courses. These activities will not only promote the culture and traditional practices of these areas, but will also attract niche groups from across the world towards the wholesome and spiritual experience that can be gained here.

Wellness and Medical tourism:

Wellness tourism is one of the fastest growing forms of international and domestic tourism. It aims at improving emotional well-being, such as stress reduction and calming the mind, as well as healing or rejuvenating the body. Wellness tourism encompasses healthy cuisine, specific fitness or body-mind-spirit regimes, learning, adventure, spiritual enlightenment, in order to enhance lives^v.

The potential of wellness tourism is very vast in India, and this can be harnessed by positioning India as a centre of Ayurveda, Yoga, Sidha, Naturopathy, etc., together with the spiritual philosophy that has been integral to the Indian way of life^{vi}. Some of the Himalayan regions are rich in medicinal and aromatic plants. Centres for Natural Healing can be established in the Western Himalayan belt of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and Eastern Himalayan areas of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Medical tourism can be promoted using traditional healing systems and medicinal plants, herbal oils, etc. Similar to the international model of establishing spas for attracting tourists, herbal spas can be established in these regions which will use the aromatic plants available in these regions for aroma therapy, herbal oil for easing physical discomfort, herbal extracts and mud packs for rejuvenation of skin, etc.

These centres could also provide a '*sattvic diet*'. This is a diet based on foods that, according to Ayurveda and Yoga, are food that lead to clarity and equanimity of mind while also being beneficial to the body^{vii}. Such foods include water, cereal, grains, vegetables, fruits, unpasteurized fresh milk, and milk derivatives such as ghee, cream, yogurt.

Thus, focusing on the cultural uniqueness of these areas and channelizing it to meet the global trends in tourism, will not only help in retention and transfer of traditional knowledge and wisdom among people, but, will also attract global tourists seeking a relaxing and rejuvenating experience.

Heritage Tourism:

Heritage tourism initiative can be started in collaboration with community-based groups, organizations and government agencies, with the aim to highlight and honour the local history, traditions, culture, and natural resources. The association of these members would focus on protecting and preserving the indigenous cultures by reviving and promoting the traditional festivals, cultural events, healing practices, cuisines, art, folk songs and dance.

An example of such an initiative is the *Chitral Association for Mountain Area Tourism* (CAMAT). It is a Non Government Organisation working for the promotion of community-based tourism in Chitral, the northernmost district of Pakistan, whose major objective is to enhance income-earning opportunities for "poverty reduction through environmental-friendly and culture-rooted community-based eco-tourism in the remote mountainous region of Northern Pakistan", through the financial support from UNESCO^{viii}. CAMAT believes it can make the protection of traditional culture a desirable outcome for community members.

By targeting different aspects for promoting tourism, such as, adventure, wildlife, culture and heritage, the local population can harness their cultural and geographic strengths to acquire economic benefits. Building on their skills or fine-tuning it to meet the needs of the tourists could help in creating demand

for their skills/products in the market, leading to more economic benefits. For e.g., in regions where pottery is widely practiced, setting up small workplaces for the tourists to themselves try making small pots and buy their pots could be received well, as the tourists would feel intrigued about the pottery making technique and feel more involved in the art/culture of the people.

Market Linkages and Ethical Commerce:

In areas where the communities have already developed a reputation for fine embroidery, statues or carving work, market linkages need to be strengthened so as to make products available in the mainstream cities.

Market dealers, retailers in cities also need to follow ethical practices while sourcing their materials and selling it to customers. For example, Kashmiri shawls and hand-made embroidered materials are very popular and commonly available in many mainstream Indian cities having stores particularly selling Kashmiri clothes and arts. However, many of the hand-woven materials are now made by machines and falsely sold to customers as being Kashmiri wear. As a result of this practice, authentic producers of these embroidered clothes are sidelined or misrepresented and the benefits of popularizing their art/craft don't really reach the practitioners of this art.

In order to help the village based art and craft forms to survive, it is not only necessary to provide the community linkages to the mainstream markets, but also ensure ethical practices so that the benefits percolate to the communities in the villages, because of whom the art form has survived. If the unethical trade practices flourish, it will lead to the dilution of the art and misrepresentation of the culture and people who actually practice this art.

Conclusion:

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing global tourism markets. Culture and creative industries are increasingly being used to promote destinations and enhance their competitiveness and attractiveness (OECD, 2009)

Himalayan states are full of natural beauty and rich culture and have the potential to become one of the best tourism spots in the country. However, difficult terrain and extreme climate plays a hindrance in its development as a major tourist destination. Also lack of infrastructure and poverty creates obstacles in development. However, these negatives can be overcome by showcasing to the tourists the rich cultural heritage these regions possess, which in turn would bring prosperity and catalyze the development of these areas.

Participation of the residents of the Himalayas in tourism development is crucial as they form the core of the cultural and creative tourism experience. Cultural diversity not only adds to the attractiveness of regions, but also because of their links with their home culture can provide important motivation for visitation.

The travel and tourism sector creates more jobs per million rupees of investment than any other sector of the economy and is capable of providing employment to a wide range of job seekers from the unskilled to the specialized, even in the remote parts of the country^x. The growing tourist numbers are bringing economic opportunities and employment to local populations, helping to promote these little-known regions of the world. However, it must also be ensured that local communities fully benefit from the development of tourism and that growth in tourism helps to preserve and sustain the natural and cultural riches of these regions.

There is huge potential of cultural tourism in Himalayan states. The people in the Himalayas are bestowed with rich and unique culture and tradition and through cultural tourism this wealth can be enhanced to bring prosperity to its citizens.

However, interaction between host societies and tourists could either destroy and alter the local culture or promote peace and understanding between the two cultures. Therefore, the challenge is to

make sure that cultural tourism initiatives are well managed and the benefits are shared equitably by all people in the society.

ⁱ <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/india/response-tourism-ladakh>

ⁱⁱ <http://m.oneindia.in/news/2009/03/24/sikkim-govt-launches-casino-to-lure-tourists-.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/india/response-tourism-ladakh>

^{iv} http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/the-impact-of-culture-on-tourism/temple-stay-programme-republic-of-korea_9789264040731-9-en

^v <http://www.wellnesstourismworldwide.com/uploads/7/2/1/6/7216110/spamantra.pdf>

^{vi} <http://tourism.gov.in/TourismDivision/AboutContent.aspx?Name=Tourism%20Infrastructure%20Development&CID=19&INO=13>

^{vii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sattvic_diet

^{viii} <http://ecoclub.com/news/096/interview2.html>

^{ix} http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/10th/volume2/v2_ch7_5.pdf