



## **‘NAYALAP’: A case study on Sustainable Tourism and Socio- Economic growth of the village Salla Rautela, Uttarakhand**

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### **Abstract**

The proposed study is based on a place known as “Nayalap” situated in a small village called Salla Rautela, having proximity to notable towns of Almora and Ranikhet, Uttarakhand. The current study is based on the case study of an entrepreneur couple who dared to establish their start up in Ecotourism in a totally abandoned and non-descript place; without any financial aid from the Government or non-government organizations. The objective is analyzed by employing survey data collected in the form of surveys, questionnaires, interviews and client testimonials. The study is based on Sustainable Eco tourism and local participation in employment generation through individual effort and entrepreneurship. The proposed study is the first of its kind on sustainable eco-tourism that is set up in a village which has seen almost the entire population migrating to cities and Nayalap could notably bring a paradigm shift towards the reverse migration after COVID-19.

**Key words:** Socio-economics, reverse migration, sustainable development, ecotourism.

### **Introduction**

Ministry of Tourism (2001-02) laid down the National Ecotourism Policy (1998) that clearly places the guidelines and government’s policies in pursuance “to achieve sustainability in tourism development and to ensure regulated growth of Ecotourism with its positive impacts of environmental protection and community development” and the Working Group report (2006) stated that “tourism has become an instrument for sustainable human development” and calls for “creating a unique brand for Indian tourism which is vibrant and based on sustainable development”. Sustainable Eco-tourism is thus, explicated as a leisure break in which the primary motive is characterized by the diminution of hustle from everyday life with an insight into complex and engrossing ecosystems, associated with the preservation of the local traditions and culture (Das, 2011).

The justification for our government’s interest in ecotourism definitely works in terms of economics as tourism itself plays a pivotal role in earning foreign exchange for the country (Ghosh et al., 2017). In the latest data provided by the INDIA TOURISM STATISTICS 2021 by the Ministry of tourism, Govt of India; a record negative growth rate of 74.9% was seen as tourism sharply dipped to 2.74 million in 2020 as compared to 10.93 million in 2019. The foreign exchange earnings (FEE) too sharply decreased to US \$ 6.958 billion in 2020 as compared to US\$ 30.06 billion in 2019, registering a negative growth of 76.9% (<https://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/2021->

09/English%20Tourism%202021.pdf). As evident from the statistics, there is a severe negative growth for foreign national but at the same time inland movement by domestic travellers witnessed a growth trend in visiting less explored places within the country.

Trending lingos like “responsible travel”, “responsible consumption” and “post-materialist consumer” has caught the fancy of both commercial niche and consumer consciousness vying for increase in gross domestic product (GDP), foreign exchange earnings and employment-generation, while bringing development to remote areas. Under this realm, the Uttarakhand government has zeroed down on Ramnagar, Ranikhet, and Dhanaulti for developing ecotourism destinations; wherein, there are many studies on sustainable ecotourism in Uttarakhand state which mainly pertains to already burgeoning tourism in popular places like the Ramnagar-Almora-Nainital, Tons Valley, Dehradun-Rishikesh-Tehri, and Tankapur-Champawat-Devidhura (Pithoragarh)-Nainital. However, critics have pointed to the inconsistencies and lack of intangible lucidity of what sustainable development actually means on the ground – leading to divergent and contradictory practices to draw legitimacy to this concept. The central and the state government has actually brought ecotourism in Uttarakhand to a hegemony status, where genuine problems like the dual challenge of climate change and migration of locals are hold sway and only trade-offs between competing growth-oriented and money minting companies are favoured; as already stated in few other studies worldwide which stated conflict of interest in most of the multi-sectoral field (Cater 1995, Silva 2003). However, there are few studies which helps us understand that how certain communities in protected areas contribute to mainstreaming climate change in ecotourism development to sustain livelihoods in the context of climate change vulnerability. Studies have also shown various dimensions of resilience with perspectives regarding the social, environmental, governance and economic development supporting the ecotourism system to withstand or adapt to climate change as seen in Mognori tribes, a farming household located in the Savannah Region of Ghana (Agyeman, 2019), hills of Nepal (Devkato et al., 2016), and local communities in and around Dana Biosphere Reserve, Jordan (Jamaliah and Powell, 2018).

The present field work is based in Uttarakhand, India where most population is agrarian and depends solely on rainfed agriculture. The state faces the brunt of climate change in the form of exceeding natural calamities like glacier bursts, flash floods, unseasonal torrential rains, forest fires and landslides and finds it difficult to control distress migration. According to 2018 survey by the Uttarakhand Migration Commission, 734 villages in the state have become uninhabited since 2011. An increased number of villages have turned ghost villages as 40% of the population have migrated and some districts such as Pauri, Garhwal and Almora are witnessing negative population growth. Though, the Covid-19 pandemic witnessed reverse migration trend and as reported by Uttarakhand Migration Commission in September 2020, around 3,27,000 migrants returned to the state in 2020. The state also launched Mukhyamantri Swarojgar Yojana in May 2020 to provide self-employment to migrants. However, this scheme has been tough on locals as it involved too much paperwork, never-ending bureaucracy and the banks required collateral to disburse a loan. Also, the locals ranted about the scheme being short-sighted and good only on paper, as it provides only subsidized loans, that too, to a select few – mostly the economically well-off.

In such a scenario, our study was conducted on a place known as “Nayalap” situated in a small village called Salla Rautela, in Uttarakhand having proximity to notable towns of Almora and Ranikhet. This case study focuses on a luxury ecotourism alongside employment generation to this remote village that almost turned this ghost village into an economically sustainable tourism spot. The idea of Nayalap consciously stood up in the year 2017; owned by an entrepreneur couple (Tanuja and Anindiya Shah) who aimed to infuse life back into the deserted village by bringing back its locals with lucrative livelihood options, realizing the importance of encouraging local village culture and preserving its roots and values. Keeping this in mind, the owners decided to work on bucolic living and assist the idea of sustenance in a village, aptly naming the place with a play on words, “NAYALAP”, opposite to “PALAYAN”.

### **Research Objectives**

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To establish how small budgeted individual enterprise can be profitable.
2. To investigate factors that formed the basis of reverse migration post COVID-19.
3. To identify factors that act as barriers for effective implementation of small-scale ecotourism in remote villages of India.
4. To propose strategies that can be used to enhance the employability quotient such as revenue generation along with economic literacy especially among women.

### **Methodology**

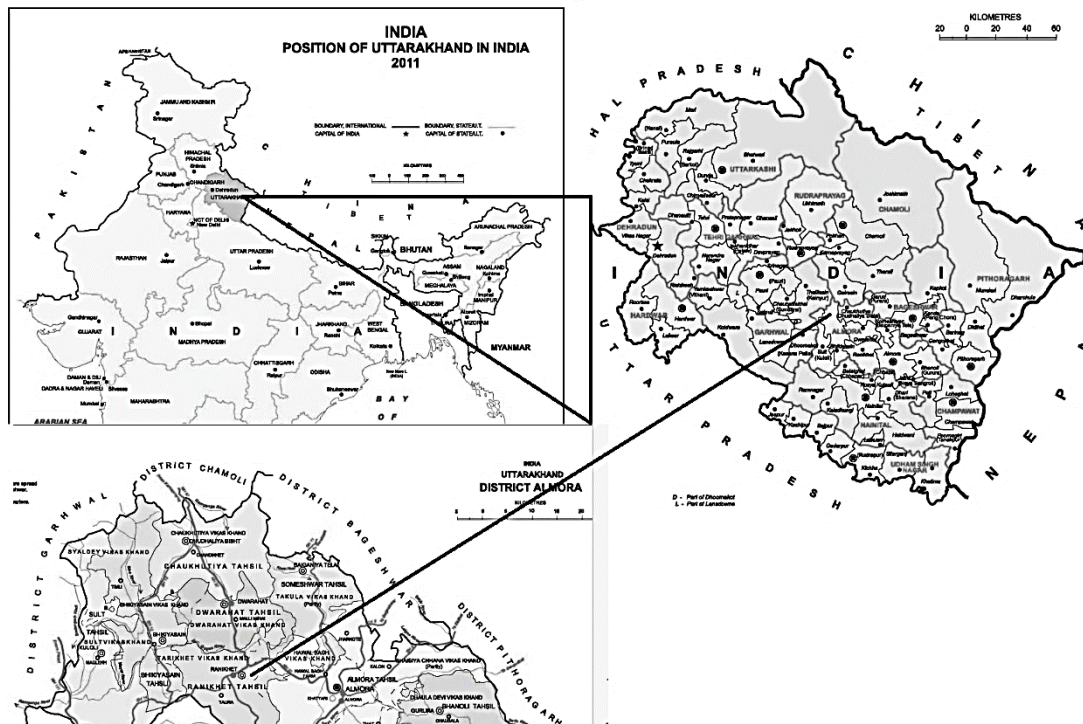
#### **Research Design**

The present study is mostly based on primary data gathered through author's field survey and direct contact with tourists and local people of the region. The sites for collecting data were the 'Nayalap' and the entire village, Salla Rautela in Shitalakhet district, Almora. These field surveys were conducted in a systematic and phased manner. In the first phase for the present study the primary data were collected from different sources during the month of January and August-September, 2022. The second phase was related to the collection of primary data where 100 schedule surveys were carried out among the workers of 'Nayalap', Pine and Dine hotel owners (sole hotel in that area), and the local people. Direct questionnaire-based interview was carried out relating to economic and non-economic activities of about 100 villagers of Salla Rautela, all the employees (directly or indirectly) linked to Nayalap, school going girls and Tanuja and Anindiya, the owners of Nayalap. The variables in this section include: Men (Uneducated and educated-schooling till 8th standard, inter, graduate) and women (Uneducated and educated-schooling till 8th standard, inter, graduate) and the parameters under these variables are employment generated in Nayalap with the scope ranging from cooking, cleaning, gardening, composting, carpenter, electrician, driver, pickle making, honey collection, basket weaving, preparation of pure ghee to home decors.

Data was collected on revenue generation, employment opportunities and economic literacy among women. This primary information was later on systematically processed, arranged, tabulated and analyzed to have a clear view of the ecotourism scenario of Shitalakhet, Uttarakhand. Involvement of local people in NAYALAP such as accommodation, transport, cooking, tourist guides, driver, electrician and souvenir industry were documented and the information collected from primary and secondary sources have been verified with the field experience.

#### **Location & Extent of The Present Study Area**

Salla Rautela is a hamlet village at 1,506 metres above sea level situated in Hawalbag Block of Almora District and post office Shitalakhet of Uttarakhand State with a total area of this village is 198.61 hectares. It is located 13 km towards west from District headquarters Almora, 9 km from Hawalbag and 193 km from State capital Dehradun. Salla Rautela is surrounded by Walsa (3 KM), Dhamas (3 KM), Kujari (3 KM), Kurchoun (4 KM), Basar (5 KM) as the nearby villages. The nearest Cities to Salla Rautela are Almora, Nainital, Haldwani and Ramnagar (Figure 1).



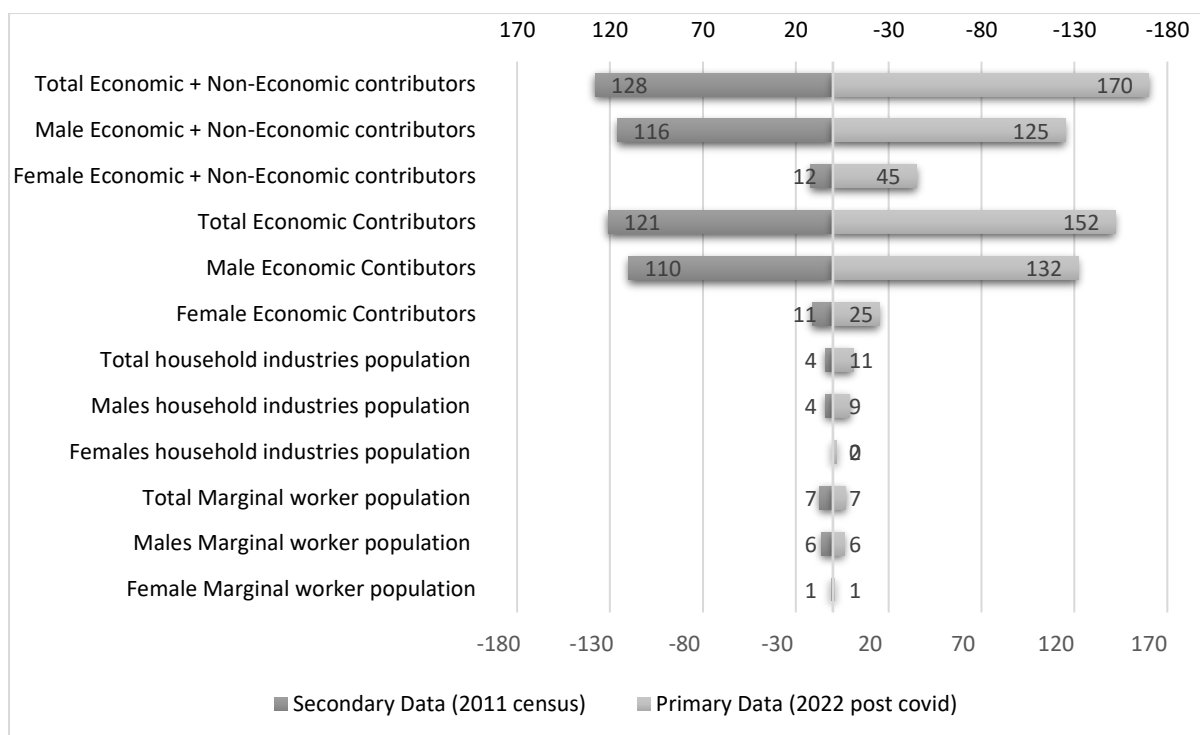
**Figure 1:** Map showing the location of Salla Rautela village, District Almora, Uttarakhand, India.

**Study of Socio-Economic Dynamics and Secondary Data Collection from 2011 Census**

Secondary data was collected from Government database available for 2011 census of Salla Rautela village and the socio-economic condition was studied. The village had a total number of 90 houses and population was at 493 of which 248 were males while 245 were females. The village literacy rate was 79.3% with male literacy at 54.7% and female literacy rate at 35.9%, respectively. Salla Rautela village was and still is administrated by Sarpanch (Head of Village) who is elected representative of village and thus the village follows the Constitution of India and Panchyati Raaj Act. Most villagers led an idle lifestyle where working population was only at 128; whose usual income was from Agri-based farm and products. It may be observed that major working population across all sectors are the males. This trend was noted in both secondary and primary data. The numbers in the primary data through the survey conducted suggests that there is an increase in the total working population though it is still more in the male population (Figure 2).

**Results and Discussion**

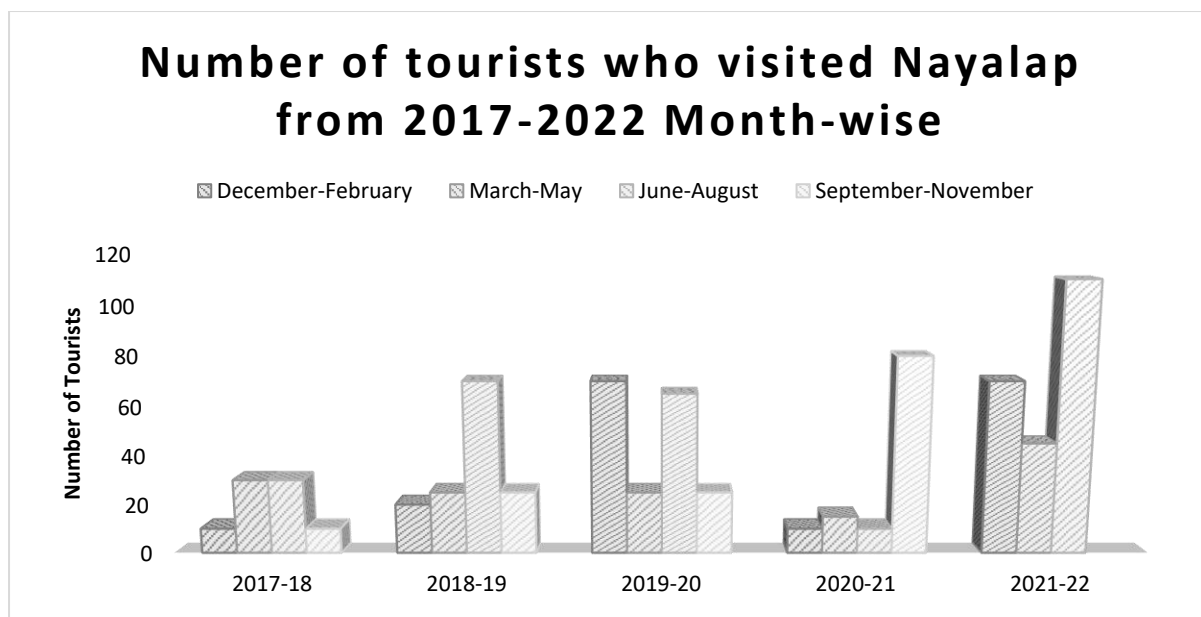
'NAYALAP', was started as a private enterprise almost two years before COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2017. 'Nayalap', stands near the threshold of a quaint village, Salla Rautela that is settled amidst the tall Acorn and Deodar trees which rose skyward on either side of narrow, street lined bushy invasive weed, *Ageratina Adenophora* or 'Kala Baans" as it is popularly known among locals. Before 'Nayalap', this village was a Ghost village because it was left with just few handfuls of scattered mud and wooden houses that were almost dilapidated by years of negligence. Their owners left them for a life in city and occasional migrants from Nepal could be seen possessing the leftover Ghost houses. A grim place where just after sunset; leopards roam to feast on stray dogs and patches of meadows where the local womenfolk from nearby villages get their goats to graze.



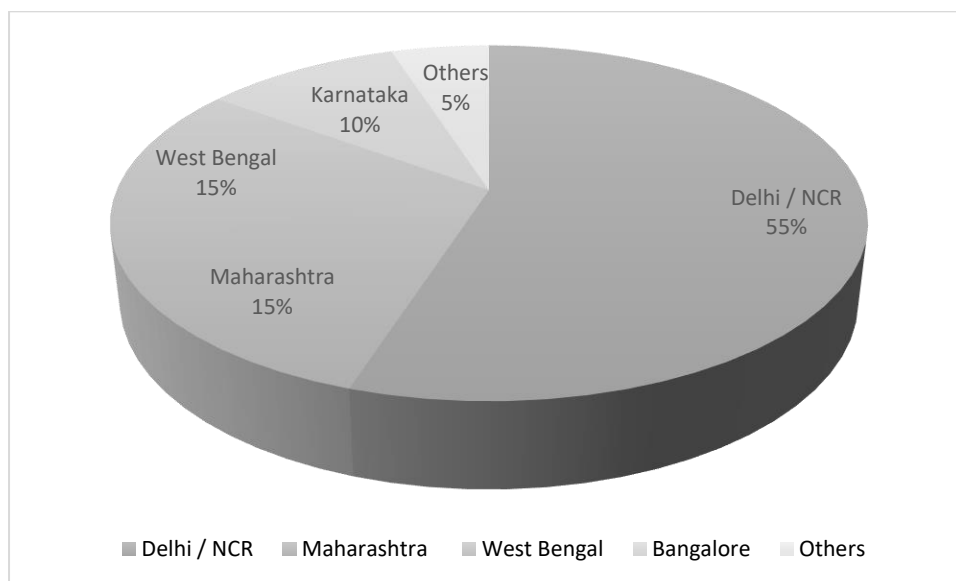
**Figure 2.** Data depicting total working population of both males and females, according to 2011 census for the main working population, population in numbers working in household-based industries and population who are marginal workers.

Initially both Tanuja and Anindiya had to face the hostility of the locals and after much persuasion; they could get a barren leased out land on top of a hillock by the Village Sarpanch. Since 2017, they painstakingly built the nondescript land to the most envied possession of the village. The pandemic witnessed many locals to be back to their land, and Tanuja hired them as orderly for her dream project. They transformed the non-educated, unskilled local villagers to self-employed entrepreneurs. Some are now excellent cooks with expertise in local Garhwali cuisines, some turned electrician, some became drivers and the local women were taught to manufacture pickles from local berries and vegetables. As this place slowly started to show up in tourism, the inflow of tourists encouraged the villagers to look in for other economic avenues like settling up small shops of utility items, local tea stalls, roadside eateries, vegetable and fruit markets etc. The author had carried out intensive physical surveys in different parts of the region during January-September, 2022 to have a profile of present status of ecotourism activity. From figure 3 it is evident that 'Nayalap' have been receiving a good number of tourists in successive years since 2017.

Though initially tourists were mostly from tourists Delhi- NCR region but slowly an accelerating growth rate is witnessed from tourists coming from other states like Maharashtra, West Bengal, Karnataka etc. The pi-chart shows that 'NAYALAP; attracts most tourists from Delhi-NCR region which may be due to its proximity to this place (figure 4). The visitors to 'Nayalap' are mainly people who are not just regular tourists but people who care for nature and are deeply connected to environment conservation. Other factors that have slowly made this place popular are the rich forests bio diversity, Nature Interpretation treks and various activities arranged by the owners, Ethnic villages tour showcasing the left out ancient houses ordained with near vanishing art of sculpted wooden doors and windows called 'Likhayi'. Local people in Salla Rautela forest village are involved in tourism activities such as accommodation, transport, cooking, tourist guides, folk dancing and souvenir industry.



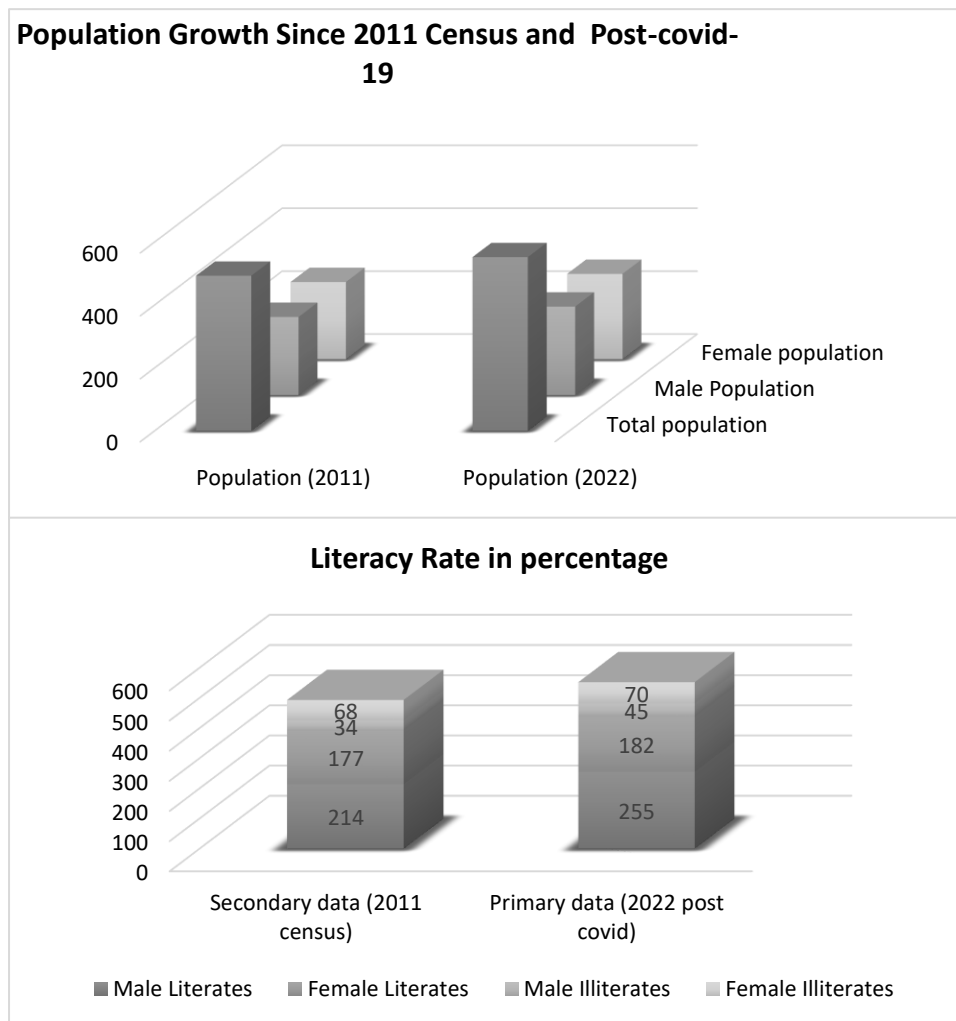
**Figure 3:** Graph showing the steady increase in the number of tourists in 'Nayalap' since 2017 and later due to Covid 19 lockdown imposed at the national level in India. The growth rate of tourism has been more than 80% from 2017 to 2022 and the annual growth rate was noted at 90% increase as evident from only 10 tourists in the month of June-August in 2020 to 110 tourists in 2022.



**Figure 4:** Percentage of tourists belonging to various ethnicity and demography visiting 'Nayalap' from different states for the period 2017-2022.

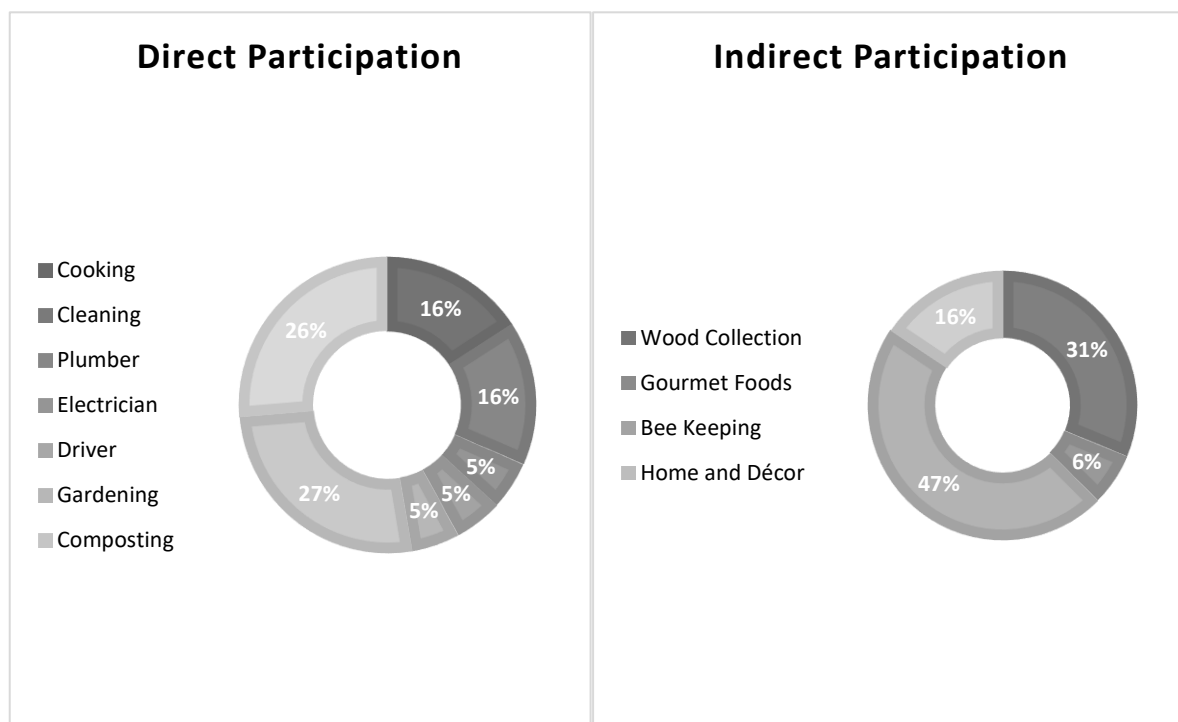
In this paper, the authors have focused on returnee migrants to this village as already stated above about the declining population rate of this region and the almost conversion of this place into ghost village with 90% of the houses left abandoned. In a recent paper by Khan, and Arokkiaraj (2021), it was stated an estimated number of 450 million intra-state migration since 2011 census. An enormous 45% increase was observed where the inter-state migrant population was at 60 million and the average annual flow of migrants between states was at 9 million between 2011 and 2016. This study conducted a comparative analysis of the return of natives back to their village, a phenomenon of reverse migration

that was seen during COVID-19 pandemic. 'Nayalap' endeavour could see the retaining of these villagers back and providing them with lucrative alternative economic reforms. The last population census was carried out in 2011 with only 90 houses in Salla Rautela. Though, there is no data on population census available in recent years, the present survey could see a growth in population of the region as compared to 2011 census as there had been retention of people who had come back to their homes during pandemic. Every home had an increase of an average of 2-3 members post 2019. In Salla Rautela male literacy stands at 96.83 % while female literacy rate is at 83.49 % and an increase in class strength was noticed by the teachers in the sole government school in the village. The data from the school showed an increase in literacy rate at 90.30 % as compared to 78.82 % before 2017 (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** The chart depicts a considerable increase in the total population and literacy rate of both males and females of village Salla Rautela post COVID-19.

Sustainable tourism is suitably considered for both community and regional development (Hall & Boyd et al 2006); and 'Nayalap' is able to stimulate economic development therefore empowering local people through earning income and employment. It became the epicentre for 'Revenue Generation'; thus, offering the opportunity for a redistribution of income and employment to Salla Rautela villagers that were traditionally lagged behind the mainstream of urban economic life. A good flow of money is generated by the villagers through the economy stimulation from various sectors of direct or indirect participation with 'Nayalap' in accommodation, cuisine, transportation etc. (figure 6).

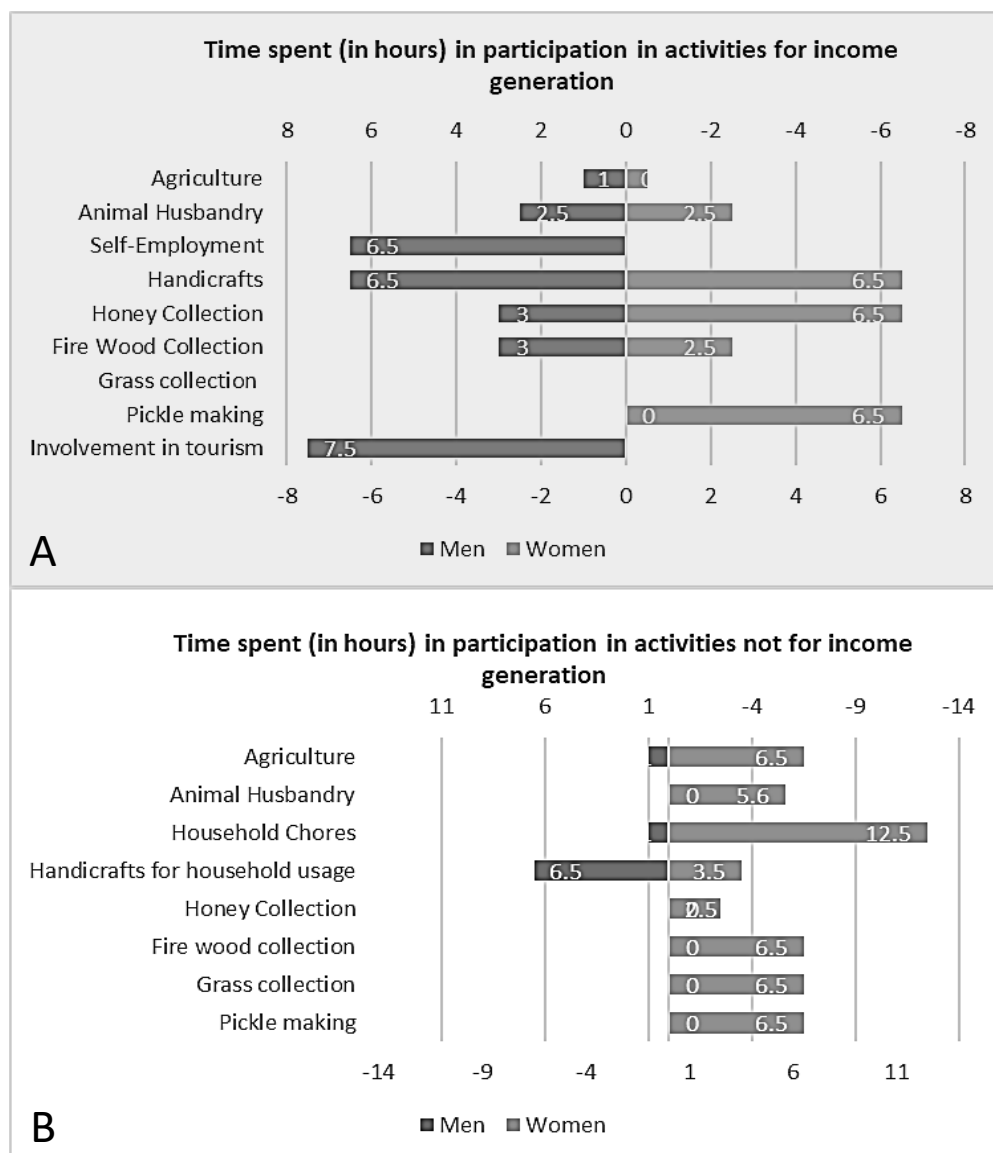


**Figure 6:** Graph showing direct and indirect participation of villagers in 'Nayalap' tourism activities.

Figure 7 depicts more women participating in equal numbers in sectors such as animal husbandry and handicrafts. However, women spend more time in household activities like honey collection and pickle making. Women spend more time in non-income generating activities like agriculture, firewood collection, grass collection, pickle making, animal husbandry etc. mainly for self-consumption. Womenfolk are still not involved in considerable numbers in either tourism or self-employment income generating activities. Whereas men, if are involved in activities like agriculture, handicrafts or firewood collection, it is mainly for either tourism or income generation. The most noticeable fact is that the villagers need not spent the entire day in tourists' activities in 'Nayalap', rather they continue with their aforesaid economic and non-economic work as before but could earn an additional amount with their involvement in 'Nayalap'.

The money spent by the tourists goes to the local business in a number of ways. This money in turn is spent on salaries and on meeting the demands of the tourists such as food, drinks, and entertainment etc. Thus, a ripple called a 'multiplier' is witnessed each time a tourist makes expenditure, an additional spending is sent through the economy (Smith, 1987). The expenditure incurred by the tourists supports not only the tourist industry directly but indirectly also supports a number of other related activities which produce goods and services for the local people as well as the tourist industry (Singh, 1993). A number of local artisans in Salla Rautela have finally found their services very economically satisfying in the form of basket weaving, supply of souvenirs as shawls, woollen stoles, traditional Gharwali caps, mats, honey and pickles etc. Ecotourism is an approach for providing income to local communities and conserving nature at the same time. It contributes to socio-economic development and conservation by: a) generating revenues, b) providing local employment, and c) inculcating a sense of community ownership (Das and Chaterjee 2015). From the income generation point of view the area is really very fortunate and the survey clearly shows a steady rise in income of the local people since 2017, after 'Nayalap' came into being. Figure 10 shows that prior to 2017 there was negligible revenue generation at Salla Rautela because for that period ecotourism activity have not flourished there.

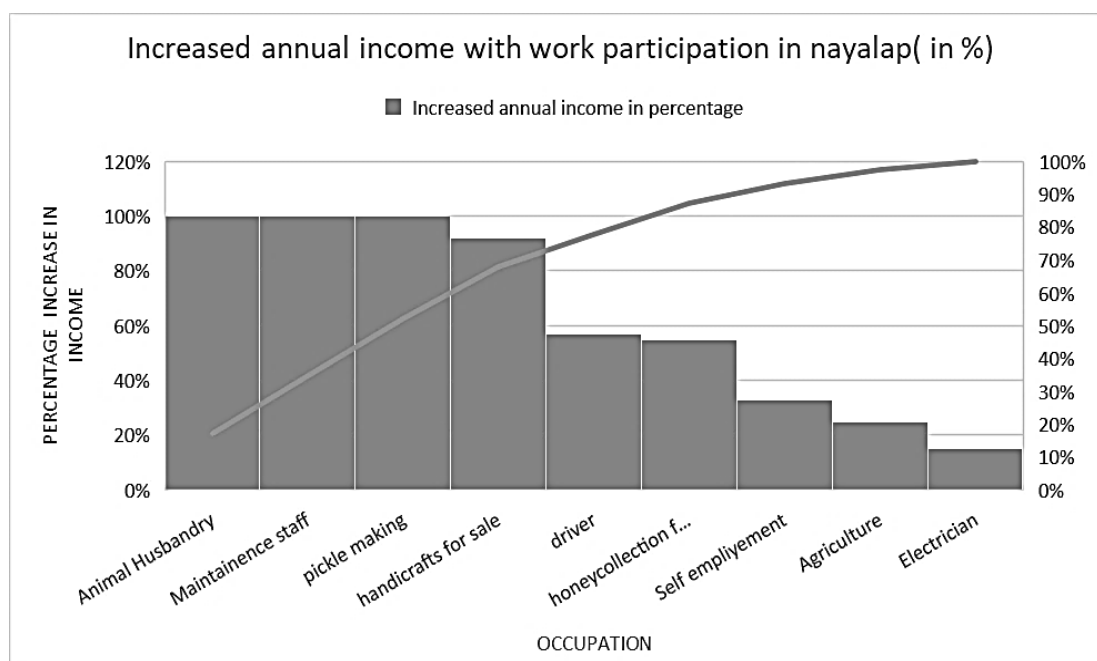




**Figure 7:** Graph showing the time spent (in hours) by both males and females of the village Salla Rautela in participating in the tourists' activities of 'Nayalap'.

After the initiation of 'Nayalap', a considerable rise in income has been possible only due to promotion of ecotourism in the area. In fact, ecotourism by 'Nayalap' is more and more promoted as a solution to the resulting poor socio-economic situation and to retain the reverse migrating population that had come back during pandemic (figure 8).

From environment impact point of view, there is a popular notion that ecotourism attracts attention to natural treasures, thereby increasing the pressures upon them (Newsome et al 2006). Thus, increasing construction of resorts is causing loss to a number of plants. It has been noted that heavy human use of open space adversely affects the biomass (Holden, 2016). Thus, it is imperative for a proper Tourism management in most natural areas that should combine various management strategies and actions where the Hill, Heritage, and Forest should be brought under this concept. 'Nayalap' adheres to this concept and has built four eco-friendly cottages completely out of cloth and minimalistic use of forests timber. Most notably is the fact that these eco-friendly huts can be dismantled anytime and at the same time they are sturdy and protects the tourists from all the harsh weather onslaughts.



**Figure 8:** The survey comprised of questionnaires based on the annual income of the locals before and after 'Nayalap'. People were questioned on what was their previous annual income, how did they increased their annual income with direct or indirect association with 'Nayalap', what all sources of income were generated from 'Nayalap' etc. An increasing trend in rise in employment generation and income at Salla Rautela was clearly noted since 2017.

The various Eco-friendly measures adapted in Nayalap includes: a) no use of plastic containers or polythene bags, b) all the pottery used are usually clay pots which are local made and furniture are made from bamboo and wood, c) usage of natural overflow stream waters for various purposes and have not taken water supply of the villages, though recently government water supply is provided, d) proper waste disposal management as all the garbage is taken to Ranikhet once a week for recycling, e) a natural pit is dug to decompose natural waste and for later use as vermicompost manure, f) no foreign/outside exquisite landscaping is done, rather a thorough research help is sought after from environmentalists to preserve natural flora and fauna of the region, thus a natural growth of native plants and indigenous flowering plants are used for landscaping.

### Conclusions

Globally, many studies were conducted that focuses on resilience of social-ecological system and its skill to acclimatize to climate change or natural disasters (Deason et al., 2022). Moreover, many research are now based on how local communities readies themselves on the face of climate change and migration aptly called as "adaptive capacity and destination risk" (Bitsura-Meszaros et al., 2019, Dube & Nhamo, 2020). However, studies relating to resilience to climate change in community-based tourism are lacking in India. The present study reflects a unique case study of present status of ecotourism activity of a small village Salla Rautela, in Shitalekhet, Uttarakhand that has been brought about by a private enterprise called 'Nayalap', rather than the government efforts. This paper aims to provide an analysis of the economic benefits that this project contributed by providing some baseline assessment of its impact on social and resource development of this place that has almost turned into a ghost village prior to 'Nayalap'. The fundamental findings were that this maiden venture has improved the regional economy through income and employment generation. With an agrarian background most of the people of the region were engaged in either marginal household or agricultural work. Due to lack of proper tertiary activities the number of people engaged in other sectors were less. Though blessed

with a rich flora, fauna and other natural resources; the region has never witnessed major tourism development activity in the past. Even with coming up of 'Nayalap', this place is still lacking the boom in tourist flow due to lack of proper publicity. Another reason is the lack of co-ordination between local Sarpanch and tourism department that has never considered other locales to develop tourism. The regional 'Tourist Circuit' concept has not been implemented everywhere, therefore, there is a limited 'tourist circuit' package to the already popular places in Uttarakhand like Nainital, Ranikhet, Almora etc. Thus, Government should make efforts and implement schemes for individual entrepreneurs who have been able to successfully bring in a paradigm shift in the entire socio-economic condition of an almost neglected and ghost village.

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