



Socio-Cultural impact of Tourism: A Case Study of Tawang Circle, Tawang District, Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Tourism is an agent of change with multiplier impacts on socio-cultural, economic, and ecological systems and is considered to be one of the engines for financial development, and job opportunities, contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a nation and territorial improvement. This study explores the impact of tourism on socio-cultural dynamics within Tawang Circle, situated in the Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh. The study has been carried out by using qualitative research methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study investigates how tourism has influenced the local community's way of life, traditions, and cultural practices. The findings highlight both positive and negative outcomes of tourism development, shedding light on its implications for socio-cultural change in this region.

Keywords- Multiplier impact, social change, Tourism, Social, Cultural, Tawang

Introduction

Tourism is “the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, insofar as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity.” (Hunziker and Kraft, 1941) In other words, tourism can be explained as, the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation, and pleasure, while making use of the commercial provision of services. Further the United Nations World Tourism Organization) defined tourism as the activity of a person who travels to places outside their usual environment for less than a year, excluding any main reasons such as vacation, business, or other personal purposes, other than being arranged by a resident unit for visiting a country

or place, (UNWTO, 1994). It therefore becomes evident that the activity called tourism is not a new concept and has been in practice in societies for a very long time, in varying degrees, dimensions and significance.

In the Indian context too, the word tourism is not new either in concept or usage and is frequently found in use early Sanskrit literature in form of multiple words like 'Paryatan'" "Deshtatan", "Tirthatan" which can be found in many references is defined as taking someone to another place outside of their usual environment, for reasons other than work, vacation, or other personal purposes, arranged by a resident unit to visit a country or place. Thus, one can envisage that tourism is an age-old practice though the destination, expectation and nature may have varied over in a temporal context. It is also imperative that the understanding and assessment of Sociocultural impacts and how tourism changes the community and individual values, behaviour, community structure, lifestyle and overall quality of life; about both the destination and the visitor has been in practice for a long understanding social relations. (Hall, 2007; Murphy, 1985, as cited in Brunt & Courtney, 1999).

Thus, for an observer, it becomes clear that tourism has always supported local livelihoods and impacted the social, cultural, and economic factors of local communities. Since ancient times, people have visited pilgrimage sites, and the local people managed local markets, accommodations, and food systems there.

The concept of Modern tourism in India can be traced back to the establishment of a committee headed by LK Jha followed by Dr. F.K. Alikhan who formulated Tourism development in India as an industry. In 2002, the first National Tourism Policy was introduced for national-level tourism development which recognized the sector as an engine for India's economic development and is also as a significant source of non-industrial opportunities.

Within this background, the present study is an attempt to trace the growth, expansion and impact of tourism upon the indigenous communities inhabiting these areas and the emerging trajectory of further expansion of this as a full-fledged source of economic sustenance.

Arunachal Pradesh, as part of Northeast India, serves as a prime example of the country's rich diversity and natural beauty. It's the largest state in terms of geographical area among the eight states in Northeast India. Arunachal Pradesh shares borders with China to the north, Bhutan to the west, Myanmar to the east, and Assam to the south.

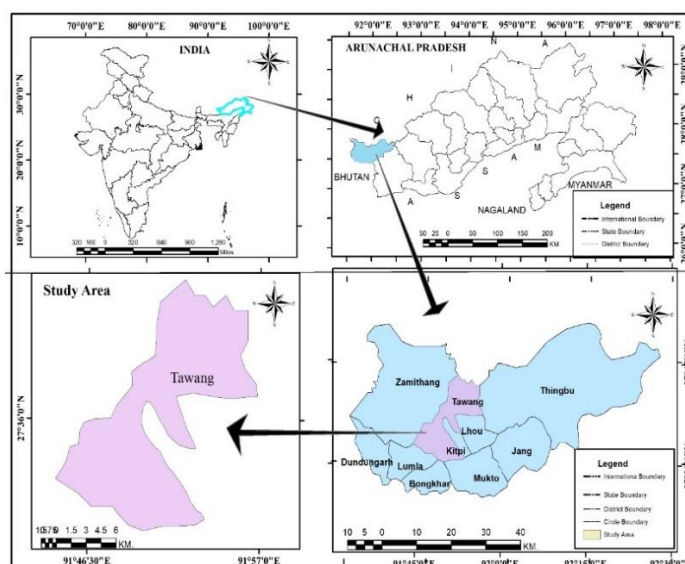
Being part of the Eastern Himalayan hotspot, the state is recognized for its biodiversity and enriched flora and fauna. Indian Forest Survey data 2022, reveals that Arunachal Pradesh has the second-largest forest area among Indian states, covering approximately 51,407 square kilometres. This area constitutes around 61.39 per cent of the state's total geographical area.

The state is known for its diverse tribal culture, with 26 major tribes and 105 sub-tribal groups living together harmoniously. Each tribe has its unique social customs, cultural heritage, and way of life and livelihoods. The

Western part of the state stands out further by its unparalleled physiography and equally variegated cultural history that makes the district one of the most sought-after tourist destinations not only within the country but also outside. Its location further accentuates its importance both from the strategic location and political dimensions with our immediate neighbour- China

The District of Tawang spreads across an area of approximately 2172 square kilometres. Located in the northwestern part of Arunachal Pradesh it shares its borders with China to the north and Bhutan to the south. The breathtakingly beautiful but difficult-to-access Sela Pass at the height of 13700 ft connects the district with the district of West Kameng. Its average elevation ranges from 3500 meters to 6300 meters above sea level. The entire area is marred with features of numerous mountains, peaks, valleys, glaciers, and rivers, collectively making it stand out as a unique tourist destination, both in terms of adventure tourism, scenic beauty like the picturesque lakes, Sangestar Tso Lake and Domla Lhakang Lhima, that virtually captivate visitors. These special places make Tawang a favourite destination for travellers seeking both culture and natural beauty. as well from the religious point of view as the renowned Tawang Monastery, one of the largest in Asia, along with the Khinmey Monastery, the Gorsham Chorten, a sacred site that is accessible every 12 years, and Damgyn village, the birthplace of the sixth Dalai Lama. For centuries, Tawang has been a religious centre for Buddhism, but of late these places are coming to the tourist map at large. Given such vivacity, it is not unique that several other types of tourism are also getting developed as a destination such as rural tourism, border tourism, entertainment tourism, adventure sports, etc. Along with the Buddhist monasteries, valleys, historical sites, traditional villages, traditional architecture and art, and unique lifestyles attract tourists.

Study Area



Source-ArcGIS

The present study area is Tawang Circle in the Tawang district. The area is a captivating destination with a rich cultural heritage and stunning landscapes. Geographically, Tawang Circle is centrally located between latitudes 27°45'N to 27°88'N and longitudes 90°15'E to 92°45'E, covering 159 square kilometres. Its diverse landscape features elevations ranging from 798 meters to towering heights of 6403 meters above sea level, sharing borders with neighbouring circles. As per the 2011 census, Tawang Circle had a total population of 19,099. The literacy rate in Tawang Circle is 78.43 per cent, reflecting a relatively high level of education within the community.

Research objectives- As stated earlier the present paper attempts to explore the impact of tourism and sets before itself the following objectives

1)To study the socio-cultural impact of tourism in the Tawang Circle.

Data Sources and Methodology

The study is based upon the primary survey and is substantiated with secondary data available from various sources used to explore how tourism impacts the socio-cultural changes of the Monpas.

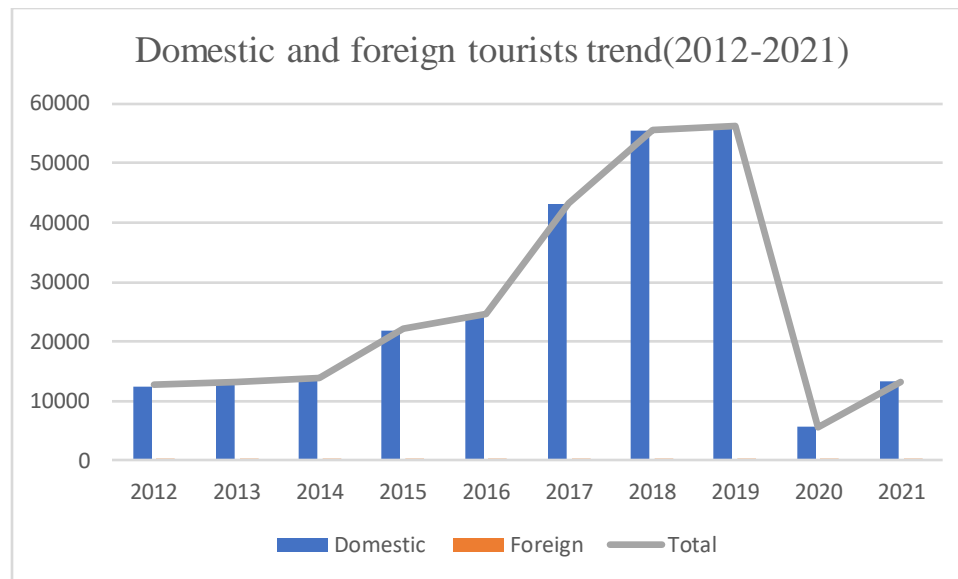
Primary data was collected through field surveys in October and November 2023 in the study area. This involved discussions and interviews with residents, entrepreneurs, and experts to gather firsthand insights.

Secondary data was gathered from sources such as the Tourism Department, books, journals, and online platforms.

The number of domestic and foreign tourist arrivals in Tawang from 2012 to 2021

Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total
2012	12392	271	12663
2013	12914	235	13149
2014	13668	267	13935
2015	21875	305	22180
2016	24423	279	24702
2017	43059	235	43294
2018	55367	245	55612
2019	55823	421	56244
2020	5639	45	5684
2021	13213	4	13217

Source: Government of Arunachal Pradesh



Source: Government of Arunachal Pradesh

Tourist arrivals in Tawang have shown fluctuating trends over the past decade. Domestic tourist numbers witnessed a significant increase from around 12,000 in 2012 to over 430,00 in 2017, marking a substantial surge in visitation. However, in subsequent years, there was a gradual decline, with figures stabilizing around 55,000 to 60,000 domestic tourists annually. In contrast, the number of foreign tourists remained relatively stable throughout the period, ranging from 235 to 421. There was a notable decrease in foreign tourist arrivals in 2020, with only 45 recorded visitors. Furthermore, in 2021, while domestic tourist numbers saw a decline, foreign tourist arrivals experienced a significant drop to just 4 visitors, indicating a sharp decrease in international tourism to Tawang.

These trends suggest a complex interplay of factors influencing tourist flows to the region, including economic conditions, infrastructure development, geopolitical factors, and global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Discussions

Out of the total 98 households surveyed, 3.39 per cent of household heads fall within the age group of 18-30, while 26.83 per cent are aged between 31 and 40. The majority, accounting for 46.20 per cent, belong to the age group of 41-50. Additionally, 14.63 per cent are aged between 51 and 60, while 8.94 per cent are over the age of 60.

In terms of the main occupation of surveyed households, 10.57 per cent reported agriculture as their primary source of income. This represents a relatively small proportion compared to the country's agricultural workforce. The prevalence of agriculture as the primary occupation has been declining since the implementation of the Food Safety Bill in 2013.

It was also found that around 23.58 per cent are engaged in business activities, indicating a significant portion being involved in entrepreneurial ventures. Additionally, 24.39 per cent of household members were engaged in government jobs. Most of these individuals are employed in Group C level, with some in Group B and very few in Group A government level. while 4.88 per cent were found employed in the private sector. A smaller proportion, 0.81 per cent, are involved in cottage industries, showcasing local craftsmanship and artisanal work. Furthermore, 3.25 per cent of households consisted of contractual workers, highlighting the prevalence of temporary employment arrangements within the community, 13.01 per cent of households comprised construction workers, while 10.57 per cent were reported as retired individuals. Additionally, 8.13 per cent of households included other skilled jobs like drivers and in other related fields. Interestingly though low preference for becoming a Buddhist lama was found among the Monpas in the study area and as of 2023 about 0.81 were found to be engaged as lama.

Impact and issues of Tourism on socio-cultural aspects in the Study area.

Tourism has wide-ranging effects on society, culture, economy, and the environment, influencing different aspects of people's lives. According to Jaafar, Ismail, and Rasoolimanesh, the social and cultural impacts of tourism involve changes in various aspects of destination communities. These changes include alterations in value systems, individual behaviours, family dynamics, collective lifestyles, moral standards, artistic expressions, traditional ceremonies, and community structures.

Table 2.

S.no	Social factors/scale	Strongly disagree with %	Disagree in %	Neutral in %	Agree in %	Strongly agree with the %
1	Access to daily information	42.06	46.73	9.35	1.87	0.00
2	local customs and traditions	37.04	17.59	28.70	16.67	0.00
3	Safety and Security	83.49	11.93	3.67	0.92	0.00
4	Unity among people	48.15	34.26	17.59	0.00	0.00
5	Trust among local people	20.37	20.37	46.30	6.48	0.00
6	Migration in Village	48.11	33.96	0.00	17.92	0.00

Source-field survey

Table 2 shows the impact of tourism on social aspects. Access to daily information within the Monpa community, Based on the Likert scale it was found that around 46.73 per cent agree that tourism has influenced

the social and cultural aspects, while 42.06 per cent, strongly disagree. Only a small percentage, 9.35 per cent, remain neutral, and 1.87 per cent agree with the statement. These suggest that the Monpa community's access to daily information is not significantly affected by tourism.

Regarding local customs and traditions, 37.04 per cent, strongly disagree that tourism has influenced this aspect, while an additional 17.59 per cent disagree. However, a significant percentage, 16.67 per cent, agree that there is an impact. Additionally, 28.70 per cent remained neutral on the matter. Local people perceive tourism as positively impacting local customs and traditions, viewing it as an opportunity to showcase and promote their cultural heritage to visitors. This suggests a sense of pride in sharing their customs and traditions with tourists, contributing to the overall promotion and preservation of their cultural identity.

Regarding safety and security, a significant majority of 83.49 per cent strongly disagree that tourism has impacted this aspect. An additional 11.93 per cent also disagree, confirming the community's perception of safety and security. A small percentage, 3.67 per cent, remain neutral, while only 0.92 per cent agree that there is an impact. This overwhelming disagreement suggests that the Monpa community maintains a high level of safety and security, with rare incidents related to safety issues. It reflects a stable and secure environment for its members, further reinforcing the community's reputation as a safe destination for tourists and residents alike.

Regarding the impact of tourism on the Monpa community, a significant majority, comprising 48.15 per cent, strongly disagree that tourism has affected unity, while an additional 34.26 per cent disagree with this notion. Furthermore, 17.59 per cent remained neutral on the matter. The overall picture therefore depicts there is indeed a strong sense of unity among the Monpa community., 2 However 0.37 percent, both strongly disagree and disagree that there is an impact of tourism on this aspect. Meanwhile, a significant proportion, 46.30 per cent, remained neutral, and 6.48 per cent agree that there is an impact. This suggests that, regardless of any perceived impact from tourism, the foundation of trust within the community remains robust and resilient. Regarding the aspect of Migration in the village, 48.11 per cent strongly disagree, while 33.96 per cent disagree, and 17.92 per cent agree that there is an impact of tourism on social aspects. However, it was found that migration for job and education purposes is a common incidence within the community.

Table 3.

S.no	Cultural factors/scale	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Food	35.58	55.05	4.19	5.18	0.00
2	Language	35.58	55.05	4.19	5.18	0.00
3	Clothing	35.58	55.05	4.19	5.18	0.00
4	Festival	0.00	11.01	30.28	25.30	33.42
5	Crop	28.44	26.61	11.01	18.62	15.32
6	Religion	90.83	9.17	0.00	0.00	0.00
7	Rituals	37.61	40.37	18.35	3.67	0.00

Source-field survey

Table 3 explains the impact of tourism on cultural aspects. Regarding food, language, and clothing, about 35.58 per cent strongly disagree, 55.05 per cent disagree, 4.19 per cent have been neutral, and 5.18 per cent agree. In the context of celebrating festivals, about 11.01 per cent disagreed, 30.28 per cent were found to be neutral. About 25.30 per cent agreed, and 33.42 per cent were found to be agreeing. It was also found that the majority of people agree on the aspect of tourism has introduced new festivals alongside traditional ones, such as the Tawang Festival and sports festivals.

In the context of the type of crop cultivation, shows that 28.44 per cent of people strongly disagree, 26.61 per cent disagree, 11.01 per cent were found to be neutral, 18.62 per cent agree, and 15.32 per cent strongly agree. Approximately 34 per cent of people strongly agree and agree because tourism has influenced changes in crop patterns. The trend reflects that people are now focusing more on growing vegetables that are usually liked and are in demand in growing markets. Hence vegetables like peas, cabbage, radishes, tomatoes, potatoes, ginger, and carrots are grown. In addition, there is a growing emphasis on agricultural diversification among the Monpa people, particularly in the cultivation of fruits such as apples and kiwis.

This shift towards fruit farming represents an adaptation to changing market demands and climatic conditions. The cultivation of apples and kiwis not only provides economic opportunities but also contributes to the preservation of traditional agricultural practices while integrating modern techniques. This diversification further enhances the resilience of the local economy and promotes sustainable development within the community.

In terms of religious practices, almost 90.83 per cent were found to strongly disagree and 9.17 per cent were found to disagree. Predominantly Buddhism is followed by most households, and the rituals, associated with it. Almost 37.61 per cent strongly disagree, 40.37 per cent disagree, 18.35 per cent were found to be neutral, while

a nominal 3.67 per cent agreed. In the general understanding therefore it was found there is a common perception that there have not been major changes in the observance of except for some change in their way of practising among the youths

However, there was not much disagreement on the fact that Tourism development in the area has primarily brought positive changes to the region, such as economic opportunities and improved infrastructure while there is a predominance of continuity of their socio-cultural practices. This underscores the sustainable coexistence of tourism and cultural preservation in the study area

Thus, one can sum up by saying that in the study area, there are no significant negative impacts of tourism on the socio-cultural aspects of the Monpas. Despite the growth of tourism infrastructure and the influx of visitors, the cultural heritage and identity of the Monpa people have remained resilient.

Conclusion

There are immense opportunities to develop tourism as an industry in Tawang Circle which will significantly boost its economy. While tourism has played a significant role in the physical development of the study area, including the construction of new hotels, homestays, roads, and restaurants, its impact on the social-cultural aspects of the Monpa community has been minimal. The predominant changes observed are positive, with tourism contributing positively to the local economy and infrastructure without significantly altering the socio-cultural fabric of Monpa society.

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