

Tourism and Sustainable Development in Ladakh

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Abstract-- Tourism has emerged as one of the most significant drivers of economic growth in Ladakh. It has not only created new chances for people to make a living, but it has also promoted cultural interchange and increased the region's awareness as a destination for those who are interested in high-altitude travel. Ladakh's delicate cold-desert ecology, limited water supplies, and traditional cultural traditions have all been under tremendous stress as a result of the fast and sometimes uncontrolled rise of tourism in the region. The purpose of this study is to get a knowledge of the ways in which sustainable development may be effectively attained by analyzing the economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and policy aspects of tourism in Ladakh. The study examines the efficacy of community-based tourist models including homestays, women-led businesses, renewable-energy-based tourism, and niche projects like astro-tourism using information from fifteen recent research publications published between 2020 and 2025. The research highlights the advantages and disadvantages of tourism: while it increases household income, boosts women's involvement, and promotes cultural preservation, it also leads to garbage buildup, water shortages, cultural commercialization, and gaps in policy implementation. According to the report, integrated governance, more community involvement, environmental monitoring, and the implementation of eco-friendly and renewable practices are all necessary. Based on this information, the study suggests ways to encourage eco-friendly, inclusive, and community-focused travel in Ladakh. In order to preserve Ladakh's distinctive ecological and cultural legacy and promote long-term economic sustainability, sustainable tourism is not only feasible but also crucial, according to the research.

Keywords-- Ladakh, community-based travel, sustainable tourism, environmental effect, sociocultural transformation, and policy implementation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, Ladakh's tourism industry has significantly changed and is now regarded as one of the main drivers of the local economy. Its pristine surroundings, lively Buddhist culture, and unique high-altitude location attract tourists from all over the world. However, Ladakh's fragile nature, few water resources, and cultural identity have been severely strained by this increase in tourists. According to Lipman, unchecked growth puts the natural resources that support tourism at risk.

In recent research, it has been emphasized that sustainable tourism, which takes into account economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects, is crucial for the long-term sustainability of Ladakh. It has become more apparent that community-based projects, such as homestays, women-run hospitality programs, and solar-powered tourist businesses, have arisen as potential models that integrate local engagement with environmental responsibility. However, despite the existence of multiple legislative frameworks and the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), difficulties continue to exist in the areas of waste management, water use, and equitable income distribution.

In order to formulate policies that link the expansion of tourism with the preservation of the environment and culture in Ladakh, it is essential to have a solid knowledge of the ways in which local communities, policy interventions, and sustainable practices interact with one another.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ladakh's economy has benefited greatly from tourism, but it has also put tremendous pressure on the region's traditional culture and fragile mountains ecosystem. The natural and cultural legacy of the area is starting to be threatened by insufficient waste management systems, over use of scarce water resources, and uncontrolled building. While NGOs and government programs support sustainability, there is still a lack of effective enforcement. Numerous local projects run on their own without long-term oversight or institutional backing. In order to guarantee that Ladakh's tourism grows sustainably without destroying its ecological and cultural balance, the challenge is to design an efficient plan that incorporates community involvement, renewable energy, and environmental governance.

Hence, the core problem addressed by this study is:

How can Ladakh achieve sustainable tourism that balances economic benefits with environmental conservation and cultural preservation through community-driven and policy-supported approaches?

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Ladakh.

2. To assess the effectiveness of community-based tourism models such as homestays and women-led enterprises.
3. To identify policy gaps and implementation challenges in achieving sustainable tourism

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stobgais & Dorjey (2021): examined how homestays in Ladakh connect cultural preservation with revenue generating to support sustainable tourism. According to their research, community-run homestays improve local livelihoods and lessen environmental stress. To uphold sustainability standards, they did point out the necessity of more robust government assistance and eco-certification programs. Namgyal & Tashi (2020): examined the difficulties sustainable tourism faces in the delicate Himalayan ecosystem of Ladakh. They noted important problems such water shortages, garbage buildup, and lax policy enforcement. The writers came to the conclusion that attaining sustainability necessitates shared accountability amongst residents, visitors, and governmental organizations. Emerald (2024): carried out a case study to evaluate tourist sustainability using measurable indicators including employment, water usage, and waste production. The study suggested developing a "Ladakh Sustainable Tourism Index" to track advancements and guarantee sustainability performance is transparent.

Springer (2024/25): highlighted the importance of women as stewards of regional culture and sustainable practices in a research on women-led homestays and community tourism. Although they warned against over-commercialization, the authors discovered that empowering women in tourism improves household income and community cohesiveness. JET Journal (2024): examined how tourism affects the Ladakh region's economy, culture, and ecology. The study found that although tourism increases revenue, it also contributes to resource depletion and cultural uniformity. To mitigate these consequences, the authors suggested waste management incentives and eco-fees. ScienceDirect (2024): examined how tourism affects the trans-Himalayan landscapes of Ladakh. Their research revealed increased trash production, interruption of bird migration, and disturbance of habitat. They recommended long-term ecological monitoring, visitation restrictions, and zoning as important conservation tactics. ARJASS (2025): concentrated on Ladakh's solid waste management, emphasizing how the region's garbage facilities have been overburdened by increased tourists. To lessen pollution and increase the effectiveness of trash management, the research recommended eco-deposits, segregation facilities, and more stringent plastic laws.

Shiv Nadar University (2025): recorded the transition of Ladakh's main source of income from agriculture to tourism. Although tourism raised revenues, it also made people more reliant on outside food sources. In order to guarantee food security with the growth of tourism, the research recommended integrating agri-tourism and climate-smart farming. IIM Kozhikode (2020): spoke about the necessity of a paradigm change from mass tourism to regenerative, low-impact travel. The authors emphasized implementing eco-certification, renewable energy, and visitation limitations to encourage sustainable behaviors in alpine regions, using Ladakh as an example. IGI Global (2024–25): examined Ladakh's tourist regulations and discovered inconsistencies in their implementation. The study suggested developing a thorough Ladakh Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (2025–2030) that includes quantifiable metrics, financial transparency, and local involvement. GBPIHED (2025): created a policy brief that tailored global sustainable tourism criteria to Ladakh's unique realities. To guarantee accountability, it placed a strong emphasis on investing in green infrastructure, developing community capacity, and granting tourist operators performance-based licenses.

Skalzang Dolma & Ashwani Kumar (2025): researched the problem of solid waste in tourist zones and proposed eco-levy systems to fund seasonal garbage collection. Their study made clear how crucial it is to implement waste management changes at the local level in order to preserve the quality of the soil and water. Padma Ladon (2025): evaluated livelihood changes and discovered that although tourism lowers poverty, it may jeopardize traditional skills and food self-sufficiency. The research recommended mixed livelihood methods that integrate agriculture, handicrafts, and ecotourism. The Guardian (2025): discussed the Hanle Dark-Sky project, demonstrating how women are empowered as "astro-ambassadors" through astrotourism. The initiative demonstrated the possibilities of a specialized, community-led tourism strategy by fostering low-impact livelihoods and dark-sky conservation. CDKN (2025): investigated how the viability of homestays in isolated areas is improved by solar electrification. According to the study, if maintenance funding and local training are available for long-term sustainability, combining renewable energy with tourism lowers carbon emissions and prolongs operational seasons.

The reviewed literature emphasizes that robust governance structures, waste management, community engagement, and the use of renewable energy are all necessary for sustainable tourism in Ladakh. Even when local efforts show promise, politicians, locals, and private operators must work together to guarantee that tourist expansion benefits the environment and livelihoods.

Research Gap

While many studies address the effects of tourism in Himalayan regions, very few particularly address Ladakh's community-led projects, participation in renewable energy, and sustainable tourism practices. Few studies evaluate post-COVID tourist patterns, and there is a dearth of primary data on local perspectives. By offering up-to-date primary data and examining both residents and visitors collectively, this study closes these gaps.

V. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study uses a descriptive research approach to gather and examine participant responses without changing any of the variables. This design helps in understanding the current situation, respondent opinions and trends based on the survey result.

Sampling Method

Convenience sampling was used in the study because it is cost effective, time saving and participants were chosen based on their accessibility and desire to take part.

The sample includes both local residents and tourists which support the study by bringing a variety of perspectives.

Sample size

A total of 55 valid responses were collected through the online survey. Despite the small sample size, it is sufficient for an initial examination of opinions on sustainability, environmental issues, and the function of tourism in Ladakh. People from a variety of age groups, origins, and Ladakh tourist experiences make up the sample.

Data Collection Method

A structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data for the study. Multiple choice, closed-ended and Likert scale questions were included in the survey in order to evaluate respondents' thoughts and perceptions regarding the chosen subject.

Google Forms was used to administer the survey in order to make participation easy and accessible. The link was distributed by email and WhatsApp. 55 replies in all were successfully gathered.

Tool Used

The questionnaire was created and distributed using Google Forms. The responses collected from Google Forms were automatically recorded and then analyzed using Google Forms charts and summary reports to understand the results.

Table :
Variables, Indicators and Measurement Tools Used in the Study

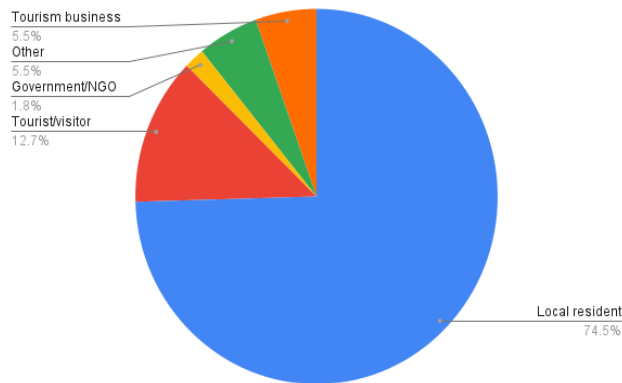
Sl. No.	Variable Category	Key Indicators Covered	Type of Scale / Measurement
1	Respondent Profile	Type of respondent (Local / Tourist / Tourism-related activity)	Nominal Scale
2	Economic Impact of Tourism	Employment generation, income opportunities, support to local businesses	Likert Scale (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree)
3	Environmental Impact	Waste generation, plastic pollution, water scarcity, ecosystem pressure	Likert Scale
4	Socio-Cultural Impact	Cultural preservation, promotion of local traditions, commercialization of culture	Likert Scale
5	Awareness of Sustainable Practices	Solar energy use, eco-friendly homestays, plastic reduction, water conservation	Likert Scale
6	Tourism Management & Policy	Satisfaction with tourism facilities, waste management, regulation enforcement	Likert Scale
7	Acceptance of Sustainable Tourism	Willingness to support eco-friendly and community-based tourism	Likert Scale
8	Suggestions for Improvement	Waste control, visitor limits, renewable energy, community participation	Open-ended Responses

This table summarizes the primary factors and indicators utilized in the study to examine tourism and sustainable development in Ladakh. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about respondents' awareness and acceptance of sustainable tourism practices as well as their opinions on the economic, environmental, and sociocultural effects of tourism.

While open-ended questions assisted in gathering recommendations for enhancing sustainable tourism policies, Likert scale questions were mostly utilized to gauge attitudes and opinions. The research technique is presented in a clear, transparent, and methodical manner thanks to this table.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

1.Type of Responded

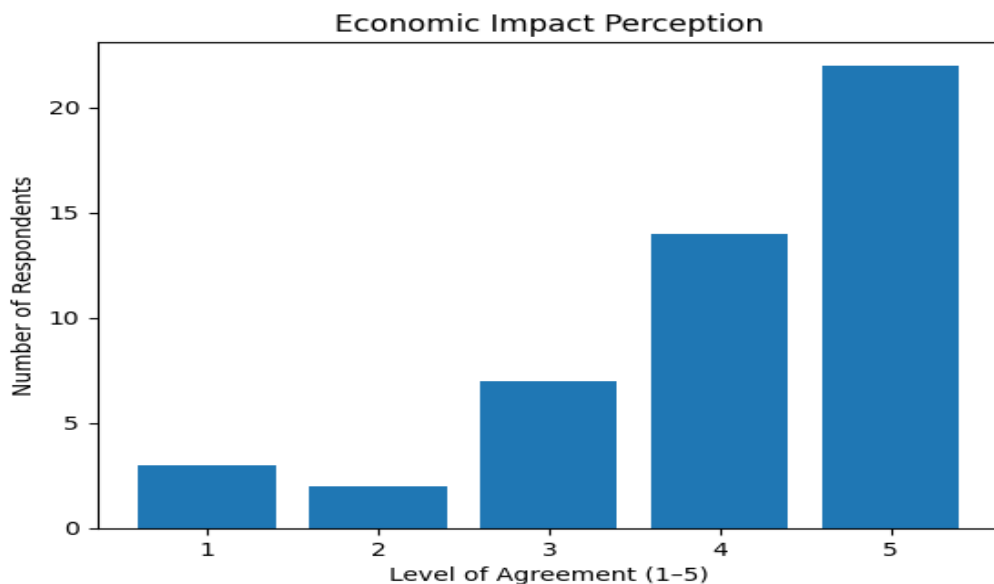


Interpretation:

The distribution of respondents by category is shown in Figure 1. Locals make up the bulk of responders (75%), followed by visitors and those involved in tourism-related activities.

This suggests that the survey mostly captures the opinions of those who are directly impacted by Ladakh's tourist industry, enhancing the findings' applicability.

2. Perception of Tourism's Economics Impact

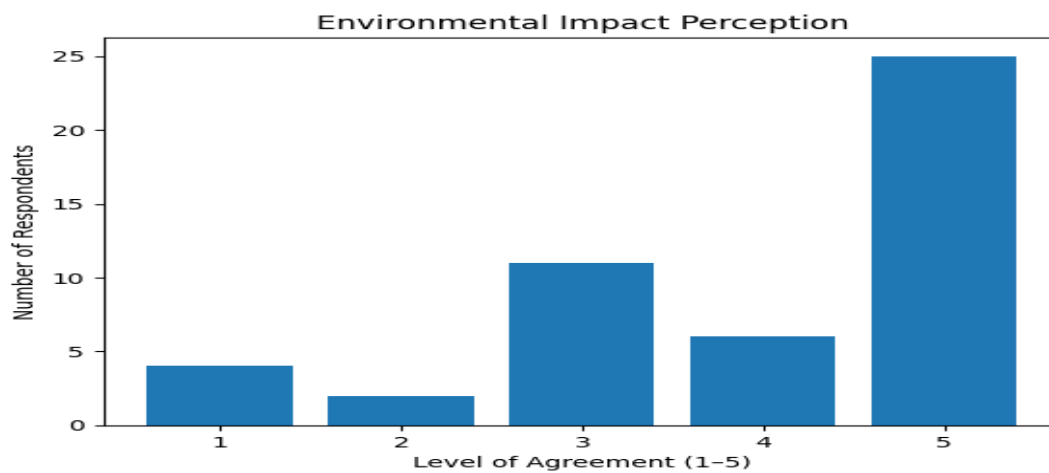


The majority of respondents concurred that tourism had a large economic impact on the area. Many said that tourism boosts local companies, creates jobs, and helps guesthouse owners. The percentage that seemed neutral or uncertain was rather low.

Interpretation:

According to the comments, tourism continues to be one of the region's most robust economic pillars. Through homestays, transportation services, guiding, and artisan sales, people are aware that tourism directly supports households. This demonstrates Ladakh's positive economic reliance on tourism and bolsters the notion that sustainable tourism regulations should safeguard this source of income.

3. Environmental Impact Perception



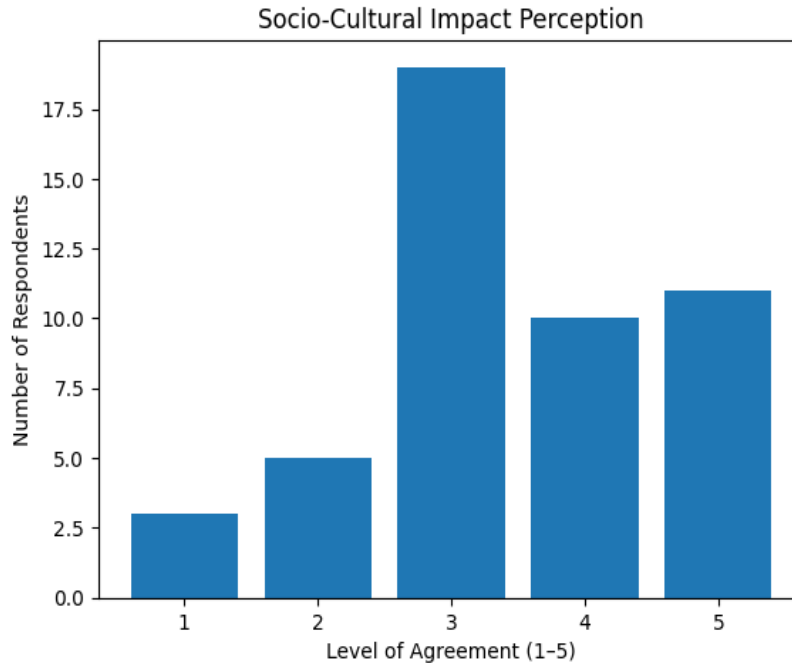
Environmental concerns were prevalent in all of the comments. The majority of participants gave moderate to high ratings to problems such as pollution, waste production, water scarcity, and strain on delicate ecosystems. According to a number of responders, the growing number of tourists causes careless garbage dumping, which strains the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

Interpretation:

These answers demonstrate a thorough understanding of Ladakh's environmental fragility. Because of the region's ecological sensitivity, sustainability measures cannot be disregarded, as seen by the respondents' repeated emphasis on environmental stress. Even if tourism boosts the economy, if it is not controlled, it endangers natural areas.

The responders seem to have a thorough understanding of this contract benefit vs. harm.

4. Socio cultural Impact Perception



Respondents gave conflicting answers when asked about sociocultural shifts. Many concurred that tourism had contributed to the promotion of regional handicrafts, cuisine, and culture. Some, however, have noted that excessive commercialization might weaken genuine cultural customs.

Interpretation:

The findings show that tourism affects society in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, it gives Ladakhi culture international respect; on the other, it could gradually change customs. These answers emphasize the necessity of community-based tourism that fosters economic opportunity while maintaining cultural integrity.

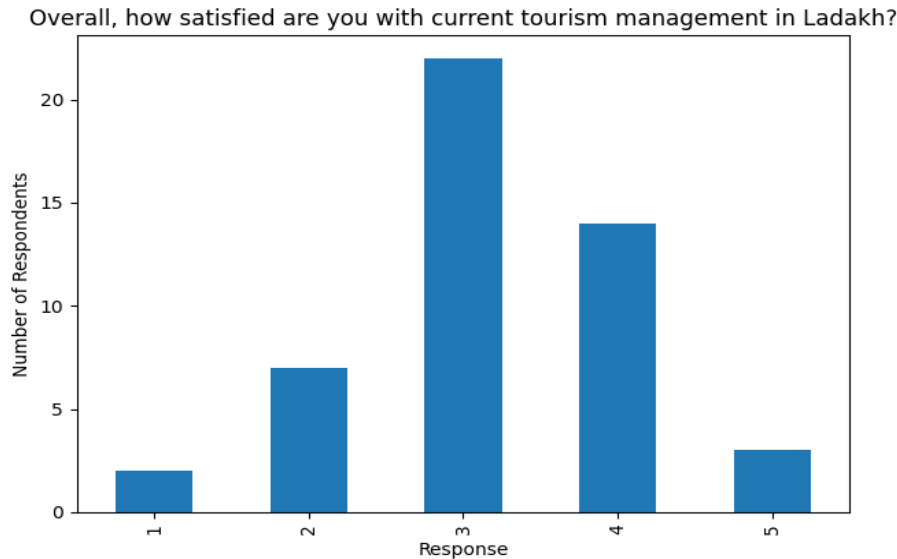
5. Awareness and Acceptance of Sustainable Practices

Initiatives including solar power utilization, eco-friendly homestays, water-saving devices, and plastic reduction programs were highly valued by many respondents. Many people concurred that sustainable tourism is essential to Ladakh's future, not merely desired.

Interpretation:

It is evident that the respondents are aware of sustainable methods. Their recognition that Ladakh's environment cannot sustain unrestricted visitor expansion is shown in their emphasis on renewable energy and eco-friendly travel. This suggests that the public is strongly in favor of developing sustainable tourism.

6. Satisfaction with Tourism Management in Ladakh



Responses indicated a range of satisfaction levels. Some respondents believed there were obvious shortcomings, especially in garbage disposal, crowd control, and environmental monitoring, while others were satisfied with the present tourism amenities and administration.

Interpretation:

Although Ladakh has made strides, the management system still requires development, as seen by the diversity of viewpoints. The problems raised by respondents are consistent with actual difficulties that have also been brought up in policy talks. Enhancing trash management, infrastructure, and planning techniques might greatly improve tourism and environmental preservation.

Suggestions Provided by Respondents

The open-ended responses reflected several recurring recommendations:

- Better waste management systems
- More education for tourists about responsible behaviour
- Stricter rules on plastic use
- Controlled number of visitors in peak season
- Encouragement of homestays and women-led enterprises
- More investment in renewable energy

Interpretation:

Respondents are clearly aware of what is needed for sustainable tourism. Their suggestions show practical understanding: environmental preservation, tourist discipline, capacity control, and community involvement. These recommendations offer valuable direction for policymakers and tourism planners.

According to the findings, respondents generally concur on three important points:

Ladakh's economy depends heavily on tourism

The most important issue is environmental effect, which requires management. There is broad support for sustainable tourist methods

People appear to be prepared to embrace sustainability based tourism models due to the combination of favorable economic rewards and a keen knowledge of environmental hazards. The findings also demonstrate that, with the right actions, Ladakh has the potential to become a model area for environmentally conscious mountain tourism.

VII. FINDING OF THE STUDY

The current study's conclusions are based on the analysis and interpretation of primary data gathered from 55 respondents via an online poll. Below is a concise and methodical summary of the findings

- According to the report, Ladakh's economic growth is significantly influenced by tourism. The majority of respondents concurred that through homestays, transportation services, guiding, handicrafts, and small enterprises, tourism creates job possibilities and sustains local lives.
- It was discovered that tourism, particularly during the peak season for travel, provides a significant source of revenue for locals. Many respondents agreed that Ladakh's economic prospects would be constrained in the absence of tourism.
- Based on the report, respondents are very concerned about environmental concerns. The majority of participants voiced concerns about growing trash production, plastic pollution, water scarcity, and the strain that growing tourism is placing on the delicate ecology.
- A lot of respondents think that the natural ecology of Ladakh is being threatened by uncontrolled tourism. The results show a high level of awareness of the area's ecological sensitivity.
- The results demonstrate that tourism has positive as well as negative sociocultural effects. Although tourism contributes to the promotion of Ladakhi culture, customs, and regional food, some respondents believed that over-commercialization might have a detrimental impact on cultural authenticity.
- Respondents were found to be mostly in favor of community-based tourism concepts like homestays. Many people think that homestays provide immediate advantages for local families and encourage cross-cultural communication between visitors and locals.
- According to the survey, women-led tourist businesses are seen favorably as they support inclusive development and increase household income and women's economic empowerment.
- Sustainable tourist measures, such as the use of renewable energy, eco-friendly infrastructure, less plastic use, and responsible waste management, were strongly supported by the majority of respondents.
- The results show that because of Ladakh's geographic location and scarcity of conventional energy supplies, renewable energy sources like solar power are seen to be crucial for sustainable tourism.
- According to the survey, respondents' knowledge of sustainable tourism is comparatively high, suggesting that people recognize the significance of striking a balance between the expansion of tourism and environmental preservation.
- It was discovered that there is a modest level of satisfaction with the current tourist administration and policy. Many respondents believed that more robust implementation and oversight were necessary, even though some acknowledged the present efforts.
- The results demonstrate the need for improved infrastructure and enforcement as waste management systems in tourist destinations are thought to be insufficient, especially during busy times.
- According to the study, in order to reduce overcrowding and resource exploitation, respondents significantly want more stringent limits on tourism activities, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas.
- Numerous responders highlighted the need for tourism awareness campaigns, recommending that travelers be taught about responsible conduct, regional customs, and environmental preservation.
- According to the results, sustainable tourism is thought to be the best strategy for Ladakh's future as it guarantees long-term financial gains while safeguarding the region's natural and cultural resources.

VIII. SUGGESTION/ RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are put out to encourage the development of sustainable and ethical tourism in Ladakh in light of the study's findings.

Strengthening Waste Management System

Waste collection, segregation, and recycling systems should be improved by the government and municipal authorities, especially in popular tourist locations. To reduce the pollution caused by plastic and solid waste, tourist destinations should have enough dustbins and strict fines for littering.

Encouragement of Policies for Sustainable Tourism

To control tourism activities, clear and precise sustainable tourism policies should be put into place. These regulations ought to prioritize preserving natural equilibrium while permitting regulated tourism expansion in Ladakh.

Promotion of Community-Based tourist

Since homestays and other community-based tourist models directly benefit locals economically and contribute to the preservation of Ladakhi culture, they should be further encouraged. To enhance service quality and sustainable practices among homestay owners, training programs have to be implemented.



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Encouragement of Women-Led Travel Businesses

To support women-led tourist efforts, special incentives, financial aid, and skill-development programs should be implemented. This will increase women's involvement in the tourist industry and foster inclusive growth.

Use of Renewable Energy in Tourism Facilities

Hotels, homestays, and campers are examples of tourism enterprises that ought to be encouraged or required to use renewable energy sources, particularly solar energy. This will lessen reliance on fossil fuels and promote eco-friendly travel strategies.

Programs for Tourist Education and Awareness

Tourists should be taught about responsible conduct, water conservation, trash minimization, and respect for local customs and culture through awareness programs. At bus stops, airports, and tourist destinations, information boards and policies ought to be posted.

Controlling the Number of Visitors in Sensitive Areas

Carrying-capacity restrictions should be implemented by the government in high-altitude and environmentally delicate regions. Seasonal limitations and controlled entrance systems can lessen congestion and environmental stress.

Enhancement of Tourism Facilities

To improve visitor experiences while reducing environmental effect, basic infrastructure including roads, sanitary facilities, drinking water supplies, and eco-friendly lodging should be upgraded.

Developing Skills and Increasing Capacity

Youth in the region should have access to training programs in topics including sustainable practices, eco-tourism, hotel management, and guiding services. Both job prospects and service quality will rise as a result.

Strengthening Monitoring and Enforcement Mechanisms

To make sure that environmental standards are being followed, tourism activities should be regularly monitored. Effective implementation requires coordination between local communities, government agencies, and tourist stakeholders.

IX. CONCLUSION

In Ladakh, tourism has become one of the key industries driving economic growth and the creation of jobs. The area is a well-liked travel destination because of its distinctive natural landscapes, cultural legacy, and traditional way of life.

The goal of the current study is to investigate how tourism affects Ladakh's economy, ecology, and society, with an emphasis on sustainable tourist growth.

The study's conclusions show that through homestays, transportation services, guiding activities, and small enterprises, tourism significantly contributes to local communities' job prospects and revenue. The report also draws attention to major environmental issues such trash production, plastic pollution, water scarcity, and the strain that the growing number of tourists is placing on Ladakh's delicate ecology. These difficulties show that unchecked tourist expansion might result in long-term environmental deterioration if improperly handled.

Additionally, the study demonstrates that tourism has both favorable and unfavorable sociocultural effects. Although it aids in promoting Ladakhi customs, culture, and handicrafts, over-commercialization and an inflow of tourists may compromise cultural authenticity. The respondents' significant support for eco-friendly activities, the use of renewable energy, community-based tourist models, and women-led businesses is encouraging. They also showed a high degree of understanding regarding sustainable tourism practices.

Overall, the study finds that the best and most essential strategy for Ladakh's tourist industry's future growth is sustainable tourism. It is crucial to have a well-rounded approach that incorporates cultural preservation, environmental protection, and economic gains. For tourism growth in Ladakh to continue to be sustainable, inclusive, and advantageous for future generations, effective legislation, community involvement, responsible visitor conduct, and strong institutional backing are essential.

X. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The research has significant limitations that should be recognized despite earnest attempts to conduct the investigation methodically.

1. The study's small sample size of 55 respondents may not accurately reflect the views of Ladakh's whole population.
2. The data in question was gathered using an online poll that only allowed those with internet connection and computer literacy to participate, perhaps leaving out some locals.
3. Convenience sampling was employed, which might lead to sample bias and restrict how broadly the results can be applied.
4. Because the study is based on self-reported replies, it's possible that some participants gave answers that were more socially acceptable than what they really thought.



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5. Time restrictions prevented the study from incorporating field-based observations or in-depth interviews, which may have yielded greater qualitative insights.
6. Long-term environmental impact studies and substantial secondary data are not included in the study, which primarily focuses on respondent views.

Despite these drawbacks, the study offers insightful information on tourism and sustainable development in Ladakh and may be used as a starting point for further studies in this field.

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