

WOMEN-LED CULTURAL PRESERVATION AS A CATALYST FOR RURAL CULTURAL TOURISM: EVIDENCE FROM PAHADAN'S VILLAGE, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Subhanjani Yadav¹, Kumar Ashutosh², Anu Singh³

¹Research Scholar, ²Professor, ³Associate Professor

¹Department of Continuing Education & Extension, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract: In contemporary economies, the convergence of cultural preservation and rural tourism has emerged as a substantial pathway. Culture has emerged as a strategic resource for sustainable rural development, adding not only to cultural preservation but also to diversification of tourism, local entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic growth. Within this context, women in rural regions play a pivotal role in safeguarding traditional knowledge, crafts, performing arts, cuisine, and indigenous practices that constitute the foundation of cultural tourism. Although previous studies have independently examined cultural tourism, cultural preservation, and women empowerment, limited attention has been devoted to understanding the role of women in preserving culture and acting as a catalyst for rural cultural tourism and local economic transformation. The study employs a qualitative case study design supported by descriptive quantitative analysis. Primary data were collected from 52 women associated with the initiative of Pahadan's Village through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and structured questionnaires. Secondary data were obtained from academic publications, government reports, institutional documents, and digital sources. This research elaborated how women's engagement in preserving local culture, tradition, crafts, and practices reshapes these into tourism assets, generating employment, upgrading social recognition, and strengthening communities. The findings put forward that cultural tourism not only repositions women in the development process but also revitalizes local economies.

IndexTerms - Cultural Tourism, Sustainable Rural Tourism, Cultural Preservation, Women Empowerment, Pahadan's Village.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a culturally diverse nation like India, the role of culture from the perspective of the economy as well as society has become significant. Once viewed as only static traditions, cultural practices are now recognized as 'dynamic' resources capable of inventing livelihoods and fostering sustainable development. Mentioning sustainable, sustainable rural tourism has emerged as a key domain area for economic diversification and fostering sustainable development. Rural tourism is a niche tourism market, now becoming a full time business for rural communities. This labor intensive industry is effectively capable of providing extensive forward and backward economic linkages to build business especially for women. Within this context, the under-recognized position of women in preserving and promoting culture is critical. In the current times, India's hill stations are emerging as one of the best destinations for rural tourism owing to its increasing enthusiasm among

youths of the nation. Women as primary custodians of cultural knowledge are preserving it through crafts, rituals, cuisine, oral traditions and many other ways. Women act as custodians of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage by maintaining festivals, traditional customs, handicrafts, indigenous knowledge, thereby significantly contributing to cultural continuity and community resilience (**Rita & Kumar, 2024**). Apart from a formal interaction, women play a valuable role in informal tourism activities (handicrafts, handloom production, small shops, homestays. (**Rewal Chugh, 2012**). However, their significant contributions remain largely informal plus undervalued. They often receive economic benefits but remain excluded from decision-making. (**Scheyvens, R. 2000**). This is despite the fact that the female population has consistently grown over the decades, both in rural and urban areas. In 1951, the rural female population was 146.7 million, while in 2036, it is projected to increase to 456.7 million. Similarly, the urban female population was 28.9 million in 1951 and the number is expected to rise to 285.9 million by 2036 (**National Commission on Population, MoHFW**). However, these cultural practices are very effectively being converted into economic assets with the emergence of cultural tourism, which is not only upgrading and protecting the culture but also giving women their deserved share. This renewed sense of identity emerges as a source of political and economic empowerment for marginalized groups (**Cole, 2007**). However, the benefits are not limited to a few sectors of the society. Rural tourism effectively contributes to the growth and development of state's rural communities by complementing agriculture and providing opportunities for economic development (**Sing, 2024**).

This paper attempts to explore how cultural preservation initiatives undertaken by women can act as catalysts for rural cultural tourism, with dedicated attention on Pahadan's Village, a Himachal Pradesh-based initiative, honored by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, for its innovation in promoting cultural wool products, textile tourism and women empowerment. Its tourism infrastructure includes cottage, community spaces, and traditional village experiences. The association of women empowerment and cultural preservation is robust. In short, enabling women with power can lead to preservation of culture, both go hand in hand.

2. NEED OF THE STUDY

The existing studies focus separately on tourism, culture and women, very few explain how women transform cultural preservation into tourism-based livelihoods. To be specific, the research addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do women-led cultural preservation initiatives transform traditional cultural practices into actual tourism products?

RQ2: In what ways does women participation in cultural tourism contribute to women's economic and social empowerment?

RQ3: What are the opportunities and challenges influencing the sustainability of women-led cultural tourism initiatives in rural India?

The research contributed to the existing literature in the following important ways:

Advancement of the literature by conceptualising women-led cultural preservation as an active economic process that simultaneously safeguards cultural heritage and generates livelihood through tourism.

Provides empirical evidence from an emerging women-led cultural enterprise in the Indian Himalayan region. The region is crucial as it remains relatively underexplored in tourism.

Offers practical and effective policy insights for policy makers, government, development agencies and tourism practitioners by demonstrating how community-based entrepreneurship can promote inclusive, resilient and sustainable rural development.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Positive Contribution on Local Economy

Annanya Chauhan, Santoshi, Dr. Vaishali Gaur (2025): The study established the positive influence of culture on personality traits and socio-economic outcomes, highlighting its direct but significant role in shaping individual behaviour and **ECONOMIC SUCCESS**.

Jake Barlow (2023): In his study “The Effects of Cultural Values on Economic Growth: An Empirical Investigation”, it has been established that culture and related traits significantly influence economic growth, with pro-environmental attitudes, establishing a positive impact on national GDP growth. Cultural values are believed to shape economic outcomes, making these values important considerations for development strategies and policy-making.

Muyan Tang and Hongzhang Xu (2023): In their study “Cultural Integration and Rural Tourism Development: A Scoping Literature Review”, rural tourism is found to be the most significant method or approach to sustaining rural areas. Tourism is majorly based on different cultures (local culture); thus, it becomes important to effectively utilize the local culture to enrich tourism attractions, activities, and arts.

3.2 Crucial Role of Culture

Faith Howard (2021): The research “Culture and Economics: A Literature Review” highlighted culture as a crucial and dynamic factor influencing economic outcomes. It emphasizes the need for deeper understanding of culture, its impacts, and capacity for change.

Mausumi Das, Priyanka Arora (2020): : The study “Culture and Market: A Macroeconomic Tale of Two Institutions” takes a neutral analytical position on culture. Culture matters significantly for economic growth (especially in the beginning), but its impact is conditional (not always positive).

- **Positive:** Culture supports growth if its traits are aligned with market development (innovation)
- **Negative:** Culture hinders growth if certain traits create rigidities, ending up at a low-growth rate.

3.3 Role of Rural Diversity in Promoting Cultural Tourism

Subhasree Kar, Deepak Kumar Sahoo (2016): India's diversity, especially in the rural region, offers tremendous potential for tourism, which effectively generates employment opportunities, sustainable livelihood for the local communities. However, this successful relationship between diversity and tourism requires addressing the core issues such as poverty reduction, development of a vibrant local economy and focus on regeneration of the old/local art and craft.

Sandhini Garg, Satpal (2022): India's cultural diversity is a boon for the nation's economy. Culture and tourism go hand in hand. Culture creates tourism, thus, further promotes and preserves culture.

UN Tourism Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics (2025): Rural tourism should promote and protect cultural heritage and pass on to future generations.

3.4 Growing Significance of Cultural Tourism

Greg Richards (2005): In the areas of global tourism, cultural tourism has emerged as a significant section as a source of cultural consumption. Cultural tourism has now become a potential source for tourism growth, attracts high spending visitors and does less damage to the environment.

János Csapó (2012): The research establishes the positive and important role of cultural tourism in today's modern tourism industry.

Ashish Raina (ROLE OF CULTURE IN ATTRACTING TOURISM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MAJOR TOURIST SPOTS IN NORTHERN INDIA): The mutually beneficial relationship between tourism and culture reinforces the competitiveness and attractiveness among countries and regions. Culture has emerged as an important aspect of tourism that is creating distinctiveness in today's world of busy markets. It not only supports the mainstream market but also enhances and creates income opportunities for the segment that supports and strengthens cultural production and its promotion.

3.5 Rural Tourism

Jitendra Singh (2015): India's rural tourism is now one of the niche tourism products. It holds good potential to attract upmarket clients moving towards the rural environment. This results in creation of employment in villages and thus brings a halt on the exodus from villages to major cities.

Srijib Shankar Jha (2021): India, benefitted by its rich cultural heritage and history, is a world-renowned tourist destination. Its tourism industry is emerging as a major economic driver, contributing 11% of global GDP. The country is equally benefitted by its rural tourism, which has enormous potential due to its vast rural diversity. This segment is fast spreading due to a counter-urbanisation syndrome, which has developed as a result of the stress of city living.

Liliana Reina-Usuga, Francisco Camino, Gema Gomez-Casero, Carol Angélica Jara Alba (2024): Rural tourism is a form of landscape conservation and sustainable development that is emerging as a solution to respond to the challenges of the rural regions in the country. In this scenario, the study argues for a more inclusive and participatory approach to achieve sustainable results.

.6 Shift in Capitalism

Amlanjyoti Goswami, Aromar Revi, Shriya Anand (2013): As per the study “India’s Cultural and Creative Economy: New Imaginations and Emerging Practices”, there has been a major shift in modern capitalism with the rise of the cultural economy, where culture functions both:

- **Economic input** (adding symbolic value to product)
- **Economic output** (production of cultural goods and services)

Thus, contributing to growth, employment and global competitiveness.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach. It is also supplemented with limited quantitative insights. Pahadan’s Village, the **study area** is selected due to its specific focus on women-led cultural initiatives. To collect data, in-depth interviews with women participants and stakeholders (target population) are conducted. Other than direct interviews, participants' observations are noted to understand lived experiences. Surveys are also conducted to assess the income and empowerment indicators. In the initial level, Purposive Sampling of women engaged in cultural practices was undertaken. It was complemented by Snowball Sampling, in order to expand the participant base.

4.2 Data Collection

A total of 52 women, connected with Pahadan's, took part in the research examining how cultural preservation initiatives undertaken by women can act as catalysts for rural cultural tourism and contribute to economic advancement and social

progress. Major villages include Manjhol and Talwadi villages, Blocks (Rong, Nyoma and Rupshow), Seraj Valley and other nearby areas.

Each participant played an active role in the initiative, thus, were able to make significant contributions for the research as well.

Table I: Women's Participation and Employment Generation in Pahadan's Village

Category	Number/Details
Women Artisans Engaged	254 (approximately)
Tourism Support Staff (Homestay)	13 local individuals
Additional Workers (Temporary)	Seasonal and activity based employment
Research Participants	52 (women)

Table II: Average Monthly Income Generation through Cultural Activities

Activity	Avg Monthly Income (Rs)
Knitting	Rs 5000- Rs 6000
Weaving	Rs 6000- Rs 7000
Stitching and Garment Production	Rs 20000 and above
Additional Tourism Activities	Varies (depending on participation)

4.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis approach: The data were systematically analysed with the help of thematic analysis approach. The focus was laid on identifying recurring patterns, themes and relationships concerning cultural preservation, tourism building and empowerment of women.

Systematic Coding: Three key stages were conducted in the analysis.

First Stage: Data from interview transcripts and observation notes were examined through open coding, where the data (experiences, participant's perceptions) were identified and categorised to enable the identification of preliminary concepts related to employment opportunities, cultural practices, tourism and transformation in the society.

Second Stage: Axial coding established connections among the identified concepts. Similar codes were grouped into broader thematic categories (such as economic empowerment, cultural preservation and transmission, conversion of cultural assets into tourism products, women participation and challenges faced by them).

Third Stage: Selective coding integrated the selected theme into a coherent analytical framework. The analysis led to the understanding of how cultural preservation activities led by women contributed to rural cultural tourism and how the promoted tourism then generated economic and social benefits for women and the local communities.

Descriptive Statistics: To complement the qualitative findings, the collected survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and averages). The statistics were used to assess the changes in the employment opportunities, change in income levels, women empowerment and other related changes associated with the initiative.

The clubbing of both qualitative and quantitative findings enable the triangulation of the outcome/evidence, thus, enhancing the credibility and validity of the research. This mixed approach effectively provided a comprehensive understanding of the positive relationship between rural cultural tourism, women-led cultural preservation, and socio-economic development.

5. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The study area in focus 'Pahadan's Village (Pahadan's Guild Pvt. Ltd.)' is founded by Himachali woman Praveen Verma. Products/Services (tourism) produced here derive their identity from local culture, traditions, heritage and practices. This culturally rooted brand works to empower rural women, by promoting them to produce cultural products and crafts that not only preserve culture but build dignity-driven livelihoods for them. They provide a cultural, rustic setup featuring wooden cottages and a mitti ka kitchen (mud kitchen). This initiative has changed the perspective of rural or village tourism by making it a product-based experience rather than sightseeing. This rural tourism initiative is receiving significant recognition for its incredible work, such as, being selected among the Top 6 Startups in India at the **National Startup Awards 2026**, receiving recognition from the Ministry of Textiles and various others.

The study discloses that women are now not limited as mere passive carriers of culture but acting as the active agents in the production, preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge. Their active involvement in cultural practices including traditional crafts, cuisine, and rituals demonstrates that culture works as a lived and 'gendered' custom, embedded in everyday life. Below are the major findings of this study:

Transformation of cultural practices within the framework of cultural tourism into marketable economic assets. Cultural practices once confined to the domestic sphere (food preparation, handicrafts, and local customs) are now increasingly repositioned as tourism products. Tourism should be understood within the broader context of local community development, where interactions between visitors/tourists and residents influence social, economic and territorial transformation (*Costa, 2015*).

Broader shift within the cultural economy, where the symbolic and experiential values have become central to economic exchange. The intangible cultural heritage is being commodified, enabling employment opportunities and income generation while also retaining its authenticity.

Continuous reinterpretation and production of cultural practices by women, enabling cultural continuity while adapting to changing socio-economic contexts.

Establishing cultural tourism as a critical mediating link between women empowerment and cultural preservation. Through tourism's institutional and market interface, culture acquires economic and social value, thus, creating a link.

Cultural Preservation -> Cultural Practices -> Cultural Tourism -> Economic Opportunities/Employment -> Empowerment

Multi-dimensional empowerment outcomes: Economic empowerment, social empowerment, psychological empowerment. The study establishes that empowerment is not uniform in nature, but gradual and context-dependent. It varies across individuals based on access to opportunities.

Subtle restructuring of gender roles by effective integration of women into tourism-related economic activities. Engaged in culturally defined roles, women's positions are revalued and repositioned within the economic sphere. However, there still exists patriarchal norms to influence the extent of this transformation.

Establishing culture as a dynamic entity.

5.1 Challenges Faced by the Initiative

The study identified various challenges faced by the initiative such as difficult terrain, limited rural infrastructure, natural disasters, need of continuous efforts for promotion and market linkages, risk of excessive commodification of culture, dependence on continuous tourist inflow and product sales.

The research effectively finds Pahadaan Villages as a community-based, culturally rooted model of rural development, where traditional cultural values serve as both identity and economic asset; women function as value creators and tourism acts as an ‘enabling platform’.

6. ETHICS STATEMENT

The informed consent was obtained from all participants and the research followed accepted ethical standards for social science research.

7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the research.

8. CONCLUSION

This study effectively establishes that cultural preservation led by women can function as a powerful catalyst for rural cultural tourism. Establishing culture as a dynamic and productive resource, the research acts beyond conventional perspectives that treat culture as merely a static and symbolic entity. The findings focus on cultural tourism as a provider of crucial interface through which cultural or traditional practices are converted or transformed into effective economic opportunities. In this journey, women emerge not merely as custodians but as entrepreneurs, knowledge holders of customs, and agents of change in the society. This research, at the same time, underscores that this empowerment established through culture is neither automatic nor uniform. Shaped by local socio-cultural contexts, access to resources, effective institutional support, beneficial government interventions/policies, the case of Pahadaan Village offers significant insights into how localized, women-led activities can integrate culture with sustainable development strategies. However, the existence of structural constraints (patriarchal norms, market limitation, lack of awareness) continues to influence outcomes. This study also contributes to the broader discourse on cultural economy and demonstrates its effective leverage as both an economic and social resource. However, the long-term sustainability of such models is dependent on maintaining a delicate balance between economic commercialization and cultural authenticity, thus, ensuring that cultural values and practices are not reduced to mere commodities/items.

To sum up, the study requests for a more effective, integrated and context-sensitive method to positive development, where culture, gender and economy are seen as parallel domains. The study calls for recognizing and strengthening of women’s role within this nexus to provide a pathway toward more inclusive and sustainable rural development, influenced by culture.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study is mainly focused on Pahadaan’s Village. Their core tourism activities include slow tourism, cultural tourism, rooted fashion, handicrafts, weaving, knitting. The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources, including

direct interviews (online mode) and data obtained from government reports and case studies. However, it has certain gaps and limitations:

Limited Data: Since the initiative is located at a distance, the coverage of sources for primary data is limited. Though it includes direct interviews and interaction for data, the participation is limited.

Limited Focus: The research is solely focused on one single initiative, thus may not fully apply to other areas or regions.

Despite the limitations, the research effectively provides the insights regarding the important role played by the women in promoting their local culture and also contributing to the economy. Also, it suggests corrective measures and policies required for the identified issues and gaps.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There is further scope for comparative studies across regions; quantitative measurement of women empowerment and longitudinal studies on cultural sustainability.

References:

- [1] Cole, S. (2007) Beyond Authenticity and Commodification. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34, 943-960.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2007.05.004>
- [2] Costa, N. (2015). Remembering Guido Martinotti as an applied sociologist to the urban mobilities and local community. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 5(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2015.51001>
- [3] Giampiccoli, A., & Saayman, M. (2017). *Community-based tourism, responsible tourism, and infrastructure development and poverty*. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 6(2), 1–28.
- [4] Rewal Chugh, S. (2012). *Empowering women through tourism: A study of Kullu Valley*. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism*, 1(2), 215–227.
- [5] Rita, & Kumar, J. (2024). *The role of women in preserving and promoting cultural heritage*. *Universal Research Reports*, 11(5), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.36676/urr.v11.i5.1495>
- [6] Scheyvens, R. (2000). *Promoting women's empowerment through involvement in ecotourism: Experiences from the Third World*. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 8(3), 232–249.
- [7] Singh, R. (2024). *A study on rural tourism in Himachal Pradesh: Impact on state economy, culture and biosphere*. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 12(5), IJCRT24A5826.
<https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT24A5826.pdf>

- [8] Seočanac, M., Đorđević, N., & Pantović, D. (2024). Cultural tourism in rural areas: Mapping research trends through bibliometric and content analysis. *Ekonomika Poljoprivrede (Economics of Agriculture)*, 71(1), 205–226. <https://doi.org/10.59267/ekoPolj2401205>
- [9] Tang, M., & Xu, H. (2023). *Cultural integration and rural tourism development: A scoping literature review*. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 4(1), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp4010006>
- [10] Timothy, D. J., & Boyd, S. W. (2003). *Heritage Tourism*. Pearson Education.
<https://www.routledge.com/Heritage-Tourism/Timothy-Boyd/p/book/9780582369702>

Copyright & License:

© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.