



Sacred Landscapes and Religious Tourism Potential in Humla

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the sacred landscapes and religious tourism potential of Humla district, a culturally rich and remote district in western Nepal. For this purpose, employing qualitative research method, uncontrolled observation and Key Informant Interview (KII) as data collection tools are used in the study. For analysis, the themes were designed and analysed them thematically. The finding indicated that Humla as a unique destination blending spirituality and tourism, attracting both local and international visitors to its sacred landscapes and vibrant cultural heritage. The major attractions of Humla include Halji, Ralling and Yalbabg Gompas for typical Tibetan cultures, natural meditation caves, Buddhism studies. Limi Lapcha offers breathtaking views of Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, along with opportunities to observe diverse wildlife in the high-altitude wildlife park. Meanwhile, Humla serve as the nearest gateway to Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, having significant potential for cross-border religious tourism. Lower parts of Humla include Shamanism, Masto tradition and other different Khas celebrations and one of the Hindu sacred sites Kharpunath. These places and practices offer opportunities for socio-cultural, meditation, and spiritual exploration. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of sustainable practices to balance tourism development with ecological and cultural conservation and recommends policymakers prioritize the promotion of Humla's tourism destination.

Keywords

Spiritual sites, Religious site, Cultural tourism, Tourism potentiality, Tourism sustainability

Introduction

Religious or pilgrimage tourism is a form of spiritual tourism that involves travel to sacred sites for faith-based experiences, often leading to personal transformation and cultural exchange (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). This form of tourism plays a crucial role in fostering religious devotion, cultural heritage preservation, and sustainable economic opportunities for local communities (Rinschede, 1992). More broadly, spiritual

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and religious tourism encompasses journeys undertaken with the intention of experiencing or participating in spiritual or faith-based customs, sites, or activities. Such travel often involves visits to places of worship, including temples, churches, mosques, shrines, and monasteries, as well as participation in rituals, festivals, prayer, or meditation. While religious tourism is typically centered around specific faith-based practices and locations, spiritual tourism extends beyond religious boundaries, emphasizing inner peace, self-discovery, and a fusion of diverse traditions and ideologies. Beyond personal enrichment, these forms of tourism foster cultural exchange, promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among people of different beliefs.

A significant example of religious and spiritual tourism can be seen in the sacred landscapes of the Limi Valley in Humla, Nepal. Home to centuries-old Buddhist monasteries, this remote Himalayan region attracts pilgrims, scholars, and travelers seeking spiritual enlightenment and cultural immersion (Bernbaum, 1997). These monasteries not only serve as centers of Buddhist learning and devotion but also contribute to the development of religious tourism, helping preserve the region's cultural heritage while offering sustainable tourism opportunities for the local population.

Humla, one of Nepal's most remote and culturally vibrant regions, has significant spiritual and religious value, making it a distinctive destination for pilgrims and spiritually inclined travellers. Located in the western part of Nepal, this isolated area is deeply rooted in ancient spiritual traditions with strong connections to Buddhism and Hinduism. Humla serves as a primary gateway to Mount Kailash in Tibet, regarded as one of the holiest mountains in Hinduism and Buddhism. Pilgrims from across the world pass through Humla to visit Mount Kailash, believed in Hindu mythology to be the abode of Lord Shiva and a major spiritual site for Tibetan Buddhism. The arduous journey through Humla to Kailash is seen as both a physical and a spiritual challenge, symbolizing the quest for enlightenment. This sacred pilgrimage route, which passes through Simikot, the capital of Humla district, has been traveled for centuries (Adhikari, 2019).

Humla is home to a diverse mix of ethnic groups, including the Lama and Khas Arya communities, who practice a syncretic blend of Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, and indigenous shamanistic traditions. The Lama community, residing primarily in the northern regions near the Tibetan border, follows Tibetan Buddhism and maintains strong cultural ties with Tibet, while the Khas Arya community, predominant in the southern areas, adheres to Hindu traditions. Both communities have preserved indigenous rituals, including nature worship and shamanistic practices, reflecting the deep interweaving of religious traditions in the region (Shahi, 2021; Bishop, 1990). One of the community of Humla-the Lama are practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism, observes major religious festivals such as Losar (Tibetan New Year) and Saga Dawa (which honors the birth, enlightenment, and death of Buddha), which attract tourist's eager to experience the distinctive religious traditions. Meanwhile, Hindu rituals are significant for the Khas Arya population, with festivals such as Dashain and Tihar being widely celebrated. The spiritual importance of these events, coupled with the unspoiled natural beauty, creates a unique opportunity for spiritual tourism and cultural discovery (Bhandari, 2021).

Humla's Raling Gompa is one of the most significant Buddhist monasteries, drawing spiritual tourists with an interest in Tibetan Buddhism (Shahi, 2021). Nestled within Humla's tranquil and scenic landscape, the monastery serves as a key site for meditation and pilgrimage, particularly during religious festivals (Bishop, 1990). In addition, several natural landmarks in Humla, such as its rivers, mountains, and caves, hold sacred significance. For example, the Karnali River is revered by Hindus as a holy waterway, and many pilgrims immerse themselves in its waters, believing that it can cleanse them of their sins (Rinschede, 1992).

In recent years, spiritual tourism in Humla has expanded, offering economic benefits to local communities and helping to preserve and revitalize local religious and cultural traditions (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Tourists contribute to the local economy by staying in local accommodations, purchasing handicrafts, and employing local guides (Shrestha, 2020). Furthermore, the influx of visitors provides the local population with opportunities to maintain and celebrate their religious and cultural heritage, which has been preserved for centuries despite the region's remote location (Bernbaum, 1997). However, the growth in the number of tourists has raised concerns about the sustainability of these practices. Over-tourism risks damaging the region's delicate ecosystem and cultural identity (Nepal, 2003). Therefore, managing spiritual tourism in Humla is essential to preserve the sanctity of its landscapes and cultural practices (Shrestha, 2020).

The spiritual and religious significance of Humla lies in its role as a pilgrimage route, its rich cultural diversity, and its numerous sacred sites that hold deep spiritual meaning for both Hindus and Buddhists. Tourism in Humla, driven by the quest for spiritual fulfillment, has the potential to not only support the local economy, but also to preserve the unique religious traditions of the region. However, sustainable tourism practices are crucial to ensure that Humla's spiritual and cultural heritage remains intact for future generations.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

A sacred scape is a place that has religious or cultural significance as stated by Singh (2013). Moreover, he emphasizes the interconnectedness of physical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions in such landscapes, highlighting their role in sustaining both local identity and global heritage (Singh, 2013). However, the increasing interest in these sites as tourist destinations raises critical questions about the balance between preservation and commercialization, particularly in fragile ecosystems like Humla.

Tourism in sacred landscapes, such as those in Limi Valley, often brings both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it can provide economic benefits to local communities, fostering cultural exchange and raising awareness about the importance of preserving these sites (Allerton, 2020). On the other hand, unregulated tourism risks commodifying sacred spaces, disrupting religious practices, and exacerbating environmental degradation. The case of Limi Valley is particularly poignant, as its remoteness has historically preserved its cultural and ecological integrity, but growing interest in Himalayan tourism threatens to alter this delicate balance. In this regard, Shackley (2001) argue that sustainable tourism models, which prioritize community involvement and respect for sacredness, are essential in mitigating these risks. Moreover, sustainable tourism minimizes negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts while maximizing benefits for local communities and ecosystems. It seeks to balance the needs of tourists, the environment, and host communities, ensuring that tourism development does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UNWTO, 2020). This approach often involves promoting environmental conservation, supporting local economies, and respecting cultural heritage, as seen in community-based tourism models (Sharpley, 2020). Additionally, sustainable tourism also encourages the use of eco-friendly practices, such as reducing carbon footprints and preserving biodiversity, to create a harmonious relationship between tourism and the natural world (Buckley, 2012). By integrating principles of sustainability, tourism can become a tool for fostering long-term economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. In the case of Limi Valley, the approach of sustainable tourism could be suitable frameworks to maintain surrounding landscapes with their spiritual vitality remaining economically sustainable for future generations.

Additionally, Olsen and Timothy (2022) explored the historical and contemporary debates surrounding the definitions, theories, and concepts of religious and spiritual tourism, addressing both the supply and demand dynamics of these markets while examining global management challenges. Their work delves into key themes such as religious theme parks, UNESCO's branding of religious heritage, gender dynamics, performance, popular culture, pilgrimage, environmental impacts, and concerns related to fear and terrorism, among others. The concluding section of their study highlights emerging trends and outlines a future research agenda for the field of religious and spiritual tourism. Adopting an interdisciplinary and international perspective, this comprehensive insight bridges the fields of tourism, religion, cultural studies, and heritage studies. (Olsen et al., 2021). Drawing insights from the spirituality, religion, and tourism, Hanefar, Sa'ari and Siraj (2016) conducted content analysis on more than 40 dimensions of spiritual tourism, organizing them within this model. Their findings suggested that tourism can promote spiritual growth through religious and secular experiences. They propose a conceptual model of Spiritual Tourism with seven themes: Meaning/Purpose of Life, Consciousness, Transcendence, Spiritual Resources, Self-Determination, Reflection (Soul Purification) and Spiritual Coping, providing a systematic guide for future research in this area (Halim et al., 2021).

Pilgrimage and religious tourism offer a special nexus of spirituality, culture, and contemporary travel, combining religious and secular experiences while tackling issues brought on by their rising popularity. "Faith tourism," sometimes known as religious tourism, refers to travel to places of worship that promote

spiritual rejuvenation and individual change. One subset, pilgrimages, are primarily driven by sacred intent and serve as a conduit to cultural traditions, spiritual discoveries, and divine truths. Every year, millions of people travel on these pilgrimages, which combine spiritual pursuits with cultural experience and are essential to religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Sikhism. Ancient forerunners of contemporary tourism, pilgrimage routes demonstrate the blending of religious and secular motives to produce ageless experiences that create enduring memories and keepsakes. These itineraries, however, struggle to strike a balance between the demands of cultural tourism and their spiritual core. Their sanctity might be undermined by commodification, which would transform holy locations into tourist destinations where rituals could be overtaken by sightseeing. Although these conflicts, religious tourism makes a substantial contribution to the travel and tourism industry by providing chances to enhance cultural and spiritual aspects while promoting heritage. To maintain the spiritual holiness of pilgrimage sites while meeting the varied expectations of visitors, a nuanced approach is necessary to guarantee that they continue to serve as significant links between the past, present, and spiritual goals of mankind (Jongmeewasin, S., 2016).

Empirical Review

Religious and spiritual tourism in Nepal's Karnali Province, particularly in Humla District, holds immense potential due to its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty. Several studies have explored the opportunities and challenges associated with tourism development in this region. Badal (2021) highlights the diverse cultural attractions of Karnali, including the Khas Aryan culture, Masto worship, Deuda dance, and Himalayan Buddhism. His research suggests that the region's cultural elements, combined with its natural landscapes, make Karnali a significant hub for cultural and religious tourism. However, the study also points out that many of these attractions remain underexplored, necessitating strategic development efforts to unlock their full potential (Badal, 2021).

Similarly, Badal (2022) explores the pristine natural landscapes of Karnali and their role in complementing cultural and religious sites. He argues that the untouched environment, along with cultural landmarks, offers a unique experience for tourists seeking both spiritual enrichment and scenic beauty. The study emphasizes the need for integrating natural and cultural tourism to create a more holistic visitor experience (Badal, 2022). Sharma (2024) further examines Humla's religious and cultural heritage, particularly its proximity to sacred sites such as Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar. His study suggests that the promotion of these landmarks, along with the district's distinct Jadan and Khasan cultures, could significantly contribute to local economic development. Sharma stresses the importance of raising awareness and strategically positioning Humla within global tourism circuits to enhance socio-economic benefits for the region (Sharma, 2024).

Additionally, the *Karnali Province Tourism Master Plan* (2021) outlines strategic approaches for tourism development, focusing on Humla and Dolpa districts. It highlights the inclusion of the region in the Kailash Sacred Landscape (KSL) initiative as a significant opportunity to promote religious and spiritual tourism. The plan advocates for sustainable tourism practices that preserve the region's ecological and cultural integrity while ensuring economic benefits for local communities (Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest, and Environment, Karnali Province, 2021). Furthermore, a case study on pro-poor tourism initiatives in Humla discusses the role of religious and spiritual tourism in poverty alleviation and sustainable development. The study underscores the potential for tourism to generate income for local communities while also acknowledging challenges such as infrastructure limitations and the need for capacity building among local stakeholders (SNV Nepal, 2021).

Based on the reviews of previous studies, this paper compiles various factual details about the region's pristine natural attractions, portraying Karnali as a "wonderland" for tourists seeking to experience unspoiled natural beauty. Moreover, it highlights the uniqueness of Nepal, specifically Karnali, as a centre of natural tourism, describing the province as a treasure trove of both material and spiritual elements. The article claims that Karnali's natural and cultural heritage, including its arts, architecture, traditions, and lifestyle, make it a must-visit destination. Despite its rich landscape, the province remains largely unexplored, adding to its

appeal for adventurers and scholars alike. This paper serves as a guide for field researchers in tourism, emphasizing Karnali's potential for discovery and exploration.

Research Methodology

The main objective of the research was to explore the spiritual and religious significance of Humla as a tourist destination. In particular, it aimed to identify the spiritual and religious potential and assess the sustainability of tourism in Humla. For this purpose, this study employed a qualitative research method based on researcher's observations in natural settings and Key Informant Interview. The data were collected for the study through direct observation of sacred landscapes and socio-cultural practices of people long with Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) involving six participants: one teacher, one social activist, one politician, one travel agent, one priest and one monastery Lama, focusing on potentiality of religious tourism. The observation place and practices and respondents for interview are selected conveniently. Moreover, researcher used uncontrolled observation, which took place in natural settings (Mazhar et. al (2021). Researcher observed the local culture, and religious and spiritual sites and practices of Humli people. For the collection of data, a checklist was used to record notable points related to the issues. Researcher cross-checked the collected information with other sources to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data. For analysis, researcher reviewed prepared notes in the field to identify themes and insights, presenting findings in a structured format that highlights major observations and their implications for significances of tourism in Humla. Additionally, researcher used the documents related to the issue of the study for the analysis and discuss.

Findings and Discussion

Sacred Landscapes Tourism in Humla

Humla is a sacred land, home to various deities. According to a local politician in Simikot, Humli people refer to their land as '*Devapuri*,' meaning the land governed by gods and goddesses. However, Jadan area is in the 'natural hibernation' around four to five months in winter and the people of this area involved in semi-nomadic economic activities. The potential for religious tourism in Humla can be explored by distinguishing between internal and external sacred sites. Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar in Tibet are key external sacred sites. Internal, own sacred sites can be divided into two parts: Jadan (Tibetan Buddhist Culture) and Khasan (Sinja Valley Civilization). Jadan, the upper part of Humla, is considered as part of ancient Tibetan culture and Buddhist monasteries, while Khasan, the lower part of Humla, is predominantly influenced by Hinduism-particularly Shamanism and the Masto tradition.

Among the different dimensions of Nepalese development, tourism is one that can be a basic livelihood mode in Humla and generally in Karnali province. We observed that Mt. Kailash (6714m) and Lake Manasarovar with Nepal's nearest border with Tibet China along its remnants of the Jadan and Khasan cultures with them will transform into modernity. Exposing this insight out in global phenomena will help to create awareness that will significantly change the socio-economy of the area. Connecting to this fact, Lama (2012), a writer and former minister of Nepal, Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar are the centre of the world and the spiritual cosmos- axis of all religions. It has one mountain, two lakes, and four rivers. It is believed to be mounted on the vehicles of four great creatures: the horse to the east, the peacock to the south, the elephant to the west, and the lion to the north. . . and four rivers originate from their mouths (Khababas) of those creatures- Bramhaputra, Karnali, Sutlej, and Indus respectively. Thus, Mount Kailash and Manasarovar are the icons of tourism destinations in the world. Regarding the potentialities of tourism in Humla, one of the local teachers of Simikot shared: *"Our region, Humla, is incredibly rich in different dimensions of Kashan and Jadan cultural heritage as well as Humla is ancient economic and pilgrimage trail to Tibet and Kailash Manasarovar respectively. However, it lacks proper transportation facilities, so, our heritage sites remain overlooked. As a result, very few tourists visit these places."* The nature and culture of Humla is very rich in promoting tourism industry. However, it is still in overshadowed because of publicity and infrastructural facilities. Most of the respondents were agreed that Humla is overlook due to the proper transportation facilities. The dominant nature and culture and the perfect harmony between the two Shamanic communities (Jad and Khas) are two vital instruments for tourism promotion in the Karnali area.

We found that All religious faiths Hindu, Buddhist, Bon and Jain celebrate and worship Mt. Kailash and Manasarovar such as Hindu worship as adobe of Lord Shiva Parbati, Buddhist worship as gigantic mandala and Guru Rimpoche, Bon worship as Bon Mountain with spiritual knowledge and Jain worship as Mt. Asthapada or Rishabanatha. The icon Mt. Kailash (the abode of Shiva) and Lake Mansarover are venerated by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Bons adherents. Tourists and pilgrims perform the kora (circumambulation ritual journey to Kailash Mandala (Lama 2012). From our direct observation, the potential of tourism in Humla is simmering in good posture. The opening of Kailash Manasarovar visits in Tibet China with two border passes Hilsa (3640m) and Syar(4900m) Lapcha from Nepal, and Hilsa-Taklakot-Manasarovar is just two to three hours drive and Lapcha pass is the most visit spot which is closest and clearest sighting of Kailash-Manasarovar and on the other hand, construction of Karnali corridor, Jitegadhi-Hilsa bring substantial impact in the region and particularly in Humla, Mugu, Kalikot and Bajura districts in particular. Regarding the expenses to reach in this area, one of the travel agent in Kathmandu expressed:

Until now, Indian pilgrims have to pay around Rs 250 to 300 thousand a package deal to Kailash Manasarover. Likewise, Nepali has to pay around NC Rs 150 thousand per person. If they use this land route Karnali corridor to Kailash this expenses will come down at least 20 to 30 percent less. Land route visitors will spend at least two days on the way to Kailash inside Nepal, i.e.; Surkhet to Hilsa.

In our observation, the significant potentiality of Humla is the Kailash Manasarover, which is the nearest distance and cheapest in terms of expenses, if road connectivity functions well to reach there.

In Humla, internally the visitors can be attracted to visit four Naths- Khochernath (Tibet), Kharpunath, Chhanyanath, and Chandannath with Khasan culture taste and world famous Gompas of Limi valley Halzi and Jang, Yalbang, Tumkot, Muchu and Railing Gompas on the way to the Kailash Manasarovar pilgrimage tour with Jadan cultural taste. We found that the beautiful tourist destinations of upper part of the Limi Lapcha (4900m) where we can see Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar with bare eye, we can worship Mt Kailash and Manasarovar from this view point. The meadow is like open zoo, can observed like flocks of wild horses, wild yaks, blue sheep, wolves and marmots (feus), and by chance snow leopard, Dhanfe, and altitude ducks, etc. Visitors can trek a lot to Limi valley and Lapcha pass, Railing Gumpa (3930m), Simikot to Hilsa and many other unexplored destinations and products within Humla and neighbouring districts. It needs to explore, collect, produce, and expose in the market.

Despite its cultural and religious significance, Humla, a district in Nepal's Karnali Province, remains one of the country's most remote regions due to its limited road connectivity to the capital, Kathmandu. However, this is expected to change soon with the completion of the Kharpunath Bridge at Kharpunath of Karnali Corridor. Once operational, this bridge will significantly improve connectivity between Humla and the neighbouring Tibetan border, marking a transformative step for the region. Historically, the socio-economic conditions in Humla and the broader Karnali region were adversely affected by the closure of trans-Himalayan trade routes following the 1962 Sino-Indian war. The reopening of these routes, along with the development of the Karnali Corridor motor road from the south, is expected to bring substantial economic benefits to the region, fostering accessibility and development in this remote area. However, challenges remain. As one of the teacher of Simikot, Humla, explained, *"The road track has just started now in our area. It is not functioning well. How can we promote our heritage or make money from tourism without transportation? Right now, these things feel like a faraway dream."* This inaccessibility has hindered the promotion of cultural and religious tourism in Humla, despite its immense potential. The region is deeply rooted in the ancient cultures of the Jadan (Tibetan culture) and Khasan, which are now beginning to gain global recognition. With improved infrastructure and connectivity, the socio-economic landscape of the Karnali Province and its rich religious and cultural heritage are poised to enter a new era of development and unlocking ample opportunities.

One of the local priest of Kharpunatha, Humla highlighted, *"The Khasan culture, traditions, and practices are deeply rooted in shamanism and Masto and Madhu tradition. During shamanic festivals, shamans transform into wild Dhamis, Jhankris, and Gurus, embodying their spiritual roles"*. In our observation, Humla is a land of *tantramantra*. Dhami and Jhankris are mediator between God/Goddess and people where Pujari prepares and manages puja. They hold and belief on *tantramantra* over the indigenous

communities in the Humla. The ancient healing practices by Shamans and Dhamis, Jhaknkris are still in practice. Moreover, we observed that unique marriage systems, such as polygamy in the Khasan region and polyandry in the Jadan region, have historically been practiced in these areas. Regarding these marriage system, one of the word chairperson of Namkha rural municipality Humla mentioned; *"These are the long tradition of local people which is prevail in certain communities not in all areas of Humla. Now these types of marriage system are in verge of extinct"* There are various arguments both supporting and opposing these traditions, the validity and relevance of these justifications remain open to debate and may require further examination in the future.

Additionally, rigorous long-term meditation practices were once common but are now rarely observed. Local people believe that, one of the Buddhist yogi Milarepa, mediated in various natural caves in this area, which later became sacred sites in Buddhism so it has high potentiality for meditation. The Limi valley exposes the ancient live Tibetan culture. The meditation practices in caves and Gompas are still there, e.g., Manepane cave, Chan-Se Nāmkā Dzong cave, Ralling meditation cave and Halji cave.

Sustainability of Tourism in Humla

In our observation, eco-tourism promotion is encouraged by preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the Humli people. Similarly, Jadan and Khasan cultures deserve high-value cultural potentiality in Karnali region

Additionally, infrastructure developments such as the Karnali Corridor and motorable roads are playing a crucial role in improving accessibility and driving economic transformation in the district (Lama, 2012). Simikot, the headquarters of Humla district, is now connected to Tibet by two motor able roads:

Hepka-Kermi-Muchu-Yari-Nara La Pass (4,620m) -Hilsa: This route is particularly suitable for trade with the Purang County of the Ngari Prefecture in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) (Gurung, 2018).

Hepka-Sheliman-Nyalu Pass (4,995m)-Talung (Jade)-Lapcha Pass: Known as the Kailash Darshan Marga, this route serves as a key tourism pathway to the sacred sites of Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar (Sharma, 2020).

While these roads bring significant benefits, there is a need for careful planning and sustainable practices during their construction (Thapa, 2019). Many respondents expressed concerns about the potentiality and impacts on local heritage sites. They acknowledged the importance of motorable roads for economic and social development but also worried about the possible encroachment on and damage to their ecological, cultural and historical landmarks. One of the teacher of Humla concerned, *"Environmental and cultural impact assessments must be mandatory before construction and development should be environmental friendly"* Therefore, it is essential to balance development with heritage conservation, ensuring that road construction is carried out thoughtfully to preserve the region's unique cultural identity while fostering growth (UNESCO, 2021).

Another critical observation for finding the scared tourism potential of Humla is the need to promote trans-border tourism activities, which can significantly contribute to the prosperity and well-being of the Humli people. To achieve this, government organizations must take strategic steps to revitalize tourism in this serene Shangri-La-like region. In this regard, a political activist stated, *"Reviving caravan trade and improving connectivity with Tibet can create jobs and boost local businesses, improving incomes and living standards of local people"*. One key initiative is to revive and modernize the traditional trans-border trade, particularly the caravan trade culture, through government-to-government (G2G) agreements with the Purang County of the Ngari Prefecture in China. This would facilitate the operation of two key transit routes—Hilsa and Lapcha—enhancing both trade and tourism in the region (Gurung, 2018). Moreover, the socio-economic and cultural connectivity two distinct cultures between Jadan and Khasan, is significant to promote the sustainable tourism development of this area.

Additionally, Namkha Rural Municipality of Humla must prioritize to build essential infrastructure, commutation, accommodations facilities and security checkpoints, and tax offices at both border transit points. Additionally, constructing a modern viewing tower equipped with advanced devices at Lapcha Pass would allow visitors to enjoy panoramic views of Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar in Tibet, as well as the

Altitude Wildlife Park in Syar Lapcha (meadow). Syar Lapcha, often referred to as the "balcony" for viewing Kailash Manasarovar, holds immense spiritual significance, as pilgrims often perform worship rituals to the Kailash Mandala from this vantage point (Lama, 2012). As stated by one of the local residents "*these tourists destination attract to people, so, locals should preserve and promote these destinations.*" Moreover, other developments must be carefully planned to address the challenges of global warming and align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for nature conservation and sustainable ecotourism (UNESCO, 2021). It is crucial to educate and raise awareness among local communities about the importance of conserving, promoting, and optimally utilizing local resources. This includes imparting knowledge and skills to locals about the value of their natural and cultural heritage, ensuring their active participation in preservation of traditional practices—such as meditation in ancient caves and shamanic rituals also.

In our observations, climate change and migration poses a significant challenge in Limi Valley. Among the three villages (Halji, Til and Jang) in Limi Til and Jang are nearly empty. Additionally Humla faces other major challenges, including climate change and unplanned road construction.

Conclusion

Humla is a sacred land, home to various deities that govern the region. The potential for religious tourism in Humla can be explored by distinguishing between external and internal sacred sites. The Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar in Tibet, China are key external sacred sites. The internal sacred sites have two distinct cultural aspects: Jadan, which is dominated by ancient Tibetan culture, natural meditation caves and Buddhist monasteries. Among them Halji, Yalbang, Muchu and Railing monasteries are most significant for typical Tibetan cultures. On the other hand, Khasan, which is primarily influenced by Hindu, includes Kharpunath as one of its most important site. Moreover, Shamanism, Masto tradition, and various Khas celebrations serve as unique religious and cultural products for tourism in Humla.

The district serves as the gateway of Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, as well as an ancient trade and pilgrimage trail to Taklakot, Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar respectively. Limi Lapcha is a high-altitude meadow and altitude wildlife park where visitors can see herd of wild horses, yaks and others. From this view point, visitors can see and worship holy Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar. The route through Humla to Mt Kailash and Manasarovar is the shortest and most cost-effective, if road connectivity is well-maintained for smooth travel.

Moreover, the recent advancements in infrastructure, such as the development of the Karnali corridor and the reopening of trade routes with Tibet, have significantly improved accessibility, enabling increased tourism and fostering economic growth. These developments underscore the transformative potential of the region in driving socio-economic development and enhancing the livelihood of its local populations. However, the growing influx of tourists and the associated commercialization pose challenges to the preservation of Humla's fragile ecosystem and cultural integrity. Without strategic interventions, the region risks undermining its ecological balance and losing its authentic cultural heritage, which are the very elements that make it distinctive. To overcome the challenges and fully realize the potential of the Humla and Karnali regions, several strategic actions are necessary. Emphasizing sustainable tourism is crucial in this region for that effective implement of policies that regulate tourist activities. Efforts to preserve cultural heritage should include programs dedicated to documenting, promoting, and safeguarding the unique traditions of the Jadan and Khasan communities, ensuring their cultural identities are maintained in the face of modernization.

Infrastructure development must focus on sustainable solutions, such as eco-sensitive road construction and the adoption of renewable energy, to enhance accessibility without compromising the natural environment. Engaging local communities in the planning and execution of tourism and development initiatives is essential to ensure their needs and perspectives are prioritized. Furthermore, strengthening cross-border collaboration with Tibetan authorities can improve trade opportunities and facilitate pilgrimage activities, fostering cultural exchange and mutual benefit in religious and cultural tourism in Humla.

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