

Problems Caused by Tourism in Kaghan Valley, Pakistan: A Study Based on Local Community Perception

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Abstract

Tourism being one of the greatest and fastest growing industries of the world is contributing significantly to the development of countries and the host communities. But this industry is facing many problems in most of the developing countries including Pakistan. Most of the issues are raised due to lack of planning which not only dissatisfies the tourists but also has negative impacts on the local communities.

Unplanned tourism not only affects the host guest relationship but also the tourism resources of an area. The study in hand is author's part of PhD research and highlights the problems of host regions caused by tourism in Pakistan, taking Kaghan valley as case study. The results of the study show that if proper measures are not taken well in time, the unplanned tourism will destroy the natural and socio-cultural environment of the valley very soon.

Key Words

Tourism, Kaghan Valley, Problems, Tourists, Local Community, Tourism Resources, Socio Cultural Environments

Introduction

Pakistan is bestowed with a lot of natural and cultural resources which can be utilized for tourism. It has the potential to attract international tourists along with the national. Unfortunately, tourism industry of the country has not been on the priority of the previous governments and has not been planned properly. Due to lack of planning it is facing a lot of problems which not only are affecting the visitors, tourism resources but the host communities as well. Due to this flaw, tourism industry is failing to play its role as it should be.

In the northern parts of Pakistan are lying the valleys, famous for their outstanding natural and cultural heritage and can rightly be called heavens on earth. In summer season due to these valleys' pleasant weather millions of tourists make their way towards these valleys and enjoy there.

Kaghan valley is one of such valleys famous for their pleasant weather, beautiful landscape, unique cultures and traditions. The valley is also known as the land of lakes due to some legendary lakes. It is located in district Mansehra and is about under 92 miles by road from Babusar Pass to Balakot and its average width is about 15 miles. (Watson, 1907). Balakot town is the gateway of this beautiful valley. Some of the writers consider the Kaghan valley as river Kunhar's catchment area and thus the villages of Shohal Mazullah, Talhatta, Bisian and Garhi Habibullah are also part of the Kaghan Valley (Masru & Khan, 1973; fig. 1 on next page).

The valleys of Pakistan see a huge burden of tourists in summer and in this season tourism resources are consumed in a very irresponsible way and same is the case of Kaghan valley. According to the statistics of Tourism Corporation Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (TCKP), during the summer season estimated tourist arrival in Kaghan valley is 1.5 million at few selected destinations of the valley only (TCKP, n.d.). Such a huge number of tourists during the selected few months of the year heavily disturbs the natural and socio-cultural environments of the valley causing several problems as well.

Majority of the tourism studies in Pakistan are focusing the visitors' perspectives. Community involvement, community tourism resources and the problems faced by local community are found in few studies. Many studies highlight the crucial tourism problems found in the literature (Naureen, 2002; Ahmad, 2003; Wasim et al., 2005; Israr et al., 2009; Fakhar, 2010; Karim et al., 2012; Khan, 2012; Rehman et al., 2013; Raza, 2013; Arif, 2015; Arshad, 2015; Sayira, 2015; Shujahi & Hussain, 2016;

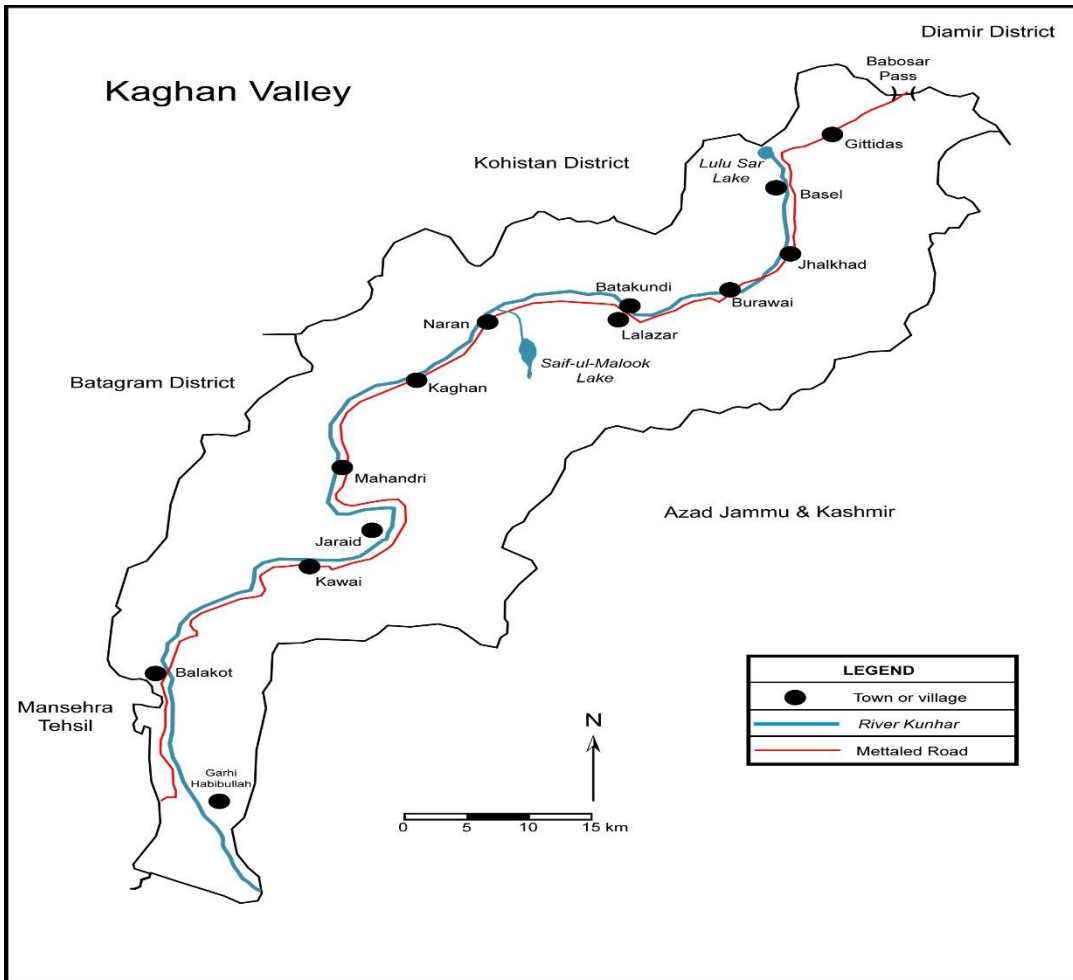


Figure 1. Map of Kaghan Valley

Akbar et al., 2017; Nasim et al., 2017). These studies are highlighting the issues of pollution and solid waste management, preservation and conservation of tourism resources, extremism/ sectarianism, inflation, unawareness of the local community and destinations' carrying capacity along with highlighting the government policies and security issues. Unfortunately, research in the field of tourism in Kaghan Valley is rare. Some of the studies (Aziz, 1998; Rasheed, 2009; Khan 2011; Ali et al., 2011, Ali n.d.) give an overview of the Kaghan Valley and its natural and cultural heritage but none of the studies discuss the problems associated with tourism in the valley thoroughly. The current study is first ever of its kind to explore the problems associated with tourism which are affecting the valley's natural and cultural resources.

Methodology

Data for this research was collected through questionnaires and field surveys. A questionnaire with open and closed ended questions was used to get the feedback from the local community to know about their perception about tourism and the problems caused by tourism in the valley. Responses from 400 community members was collected from different localities of the valley through the various teams of two field members. Some of the field members were chosen from the local community to have good results. All the field members were educated including both males and females. A unique feature of the study is that it covers almost all the strata of community both male and female from diverse age, income and educational backgrounds. For open ended questions common themes were

identified and analyzed in excel to get the percentages of the responses of the local community's perception about the problems caused by tourism. Along with questionnaires, the researchers had also in depth discussions with local community to know about their perception about tourism and tourists in the valley.

Results and Discussion

Local community identified some harms and problems due to tourism and tourists. Most of the problems and harms perceived by the locals are on their socio-cultural and natural environments. Major problems highlighted by the locals are discussed in the following lines.

Environmental Threats

Tourist destinations receiving heavy tourists' number are under environmental threats. These environmental threats of tourism may be the degradation of natural resources, water resources, and local resources (pressure on local resources like biodiversity, food and raw material and energy). During the peak season, excessive use of these resources can affect the lives of local community. Air and noise pollution, garbage and solid waste, sewage and physical impacts like construction and addition of tourism infrastructure can lead to land degradation and loss of biodiversity. United Nations World Tourism Organization in 2008, undertook a study to identify the impact of tourism on carbon emissions (internationally). The results reveal that tourism sector accounts for some 5% of total carbon emissions and the larger contributor for this is domestic tourism backed by land transport (Lemma, 2014). Land transport is the only mean of arrival in Kaghan valley and the visitors use to visit through their own cars mostly, affecting the environment especially during off road drives.

A fair number of local communities i.e. 26% are of the opinion that due to heavy tourism in the valley, natural environments are suffering (fig. 2) and there are also threats to local cultures. Local community is of the opinion that their daily life is disturbed due to congestion and overcrowding. Due to unplanned tourism, pollution is increasing in the valley day by day. Due to tourist activities environment is deteriorating (as there are no treks, camping sites etc.). Tourism has destroyed the natural beauty and water and air are being polluted. Garbage and littering everywhere are not only deteriorating the resources but eye soaring as well. Local community says that pollution/ smoke from vehicles is entering our body. A lot of natural resources are being misused for tourism purposes i.e. construction of hotels, restaurants and markets etc. and there is construction without planning. This construction without planning is disturbing the agricultural lands and the beautiful landscapes as well. Once there was a beautiful morning view or scenery, now is a multistoried hotel and nothing to see and enjoy. The construction without planning is at such a height that investors use excavators and bulldozers to smooth the land for construction. Due to tourism and heavy traffic, noise pollution is also increasing. Local community is also of the opinion that due to environmental pollution the lives of small kids and school going children are at risk, as they do not have enough immunity in young age and their health is at risk due to environmental pollution.

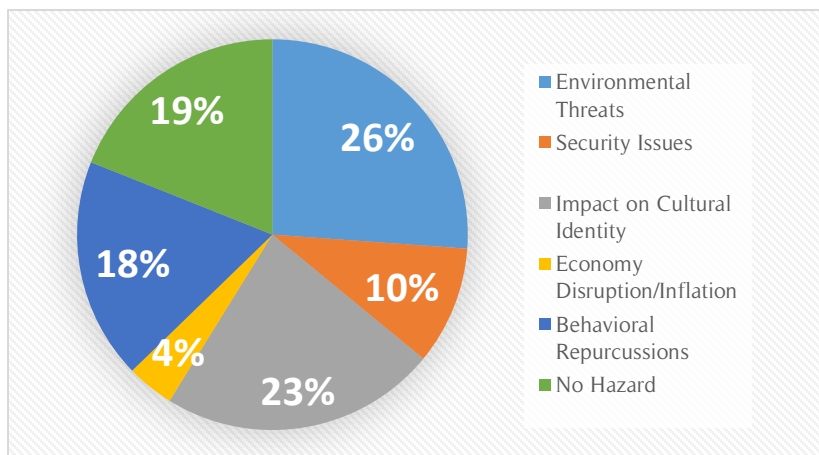


Figure 2. Problems/ harms identified by the local Community

Impact on the Culture

Social and cultural changes can be caused directly by interacting with tourists and due to the local tourism industry as well, which seeks to adopt the conditions to tourists' needs. Tourists are often regarded as the main agents of cultural change and it is important to consider other mass forms of intercultural communications in the modern world as well, such as role of media, migrations and their role in the changes of societies and cultures at tourist destinations. There are number of impacts on local communities and cultures due to the interaction between the locals in the developing countries and the foreign cultures. These social and cultural changes can be managed in a sustainable way by monitoring the number of tourists and managing the tourism offer sustainability (e.g. including and empowering the local community). So tourism should be community- based and the locals are providing services and products in their own enterprises, using some income for projects, which provide benefits to the community (Katelieva, 2019). When tourism is planned and developed on community based approach, the problems with the local communities and the cultures would be minimized. There is no community-based approach in the valley and the local community and their representatives are not involved in tourism related decisions, so the locals are depressed, and the number of problems are taking place.

A fair number of local community i.e. 23% is of the opinion that due to tourism; culture of the valley is being changed (fig. 2). Interaction with tourists since last many years and now a boost in tourism, is changing the minds of the local community and they are leaving their own culture and adopting and liking the tourists' cultures. The women and the youth are more vulnerable to these adaptations. Women further exercise the tourists' culture in the children and thus the local culture is under threat. Some of the local community also highlighted that the tourists' culture is better than local culture.

Similarly, the local community highlighted the areas where culture is being changed. Some of the locals are of the opinion that the whole culture is being shaking and is under threat due to heavy tourism and our centuries old traditions are changing. Due to demonstration effect the dress is also changing. Youth is adopting the tourists' dresses which are different from the local ones and leaving their own. Covering the head with cap was once a tradition of the valley and the youngsters did not use to go in front of the elders bare headed, now this is changing, and the youngsters freely move here and there bare-headed. Similarly, women used to wear loose shirts and trousers and cover their heads with shawls, but now after seeing the female tourists, they are adopting the dress of the tourists which for local community is immodest or offensive.

Traditional skills are on the verge of extinction. People have started the tourism related, or other businesses and jobs and their skills and knowledge are almost near to die. The number of the custodians of these arts and crafts is decreasing day by day, if the measures are not taken immediately for the revival of these skills, will be disappeared very soon. One of the examples of these dying traditions in the valley is weaving industry. There is only one weaver in the valley who has a shop in the village of Jared. He is the only known custodian of weaving industry in the valley. Similarly, handicrafts by the women, who once produced the master pieces with wool, and straws etc., are disappearing rapidly. Tourism may be a source of revival of these arts and crafts and women can contribute a lot in this industry.

Similarly, some other aspects of culture like fairs and festivals, folklores and legends, storytelling, rituals etc. are vanishing and disappearing from the daily life of the local community. *Gatka* a local dance is at the verge of disappearance. Only few elders in some of the villages of the valley know this art.

Security and Safety Issues

Local community i.e. 10% is having a threat from some of the tourists (fig. 2) and is of the opinion that there is no proper mechanism of searching the tourists while entering the valley and in some vehicles; there are criminals/kidnappers in the shape of visitors. Some of the local community is of the opinion that there is a threat of kidnapping to local school going children. There is an increase in accidents also due to heavy traffic in the tourist season as the tourists are not aware of the roads in mountainous areas. Due to heavy traffic and unskilled driving on the part of tourists, local school going children lives are at risk and they suffer a lot. Due to heavy traffic, local community suffers a lot and their daily life disturbs. Often the local community cannot get a vehicle for their hometowns due to heavy tourist's inflows and shortage of vehicles at the terminals. So, it is a big issue for the local community in tourist season. Local community is also of the view that due to increase in tourism some negative trends in local community like smuggling, theft and illegal weapons are also increasing and the youth is being involved in such activities which is not good for the local community and the valley.

Behavioural Repercussions

Tourism has a negative impact on specific groups of society in the valley and is changing their behaviors. 18% of the local community is complaining about these problems (fig. 2). These changes can clearly be seen in some of

the people related with businesses and students/ youth etc. Local community is of the view that due to tourism immodesty is taking place. Some immodest people visit the valley and defame it. Immodesty in dress is increasing and the local women are more vulnerable to it. Similarly, some of the local community is of the view that due to tourism disobedience in youth is taking place. One of the possibilities of this disobedience is that youth demands some extraordinary from their parents by observing the visitors' lifestyle, which is difficult for the parents to manage due to their limited resources, so it may also be the reaction to that.

Some of the locals are involved in the addiction and smoking. It is due to the demonstration effect. Visitors smoke openly while in the cars and during the meals and during the visits. Some of the visitors also drink, so the local community observe them and want to behave like the visitors, without knowing the impacts. Youth is getting involved rapidly in addiction and smoking.

Inflation/ High Prices

Some of the local community i.e. 4% is of the opinion that due to tourism inflation takes place and rates/ fares and prices of the daily use items and the local transport are increased in the season. Daily use items like vegetables etc. also become costly. It is due to heavy demand of these items at the destinations in the valley. Sometimes, there is shortage of some of the daily use items in the local markets of the valley. Petrol is also not available to local community especially on *Eid* days and local community movement during heavy tourists' season is restricted and become very difficult. Due to unavailability of such services, the prices become high and artificial inflation takes place. Some of the local community members say that they are very poor and hardly earn some money and food for their children and due to high prices and transportation problems their lives suffer a lot and the survival becomes difficult.

Immoral Behaviours of the Tourists in the Valley

During the survey local community was asked about their opinion regarding the interaction with tourists and their behavior. Local community highlighted various issues related with tourism and tourists and are of the opinion that due to certain reasons they do not want to interact with tourists' behavior is not encouraging for their coming generations. 48% of the local community is of the opinion that tourists are not trust worthy and they do not respect our culture and women. Local community is also of the opinion that some of the tourists do not talk in a civilized way and misbehave with the locals and due to tourists' inflation in the valley is also taking place (fig. 3). 52% of the locals say that tourists stare at local women and take photographs of them (fig. 3). Local community is justified in saying this, as some of the tourists do not respect the local culture and traditions and listen to loud music on the way and park their cars on the roads, near the houses and villages and start dancing. Such type of music and dance and even loud talks near the villages is unethical among the local community of Kaghan Valley.

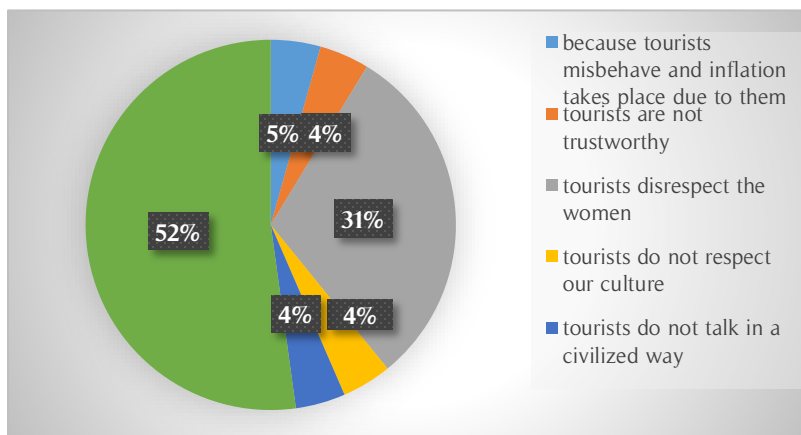


Figure 3. Value and experience of interaction with tourists

Similarly, local community complains that tourists enter their villages without their permission or without knowing the local norms and traditions. In the villages of the valley, there are no fortification of the houses and the houses are open and the strangers do not enter the village or go near the houses, but tourists do not care and enter the villages. Local community notices it and becomes aggressive. Similarly, local community is of the view

that tourists stare at their women, take photographs of their houses and women and sometimes tease them. Some of the women also expressed that their interaction with tourists is not good and tourists are not reliable and trustworthy. In the valley women use to spend most of their time outside their houses, in the fields with cattle, bringing water from the springs, washing clothes at streams etc. and often they perform these duties alone, so tourists tease them and act immorally. Such types of acts from the tourists create disturbance in the local community and often quarrel with the tourists take place. Same is the reason local community now feels great distress from tourism and tourists and regard this irresponsible tourism as terrorism and such tourists as terrorists. Local community is of the opinion that they do not need such type of tourism which is disturbing their daily life.

This irresponsible tourism is now spreading in different parts of the country and it has spread up to Hunza Valley (Gilgit) which is northern most part of Pakistan and Kalashas also complain about this behavior of tourists (authors discussion with the locals of Hunza and Kalashas recently). Such immoral attitude of the tourists in Kaghan Valley is creating conflicts with the locals and the local community dislikes such tourists and do not cooperate with them in return. There is a need to raise awareness and guide the tourists to respect the local cultures, so that friendly host and guest relationship could be established.

Some other Problems

Apart from the major problems discussed above there are some other problems which local community has highlighted during their discussions. Some of these problems are discussed as under.

Lower Educational Behaviour

Some of the local community is of the opinion that due to tourism youth is diverting from the education. In the valley there is a less trend of education in some of the villages and the youth sometimes deviate from the studies by observing the tourists. Some of the youth leaves schools at early stages and tries to earn money and travel in luxurious vehicles due to their childish thoughts and immaturity. There is a dire need to devise comprehensive plans to make the local community aware especially the youth to get education and work for the betterment of the valley and the humanity.

Religious Impacts

Some of the locals are of the opinion that tourism has some negative religious impacts and the locals especially youth is deviating from the religion. They do not pay attention to offer their prayers, recite the Holy Qura'an. Some of the locals say that some of the females have started wearing immodest dress in the valley after seeing/ observing the tourists. Some of the locals are also of the opinion that youth is also becoming disobedient and they do not obey the elders now.

Prostitution

Some of the members of the local community of the Kaghan Valley pointed out that some tourists are negatively affecting the valley and its community. Some immodest people visit and defame the valley. Few of the locals highlighted that some of the tourists are not visiting with their families or spouse etc. but these are prostitutes, who come in the form of tourists and behave immodestly in the valley. This is a very sensitive issue and should be dealt with seriously at its early stage. Tourists should be taught ethics and such criminals should be dealt with seriously. These immodest behaviors and prostitution are the beginning to defame a destination and a culture as well. So, this beautiful valley should remain beautiful and not contaminated by the illegal and immodest tourism activities. For this, clean family tourism should be promoted.

Management of Natural and Cultural Resources

Total negligence of the management of natural and cultural resources of the valley is also a very sensitive issue. There is no planning and management of the natural resources like lakes, river and streams, national parks and wildlife etc. Garbage and waste are directly thrown in the fresh waters and there is no concept of recycling or proper handling of garbage etc. Recent efforts of forest and watershed departments for the conservation of forests in the valley are praiseworthy. Similarly, cultural resources especially the arts and crafts of the valley are dying due to lack of patronage and introduction in the local and national tourism markets. Archaeological and religious sites are deteriorating and are on the verge of destruction and there is no conservation and tourism planning for such sites. Antique hunters are looting the sites and antiquities are being disappeared. There are no guides and information centers in the valley to provide proper guidance to the visitors of the valley. Visitors complain a lot

about the information centers and the guides and guidance facilities in the valley. So, there is a dire need to take measures for the above mentioned problems for the protection of the natural and cultural resources of the valley.

Conclusion

Kaghan Valley is one of the most beautiful valleys of Pakistan accommodating millions of tourists in the season. These tourists enjoy a lot from natural and cultural beauty of the area. But unfortunately, due to unplanned tourism in the valley a number of problems are also arising and disturbing not only the local community of the valley but also fragile natural environments. Irresponsible behavior of some of the tourists is also creating frustration among the local community and some of the locals are seriously thinking about the future of tourism in the valley and their coming generations. The need is, government should take tourism in the valley on priority and make a comprehensive plan for the protection of natural and cultural resources and the development of sustainable tourism in the area. If precautionary measures are not taken on priority, soon the resources will be perished and nothing left behind for future tourists and the local community.

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