



## The Disposability of Paradise: A Socio-Policy Analysis of Tourism-Induced Ecological Precarity in Himachal Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

Himachal Pradesh is often called Devbhumi meaning land of gods and people see it as a clean and peaceful place in the mountains but today there is a different reality behind this image tourism has become the main source of income for the state and it has helped many people earn their living but at the same time it has also brought a serious problem of waste and pollution many visitors come every year and with them comes plastic bottles food wrappers and other waste which is often thrown without care this has created what we can call waste landscapes where natural beauty is slowly getting covered by garbage.

This paper tries to look at this issue in a simple human way not just through numbers and data but by understanding how people feel and live in this situation there is a clear gap between what the Himachal Pradesh eco tourism policy says and what we actually see on the ground the policy talks about sustainability and protection of nature but in reality many tourist places are struggling with unmanaged waste and lack of proper systems.

The kullu manali area is one of the most popular tourist regions and also one of the most affected places here we can see how rivers roads and forests are facing pressure from increasing tourism through a small conversation with a local person we understand that this problem is not only about waste management but also about fairness and respect local people feel that their environment and traditional values are being ignored for the sake of profit.

In the past people living in these mountains had a strong connection with nature they respected it and took only what they needed but now that balance is slowly breaking this paper suggests that instead of only focusing on technical solutions there is a need to think about people their behavior and their



relationship with nature a more human approach is needed where both tourists and locals take responsibility and where policies are made keeping real ground situations in mind.

**KEYWORD :** SHimachal Pradesh, Tourism, Pollution, Waste management, Eco tourism policy, Kullu Manali, Environment, Local communities, Sustainability, Plastic waste, Waste landscapes, Cultural values, Human approach, Environmental impact, Mountain ecology.

### **Introduction The Aesthetic Paradox**

The mountains of the Himalaya are often seen by tourists as a clean and peaceful place where everything looks perfect and untouched people come here to relax take pictures and enjoy nature but this view is only one side of the story the mountains are not just a background for holidays they are living spaces where people animals forests and rivers are all connected and depend on each other.

In Himachal Pradesh the number of tourists has increased a lot in recent years lakhs of people visit every season and this has changed the way these places feel and function areas that were once quiet and sacred are now crowded with hotels vehicles and shops many places that held cultural and spiritual value are slowly turning into busy tourist spots where the focus is more on business than respect for nature , The problem is not only about pollution in terms of dirty water or plastic waste it is also about how space is being treated many visitors use these places for a short time and leave behind waste without thinking about the long term effect this creates a feeling that these places are temporary and can be used and thrown away like objects the needs of tourists like comfort easy travel and quick services are often given more importance than the health of the environment and the lives of local people.

This situation shows a deeper issue where the natural balance of the mountains is getting disturbed and the connection between people and nature is becoming weaker what looks beautiful from the outside is slowly facing pressure from inside and this is the real challenge that needs attention.

This growing pressure is clearly visible in everyday life roads are often crowded with traffic during peak seasons and long lines of vehicles create noise and smoke small towns struggle to handle so many people at one time waste bins overflow and in many places there are not enough systems to collect and manage garbage properly rivers and streams which once carried clean water are now affected by plastic and other waste this not only harms the environment but also affects the daily life of local people who depend on these natural resources for water farming and livelihood and quick profit that feeling is becoming weaker this creates a gap between

### **Traditional values and modern practices if this continues the natural beauty and cultural identity of the region may slowly fade away Policy Critique The Language of Exclusion**

Many government policies in Himachal Pradesh talk about waste management and clean tourism but on the ground they do not always fit the reality of the mountains these plans are often made by thinking about cities where roads are wide land is flat and systems are easier to manage but the mountains are



very different villages are spread out roads are narrow and many places are difficult to reach this makes it hard to apply the same rules in the same way, one big problem is the difference in scale what works in big cities like Delhi or Pune does not work in areas like Parvati valley or Beas valley in cities waste can be taken far away to dumping sites but in the mountains there is no real away space is limited and every place is part of the

natural system when waste is thrown it stays within the same environment and slowly harms land water and wildlife.

Another issue is how eco tourism is being promoted it often sounds good in words but in reality it focuses more on building hotels roads and tourist facilities instead of thinking about how many people a place can actually handle there is little attention given to the idea of limits many fragile areas are taking more pressure than they can manage which leads to damage over time, there is also a lack of responsibility from big companies whose plastic products are used by tourists bottles packets and wrappers are left behind in forests rivers and even high mountain areas where there is no system to collect them local people are left to deal with this waste even though they did not create it policies do not strongly address this issue and this creates an unfair situation where the burden falls on small communities.

*Overall these policies need to become more practical and sensitive to mountain conditions they should include local voices understand the limits of nature and make sure that responsibility is shared by everyone including companies tourists and the government another important gap in these policies is that local people are often not properly involved in decision making plans are made at higher levels and then applied to villages without fully understanding local needs and knowledge people who have lived in these mountains for generations understand the land seasons and natural balance much better but their voice is rarely heard this creates a feeling of distance and sometimes even frustration among communities if policies include local participation and trust their experience the solutions can become more practical and long lasting and people will also feel more responsible in protecting their own environment. Case Study The Waste Scapes of the Kullu Manali Corridor*

The road between kullu and manali is one of the busiest tourist routes in Himachal Pradesh and today it clearly shows how the problem of waste is growing earlier this area was known for its apple and plum orchards and most of the land was used for farming people followed natural seasons and their daily life was connected to agriculture but now many of these lands have been changed into hotels cafes parking spaces and shops to support tourism.

With the widening of the highway and the opening of atal tunnel the number of vehicles has increased a lot during peak season long traffic jams are very common and one can easily see smoke dust and noise all along the road the fresh mountain air is slowly getting affected and the calm environment is no longer the same as before, if we look closely near the beas river we can see plastic bottles food packets and



other waste lying on the banks in some places it feels like this has become a normal part of the view which is very concerning earlier these riverbanks were clean and used by locals for daily needs but now they are slowly getting polluted.

In many villages small water channels known as kuhls are used for irrigation and drinking water but now these kuhls are often blocked by plastic and waste which stops the flow of water farmers face problems in watering their fields and this creates tension between the needs of tourism and farming local people sometimes feel that their basic needs are being ignored while tourist facilities are given more importance.

This situation shows a clear example of unfairness where the burden of waste and pollution is carried by local communities while the benefits of tourism are not equally shared it is something that can be seen with our own eyes and felt in everyday life and it needs serious attention before the damage becomes too difficult to control.

## **Visual Representation**

When we move along the kullu manali road the change in the landscape is easy to notice with our own eyes earlier there were open green fields orchards and clear riverbanks but now many spots are filled with parked vehicles small stalls and piles of waste near bridges and roadside areas plastic bottles chips packets and disposable plates are often seen lying around even in places that are meant to be scenic viewpoints the beas river which once looked clean and fresh now has visible waste along its edges in some stretches the water still flows strongly but the sides

## **Tell a different story this mix of beauty and waste creates a strange feeling where nature and pollution exist side by side. Oral Interview**

During a small conversation with a local resident who has been living in this area for many years he shared his concern in very simple words he said earlier we used to drink water directly from the kuhls and streams but now we have to think twice he also mentioned that during tourist season the amount of garbage increases a lot and sometimes it takes days to get cleared he feels that tourists enjoy the place for a short time but locals have to live with the impact every day he also said that farming has become more difficult because water channels get blocked and land is not as clean as before

another local shopkeeper shared that tourism has helped him earn money and support his family but at the same time he worries about the future he said if this continues people may stop coming once the place loses its natural beauty he believes that both tourists and government should take more responsibility he suggested that there should be strict rules for waste and better awareness so that people understand the value of these mountains his words reflect a mix of hope and concern which is common among many people living in this region.



## Digital Ethnography: Beyond the Scenic Viewpoint

The rise of social media has fundamentally changed how people interact with the mountains turning quiet fragile spots into crowded instagrammable destinations today a place is often valued more for how good it looks through a phone screen than for its actual ecological health this digital focus acts like a literal and metaphorical filter where travelers become so focused on capturing the perfect pristine shot for their followers that they stop noticing the reality on the ground you often see someone carefully framing a photo to show only the snow peaked mountains and blue sky while they are literally standing on a pile of plastic bottles and food wrappers just outside the cameras view this creates a ghost landscape where the beauty we see online is a lie that covers up the ecological grief happening in real time by chasing these digital trophies tourism becomes a hollow act of taking beauty without taking any responsibility for the waste left behind leading to the over saturation of areas that simply werent meant to handle such heavy human pressure.

The way we look at our home has changed because of these screens and it is painful to watch how a quiet corner of a forest or a clean bend in the river suddenly becomes a famous spot overnight just because of a few photos people come in a rush with their loud cars and music and they don't even look at the trees or feel the air properly they just want that one perfect picture to show the world it is a strange thing because they will stand right next to a pile of stinking plastic or a blocked water channel and just move their camera a little bit so the garbage doesn't show they are capturing a dream but leaving us with a mess that doesn't go away once the photo is uploaded this digital hunger is pushing too many people into places that are small and fragile and the ground simply cannot take it anymore we are seeing our sacred spaces and our old grazing lands being turned into nothing more than backdrops for someone else's vacation and in that process the real soul of the mountain is getting lost it feels like people are visiting a museum instead of a living breathing home and when they leave they forget that we are the ones who have to wake up the next morning and live with the soot on our leaves and the plastic in our fields.

It is hard to explain the feeling of seeing your own backyard treated like a dumping ground by people who claim to love the view. when visitors arrive they see the big mountains and the green valleys but they don't see the years of care we have put into our orchards and our paths. they come for a few hours of fun and leave behind things that will stay in our soil for hundreds of years while we are left to pick up the pieces. it feels like our life and our work don't matter as long as the tourist is comfortable and has a good story to tell back home. but the truth is that these mountains are not just a playground they are what keep us alive and if the water stays dirty and the land stays buried under plastic then eventually there will be nothing left for anyone to come and see. we are not asking people to stop coming but we are asking them to see us and to respect the land as a living thing because once the peace and the purity are gone they don't just come back with a new policy or a bigger budget.



## The Human Element An Interview Narrative

To understand this problem in a deeper way it is important to listen to the people who live here every day this short story is based on a conversation with rakesh who is a 54 year old apple farmer living in a village near manali he has spent his whole life working on his land and taking care of his orchard his words are simple but they carry a lot of truth and feeling.

When asked how tourism has changed his life and his connection with the land he paused for a moment and then spoke slowly he said earlier the river felt like a part of our family we respected it and it gave us clean water for our homes and fields but now the same river looks different in many places he said that waste from hotels and tourist activities often ends up in the water and it no longer feels as pure as it once was.

He also talked about how the number of visitors has increased a lot over the years he said people come here to enjoy the snow and the beauty but they do not always think about the impact they leave behind plastic bottles food wrappers and other waste are left in open areas and sometimes even near farms he said we wake up in the morning and find garbage near our land which was not there before this makes us feel bad because we try to keep our surroundings clean.

Rakesh also shared his concern about air quality he pointed towards his apple trees and said that earlier the leaves looked fresh and healthy but now there is often a layer of dust and black soot on them especially during heavy tourist season he said so many taxis and vehicles pass through the roads every day and the smoke affects the trees in ways that are not always visible immediately but can be harmful over Time.

When he spoke about eco tourism he smiled a little but it was not a happy smile he said we hear big words like eco tourism in meetings and news but in reality it feels different to us here he explained that more hotels are being built and more water is being used for tourist facilities while farmers sometimes face shortage of water for their crops he said it feels like our needs are becoming less important compared to the comfort of visitors.

His words show a kind of silent pain he is not angry but he is worried he feels that the respect for land and nature which was once very strong is slowly fading away he also feels that people like him who grow food and take care of the land are not getting the value and respect they deserve.

This story helps us understand that the problem is not only about managing waste or building more facilities it is also about how people feel about their home and their identity when the environment changes so quickly it affects their emotions their work and their sense of belonging there is a feeling of loss not just of clean water or fresh air but also of pride and dignity , it becomes clear that solutions should not only focus on rules and systems but also on people their voices and their experiences if we really want to protect these mountains then the thoughts and feelings of local communities like rakesh



must be heard and respected only then can there be a balance between tourism and the life of the people who call this place their home. **we are not losing just our land we are losing the way we used to live with it**

## **Ghost Landscapes The Instagrammability of Ecological Grief**

In many tourist places in the mountains there is a strange reality that can be seen if we look closely people come to take beautiful photos of snow peaks rivers and valleys they search for the perfect spot the perfect angle and the perfect moment but often what is not visible in the picture is the ground beneath their feet many times people are standing on plastic waste food wrappers or broken bottles while taking a photo that looks clean and perfect.

This shows a gap between what is real and what is shown online the picture looks peaceful and pure but the actual place is facing damage this can be called a kind of taking beauty without taking responsibility people enjoy the view capture it on their phones and share it with others but the waste they leave behind stays in the same place and slowly becomes part of the land.

This habit is becoming more common with social media where places are valued for how good they look in photos rather than how healthy they are in real life some spots become famous not because of their natural importance but because they are popular online this brings even more people and more pressure on the same fragile areas.

local people often notice this change they see how visitors focus more on pictures and less on the place itself earlier people would sit quietly near rivers or walk through forests with care but now many come in a rush take photos and move on without thinking about the impact they leave behind this creates a feeling that the true meaning of these places is slowly being lost.

This idea reminds us that beauty is not only what we see in a photo it is also about how clean and healthy a place is in reality if we only take images and leave behind waste then the beauty we are capturing will not last for long it becomes important to match what we show with how we act so that these places remain truly beautiful not just in pictures but in real life as well.

## **Towards a Humanities First Policy Framework**

If we really want to protect Himachal Pradesh then the thinking around policy has to change in a simple way it should not only focus on systems and rules but also on people their lives and their connection with nature the mountains should not be seen as empty land for use but as living spaces that deserve care and respect.

One important step is to give more power to local villages instead of keeping all decisions at higher levels village groups like gram sabhas understand their area much better they know the seasons the land and the problems they face every day if they are given the right to manage waste and tourism they



can create better solutions for their own place they can also ask visitors to pay a small fee which can be used to clean and restore the environment this will make tourism more responsible and also support local needs.

Another simple but strong idea is to make tourists more aware many people who come to the mountains do not fully understand how sensitive this place is instead of just putting signs that say do not litter there should be a short and clear introduction at entry points like rohtang and atal tunnel this can explain how the mountains work why waste is a big problem and how visitors can help protect the area even a few minutes of real understanding can change behavior in a big way there is also a need to control pollution from vehicles the number of cars and taxis has increased a lot and this affects both air and land one way to manage this is to ask vehicles that create more pollution to pay a higher fee when entering sensitive areas this money should not just go into general funds but should be used directly to support farming water systems and local environment protection this will help balance the damage being caused.

Overall the focus should be on sharing responsibility everyone including tourists local people businesses and the government should play their part policies should be simple practical and based on real life conditions when people feel involved and respected they are more likely to care for the land in the long run this kind of approach can help protect both the beauty of the mountains and the life of the people who depend on them.

### **Important Note Shared Responsibility and Real Change**

Real change will only happen when everyone understands that the mountains are not just for use but for care rules alone will not solve the problem if people do not feel connected to the place tourists must act with respect local people must be supported and the government must listen and respond honestly if this shared effort does not happen then even the best policies will remain only on paper but if people truly care and take small responsible steps every day then these mountains can still be protected for the future this also means that awareness should not be a one time effort but a continuous process schools local groups tourism workers and even small shopkeepers can play a role in reminding people about responsible behavior simple actions like reducing plastic use carrying waste back and respecting local water sources can slowly build a culture of care when visitors see locals taking pride in their surroundings they are more likely to follow the same path in this way responsibility spreads from one person to another and becomes a shared habit rather than a forced rule.



## CONCLUSION

The problem of pollution in Himachal Pradesh is not only about waste lying on roads or near rivers it shows a deeper issue in the way people think and behave towards the mountains somewhere the connection between humans and nature is becoming weaker the mountains are being treated more like a place for short visits and enjoyment rather than a living home that needs care and respect.

for local people these mountains are not just scenery they are part of daily life they give water food and support to families but when large numbers of visitors come without awareness it creates pressure on these same resources this leads to problems that go beyond visible waste it affects water sources farming and even the peace of the place over time this creates a feeling of loss among local communities.

A more human focused way of thinking can help in dealing with this situation instead of only focusing on cleaning waste after it is created there should be more effort to prevent it by changing behavior and building understanding people need to feel that they are part of the place even if they stay for a short time this feeling can make them act more responsibly policies also need to reflect this change they should not only talk about rules and systems but also about values respect and balance when policies support local communities listen to their voices and protect their needs they become stronger and more meaningful at the same time tourists should be guided in a simple and clear way so they understand how their actions affect the mountains. If this balance is not created the natural beauty that attracts people may slowly fade away but if people work together with care and responsibility there is still hope the mountains can remain clean peaceful and full of life for future generations the real goal should not just be to manage waste but to rebuild the bond between humans and nature so that both can exist in harmony.

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