

# Green workers of Himalayas: evidence of transformation induced regeneration

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The investigation of the relationship between the future of humanity and the future of ecology is a pertinent issue. In this context, the study aimed to explore people's travel experience in the Himalayan region of India for transformation and well-being and how transformation induces their involvement in regenerative practices. The authors investigated if transformations contribute to the well-being of all living beings and the environment and induce involvement in regenerative practices?

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors preferred qualitative research design and selected narrative inquiry as a research approach to bring individuals' life stories to the centre stage for examination. Accordingly, diachronic data was collected, and a paradigmatic type of narrative inquiry was applied that uses paradigmatic analytical procedures to produce thematic categories and taxonomies from the database.

**Findings** – Nine themes were identified and discussed in the light of existing literature. Transformational tourism promotes well-being and reduces mental health anomalies. The study participants used words like calm, compose, stress-free, and compassion, indicating enhanced consciousness. They also reported satisfaction and induced environmentally friendly behaviour after serving the community and environment at tourist destinations situated in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the Union territory of Ladakh of the Himalayan region of India.

**Originality/value** – The paper collates evidence to establish a correlation between transformation and regeneration. There is a suggestion that transformative travel leads to participation in regenerative activities. The paper is based on people's experiences described as green workers of the Indian Himalayas and provides empirical conclusions that support the argument of transformational induced regenerative tourism.

**Keywords** Transformational tourism, Regenerative tourism, Mental health, Well-being, Qualitative research, Climate change

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Time and again, human civilization has been exposed to the threats that have altered their way of life on the planet. Today, the most significant challenges before the world are climate change and the health and well-being issues of the people. The mental health and well-being issue aggravated during the COVID19 pandemic, but it's undercurrent that the world ignored for a long time was always present. It is the destructive tendencies and their repercussions that adversely impact people's health, well-being, and even the ecosystem visible at all levels: individuals, society, and the environment. At the individual level, mental health and well-being emerged as a significant health challenges of the 21st century. Twelve billion working days get wasted every year, and depression and anxiety cost US\$ 1 trillion to the global economy (Eaton *et al.*, 2018). At the societal and environmental level, human establishments evolve, shape, and build around concrete structures, obfuscating the scenic nature from people's gaze. The cities are becoming unhappier, and people live miserable lives (Glaeser *et al.*, 2016; Macdonald, 2019). Rapid urbanization, hectic life schedules, and destruction of natural resources damaged the social and natural environment associated with people's deteriorating well-being.

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Human civilization is exposed to various frightening crises. Climate change and ecological disturbances are some of those crises that pose a severe threat to the present and future generations. The coronavirus pandemic is an example of human intrusion in the ecosystem, increasing the risk of infectious diseases in the present and future. Further, land-use change, agricultural expansion, and wildlife exploitation for various reasons led to ecological disturbance created by humans (Everard *et al.*, 2020). The deepening environmental crisis is a consequence of the increasing hold of capitalism, consumerism and neoliberal economic globalization on society. In recent years, it has been observed that the destructive and exploitative practices in the name of economic growth disturbed the ecological balance and damaged the planet; hence, climate change emerged as an existential threat to the world (Gills, 2020).

The present global challenges demand a radical shift from the existing capitalist world order focused on profits and growth without considering the consequences of leveraging and exploiting resources at an accelerating pace. The world needs restoration of spiritual philosophy where we are conscious of our actions that go beyond the accumulation of resources and post materialistic philosophy (Gills, 2020). The need of the time is the expansion of consciousness and transformation at the individual and societal level to maintain environmental sustainability and ecological balance. Over here, Peter Russell appears relevant, "The crisis facing humanity today is not so much an environmental crisis, a political crisis or an economic crisis; it is essentially a crisis of consciousness—a spiritual crisis." (Russell, 2001, p. 1).

The need is to explore a medium that may act as a medium and a transformative force. Tourism is the largest and fastest-growing industry that has a global reach. The travel and tourism industry can act as a transformative force that may contribute to the inner transformation process and result in the awakening of consciousness (Sheldon, 2020); however, the challenge before the tourism industry is its success which results in over-tourism and massification due to increased number of tourists at a destination and thus, it also requires the transformation of its practices (Wahl, 2019). Tourism flourishing at a destination also causes damage to the ecosystems and the communities through exploitative practices and social degeneration (Wahl, 2019). The need is to redesign tourism by using its positive power instead of treating it as a victim of changes. Existing research literature suggests that reconnecting people with the environment is beneficial for environmental preservation and people's well-being (Sheldon, 2020). It demands an essential shift in seeing tourism merely as a service industry that serves customers with tourism products and services but as a phenomenon that may increase people's consciousness through inner transformation. The transformation of consciousness and awakening may also get people involved in restoring and regenerative practices at tourist destinations to strengthen local ecosystems' health and climate resilience (Wahl, 2019). At the same time, transformation through tourism will also enhance people's well-being (Kottler, 1998; Ross, 2010).

Previous studies highlighted that transformative travel is conducive to personal and social transformation and it can infuse an emotional connection between all the living beings that are part of nature (Ateljevic, 2020; Sheldon, 2020). Studies also highlighted the need to transform tourism operating systems for sustainable tourism and visitors' economies (Cave and Dredge, 2020). In addition, some studies went beyond and advocated for the concept of regenerative tourism and provided strategic actions and models that are essential for providing holistic sustainability and well-being of people and local communities (Ateljevic, 2020; Duxbury *et al.*, 2020); however, most of the studies are either conceptual or provides new insights in the domain of transformational and regenerative tourism lacks empirical findings and evidence. Considering the dearth of research in transformational and regenerative tourism, the authors came across the concept of green workers that are young people escaping from the hustle and bustle of cities to find relief in the wilderness and nature-based destinations of the Himalayan region in India. These people associate themselves with local NGOs and mountain communities and get involved in restoration work by engaging in community clean-up drives, waste collection and public awareness programmes that support destination regeneration and enable environmental consciousness in people simultaneously.

The authors preferred studying the travel experiences of urbanites travelling to the Himalayan region and their motivations. These urban metropolitan people prefer nature-based destinations, mountains and wilderness or remote locations for travelling to get relief from excessive pressure and stress and to break the monotony of the hectic schedule of urban areas (Bhalla *et al.*, 2021; Birch *et al.*, 2020; Pesonen and Komppula, 2010; Sheldon, 2020; Wolsko and Hoyt, 2012). The increasing number of tourists in the destinations of the Himalayan region is evidence of the most sought-after choice of metropolitan tourists. The authors found the Himalayan region more conducive to a transformational experience in this context. The Himalayan region provides fresh air, wilderness, suitable climate, healing and even forest bathing, which contrasts with the hustle and bustle of polluted metropolitan cities. Some destinations like Ranikhet in Uttarakhand state are now being developed for forest bathing-inspired by the Japanese practise of Shinrin Yoku.

Interestingly, tourism in the Himalayan region of the Indian states amplified rapid urbanization, improved infrastructure and created employment opportunities; however, unplanned urbanization and access to the remote areas of the Himalayas by the people and the global markets pose a severe threat to the environment (Tiwari and Joshi, 2020). The local communities also benefitted from the tourism industry, but their agrarian, traditional and cultural practices have been compromised. The tourism and hospitality industry's growth significantly contributed to climate change's effects on the Himalayan ecosystem. Cloud bursts are getting common in the arid highlands of the Himalayas, such as Ladakh, which has observed a steep and sudden increase in the number of tourists (Thayyen, 2020). Similar famous tourist destinations such as Shimla of Himachal Pradesh and Nainital of Uttarakhand experienced drastic changes in the ecosystem and are suffering from the adverse effects of climate change as glacier outbursts, cloud bursts, flash floods, heavy rainfall and landslides are getting common in the region (Thayyen, 2020). Tourist destinations are suffering from the consequences of the increased number of tourists more than the carrying capacity of the destination. Increasing pollution from vehicles, traffic congestion, unavailability of the parking space, littering and improper waste management are some of such consequences. It has increased hostility amongst the local community and destroyed the fragile ecosystem of the Himalayan region. The challenge is that people seeking inner transformation and healing are travelling to the Himalayan region, but increased tourism activities in the vulnerable Himalayas adversely affect the local community's ecosystem and climate. In this context, tourism practices also need transformation to better the environment.

The paper examines how travel and tourism act as tools for transforming people's and the planet's well-being. As per the study's context, first, it explores the well-being status and the motivations of urban youth living in metro cities of India to visit the destinations of the Himalayan region. Second, it determines the changes in behaviour and attitude of people towards themselves and others by travelling. Third, the paper explores people's engagement in activities at the destination visited and how and why they involve themselves in restorative and regenerative practices. The literature review and methodology follow the introduction section of the paper. It is then structured with a section on findings and discussions and ends with a conclusion comprising implications and directions for future research.

## 2. Literature review

Tourism is considered a tool for economic growth; however, creating jobs, providing employment opportunities and generating revenue through taxes ignore the negative impacts on the well-being of the environment and individuals, particularly in local communities (Pollock, 2019). The recent COVID19 pandemic made human civilization realize the importance of psychological and sociological factors that impacts individual and social life and how it has expanded consciousness amongst people (Hussain, 2021). People worldwide wish to live as per pre-COVID19 conditions considering it normal; however, the concept of normalcy and normal life requires serious introspection. After surviving a pandemic, we need to redefine normalcy; perhaps, the solution would be holistic normal. Gills (2020) highlighted the need for transformation amidst the crisis in individuals and environmental life. It is the restoration of a culture of peace, kindness and

compassion between individuals and within the web of life. Over here, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the significance of well-being of individuals and ecosystems but before that we need to understand the issues and challenges people and environment are experiencing in terms of deteriorated well-being.

## **2.1 Well-being: people and environment**

Urban spaces of developing nations are the new centres of rapid industrialization and consumer capitalist societies. People residing and working in urban locales and industrial areas suffer from health and well-being issues (Murphy *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020). The scenario is more common in developing countries that focus on economic growth and development but spend less than 1% of their total GDP on health care and even less on mental healthcare (WHO, 2019). The despair in the life of urbanites increased the issues of stress, anxiety, depression and even suicidal ideations and the present COVID19 pandemic intensified the health and well-being challenges (van der Velden *et al.*, 2020). The city's highly competitive environment creates excessive pressure on people, influencing the culture of wealth accumulation and material possessions for which they sacrifice their health and well-being (Fragga, 2019; Gills, 2020).

Stakeholders have started considering tourism beyond an industry that yields economic gains and development. They are focusing on exploring the potential of travel and tourism as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) that produces healing effects focused on enhancing health, wellness and spiritual well-being (Gezon, 2018). Travel is considered a social phenomenon to escape harsh realities and break the monotony of life. In the quest to re-create the damaged identities and combat the existential crisis, people utilise travelling to reconnect to self and the world (Maoz, 2006; Robledo and Batle, 2017). With the emergence of contemporary and new forms of tourism, people would be more attracted to less technologically enabled destinations. They search for meaningful experiences through tourism that enhances physiological, psychological and spiritual well-being (Robinson and Schänzel, 2019). It demands designing tourism experiences that facilitate an individual's emotional nourishment and promote a sense of unity with self, people and the environment (Sheldon, 2020). Interestingly, to enhance well-being and strengthen the connection within and outside, people prefer nature-based destinations, remote and wilderness locations, and even rural spaces juxtaposed with the urban artificial set-up. Nature-based destinations are conducive to enhancing mental health and well-being (Ashley, 2007; Little, 2012; Sharpley and Jepson, 2011; Sheldon, 2020); however, the challenge is that tourism and environmental degradation also require transformation.

## **2.2 Transformational tourism and transformation of tourism for well-being**

The understanding of the term transformation is grounded in the work of Jack Mezirow. He defined transformation as expanding consciousness and self-awareness that changes worldviews and views towards self (Mezirow, 1978). In the context of adult life, he explained that it comprises dilemmas and life crises that are common and cannot be resolved by usual ways of handling problems. Ross (2010) defined personal transformation as "a dynamic socio-cultural and uniquely individual process that (1) begins with a disorienting dilemma and involves choice, healing, and experience(s) of expanding consciousness towards the divine; (2) initiates a permanent change in identity structures through cognitive, psychological, physiological, affective, or spiritual experiences; and (3) renders a sustained shift in the form of one's thinking, doing, believing, or sensing due to the novelty of the intersection between the experiencer, the experience, and the experiencer's location in time".

Transformation in the context of travel and tourism was first defined by Kottler (1998, p. 26) as "a process that involves the actualization of something missing driven by intellectual curiosity, emotional need, or physical challenge." Kottler and his clients enhanced travel experiences through the therapeutic interventions of travelling. He claimed that no other activity has more potential than travelling, producing healing effects and altering people's perception of life

(Kottler, 1998, p. 14). Robledo and Batle (2017) highlighted the significance of considering tourism beyond the activity for pleasure. The motivation of leisure travel is usually based on the escapism that breaks the monotony of routine life; however, transformational tourism is more about seeking. Cohen (1979) predicted this “seeking” phenomenon as finding meaning in life or discovering one’s true self. Therefore, transformational tourism may act as a catalyst of change that enhances well-being as it produces the positive synergies of mind, body, and soul (Smith, 2003; Little, 2012). It may emerge as a possible solution to the surging issue of mental health and well-being anomalies that require the immediate attention of the stakeholders, particularly policymakers.

Tourism is transformative, but ironically, it has become a victim of its success. Flourishing destinations were exposed to the challenge of over-tourism in the pre-COVID scenario; wherein massification resulted in community hostility and a damaged ecosystem. It also contributed to climate change and natural disasters at the destinations because of increased carbon footprints and pollution that disturbed the fragile ecosystems of the Himalayas (Singh *et al.*, 2020; Thayyen, 2020; Tiwari and Joshi, 2020). The challenge is maintaining the sustainability of the destinations that depend upon the transformation of tourism operating systems and practices (Cave and Dredge, 2020).

Existing research shows that travelling to nature-based destinations generates healing effects and creates spiritual experiences that help tourists expand consciousness, feel more awakened, and transform (Little, 2012; Sheldon, 2020; Smith, 2003). Sheldon (2020) highlighted the significance of a sense of unity that promotes compassion and unity between people and the environment. Transformation enhances consciousness and makes people realize their dependence on the environment. Like humans find nature conducive to their health and well-being similarly, the existence of the environment also depends upon human actions. With the interconnectedness between living beings and nature, it is vital for people of postmodernist society to understand that humans and nature are the same at the core. Ateljevic (2020) described an emerging trend wherein people demand meaningful tourism experiences that allow them to develop individually and collectively. People travel as volunteers and get involved in activities that make a difference and improve society and the environment.

The need for a radical shift in thinking and behaviour, the transformation of tourism through tourism, and the enhancement of consciousness will decide the future of tourism. The new normal should be holistically based on nature and humans’ co-existence. Gills (2020) elaborated on the problems and challenges of the triple conjecture of climate change, capitalist world order, and COVID-19 and advocated for restoration and great awakening. Accordingly, regeneration comes into the picture based on utilizing the power of restoration. Regeneration may act as a mechanism that restores the lost prudence and allows the ecology to sustain and flourish against anthropocentrism—a viewpoint that holds human supremacy over nature. The Innovation Group, “The New Sustainability: Regeneration” (2018) highlighted the immediate need to find a better definition of sustainability or a movement that goes beyond the generic concept of sustainability as “doing less harm is no longer enough”. The future of sustainability is regeneration: replenishing and restoring what we have lost and building economies and communities that thrive while allowing the planet to thrive too. In terms of the shift required in tourism, regenerative tourism can play a significant role in deciding the future of humanity and the future of ecology. The most important point of regenerative tourism practice is leaving the destination in a better condition than it was found. Some steps like responsible travel, going green, cleanliness, and awareness drives can lead to restoration and ultimately to regenerative tourism. McEnhill *et al.* (2020) explained regenerative tourism as “promoting enduring positive outcomes, and that to get to a regenerated state, restoration needs to occur—healing, restoring, and thriving”. The report highlighted regenerative tourism as a new domain, but the complementary or alternative paradigm lacks a clear definition. The reason is the dearth of academic work and research in the domain. Therefore, the study’s authors realised the significance of the pertinent issue of investigating transformation and regeneration as twin engines for a better world. The study attempts to provide evidence by developing the understanding of youth’s engagement in destination restoration work in the Himalayan states of India and the

deliverables of such engagement. Will such transformations contribute to the development of self and the well-being of all living beings and the environment?

### 3. Methodology

The authors applied qualitative research design and preferred narrative approach as a subset of qualitative research to bring individuals' life stories to the centre stage for examination. Qualitative research is preferred over the structured survey method as it allows the study participants to explore and express their emotions and experiences freely (Creswell, 2007). Narratives are based on discourse composition that brings diverse events, happenings, and human life actions together and draws a thematically unified goal-directed process (Polkinghorne, 1995). The two reasons for selecting the narrative research approach are first, to better understand study participants' subjective experiences and second, to consider the contexts and environment in which such narratives were built. It helped the authors build meta-narratives related to people's mental health and well-being, how travelling affects their well-being, and how and why they participate in ecological restoration programmes at tourist destinations. Atkinson and Rubinelli (2012) highlighted that illness is a biographical disruption that affects identity and life. In this context, the authors considered mental health anomalies and well-being issues as disruptions in the everyday life of individuals. It also affects people's consciousness; hence, the need for transformation becomes pertinent. Narrative research facilitates the understanding of such disruptions and helps reconstruct narrative and personal identity based on when and why specific actions were taken by individuals (Polkinghorne, 1995).

#### 3.1 Sample design and participant selection procedure

To identify study participants, the authors applied purposive and snowball sampling to select people between the ages of twenty-four (24) to forty (40) working and settled in metropolitan cities of India. The study participants were frequent travellers to the tourist destinations located in the Himalayan states of India, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the Union territory of Ladakh. The reason for selecting people between the age of twenty-four (24) and forty (40) is based on the findings of a study that highlighted that people between the age brackets of fifteen (15) and thirty-nine (39) are prone to suicidal ideations and mental health anomalies (Dandona *et al.*, 2018). The interviews were conducted post the study participants traveling when they reached their respective cities. One of the objectives of this study was to understand the well-being states and motivations of people of metropolitan cities travelling to the Himalayan states, and therefore, sample identification was made accordingly.

In confirming the principles of ethical practice of human science research, the authors explained the study objectives and their significance to the participants before obtaining their consent to be interviewed. After obtaining their oral consent and the interview, the authors validated the data collected from the participants by providing copies of the synthesis of descriptions to the participants. Participants found the textual description acceptable and affirmed that no change is required in the text used as narratives.

#### 3.2 Interviewing procedure and analysis

The authors conducted in-depth unstructured, open-ended interviews and transcribed the interviews. Unstructured interviews are considered the most suitable data collection method for extracting people's narratives as they score high on validity (Kaasila, 2007; Mertova and Webster, 2019). A total of eight (08) people were interviewed individually for a minimum time of forty (40) minutes which was also extended to one (01) hour in some cases. The sample size in narrative research is usually small to collect extensive and in-depth information (Overcash, 2003; Butina, 2015). All the interviews adhered to the general interview guidelines. The authors kept the study's objectives in mind and followed a pre-decided interview pattern. The interviews were continued

until the information collected reached the saturation point of repetition or till lesser variability was found in participants' stories (Schank, 1990; Wilson, 2002).

The authors collected diachronic data for the analysis and chose the paradigmatic type of narrative inquiry that uses paradigmatic analytical procedures to produce thematic categories and taxonomies from the database. The analysis of narratives was found most suitable to develop the themes out of the stories in a chronological pattern (Polkinghorne, 1995). The analysis procedure was carried out on transcripts, and both the authors carried out the procedure of inter-coding before developing the taxonomies. The results and discussion section present the themes with supportive statements. Pseudo-identity with codings such as P1 and P2 was used to conceal the participants' identities.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

Eleven themes were identified and presented under three superordinate themes. The rationale for presenting themes in a chronological and staged way complies with the study's objectives and the narrative structure of the research, which is usually based on a plot.

##### 4.1 Stage 1: well-being status and motivations for visiting the Himalayan region

Following the first objective of the study, the well-being condition and the motivations for visiting the Himalayan region following broad themes were obtained:

###### 1. Theme 1: Stress and fatigue

The most common phenomenon that appeared in the narratives of all the study participants was stress and compromised well-being. Daily hectic routine, long working hours and commutation time, stress at the workplace, and urban lifestyle often lead to life crises and have been cited as the reasons for the escape of urban travellers (Maoz, 2006; Ochiai *et al.*, 2015; Macdonald, 2019). For example, participant 3 (P3) expressed stress and fatigue as:

I came to Delhi to make my dreams come true. Initially, I was excited and happy, but now I feel half of the time spent on metro trains. Today, I am working from home, but my work never comes to an end. I feel exhausted and drained every single day. Stress has become an inevitable part of my life.

###### (2) Theme 2: Pollution and population

Two of the significant challenges that also add to urbanites' stress levels are pollution and population. Kastenholz *et al.* (2012) stated that people prefer to escape urban areas and travel to rural areas because of increasing congestion, pollution, and noise. Participant 7 (P7) mentioned:

Delhi has become the pollution capital of the world. You cannot breathe here as it may lead to multiple diseases. Moreover, the crowd in the city and traffic jams irritates me a lot. Why would I not go to the scenic villages of Uttarakhand where I can breathe fresh air?

Little (2012) also flagged the same issue by highlighting the significance of nature for the health and well-being of people and the routine issues of urban life that force people to visit rural and isolated areas amidst nature.

###### (3) Theme 3: Healing through nature and wilderness

Time spent in nature has always been found conducive to health and well-being. Nature provides therapeutic interventions that help a person heal and can also initiate the process of inner transformation. Ecotherapy, forest bathing inspired by the Shinrin-yoku, physical activities and adventure help people transform and enhance their well-being (Bhalla *et al.*, 2021; Ochiai *et al.*, 2015; Sheldon, 2020). Participant 2 (P2) said:

I lost the love of my life because I was not able to give proper time to her. She left and my loneliness pushed me towards alcohol. I became irregular and inefficient at my workplace because I could not take

the setback. Finally, I ran away to the mountains as a bag packer and established the lost connection in me. Nature was medicine and perhaps the only healing agent that worked for me miraculously. Travelling has become my passion now as it makes me grounded and humble.

Nature provides therapeutic landscapes, sounds of wind and silence, animal sounds, a peaceful environment, fresh air and pure water that allows a person to become calm and aware more inside (Kastenholz *et al.*, 2012; Soga *et al.*, 2021).

#### **4.2 Stage 2: transformation in self and world's view**

##### 1. Theme 4: Time for introspection

Two of the study participants, P5 and P7, expressed almost similar feelings about talking to self. P7 said:

When I travel in the Himalayan forests for trekking and camping, I feel light on my feet and even inside. It is like some burden has been lifted from my chest. While I trek for kilometres, it is always the conversation that takes place inside me. It allows me to think deeper and I get my answers. I realise where I went wrong in my office and even in my personal life. A kid inside me then smiles.

Sheldon (2020) mentioned environment connectivity and how it helps people calm their minds and understand the more profound things. It supports the enhancement of self-awareness and consciousness that allows people to make the right decisions in life.

##### (2) Theme 5: Regain mental and emotional balance

Gezon (2018) highlighted that travelling to nature-based destinations and immersion in nature are complementary and alternative medicine that can benefit people with moderate mental health anomalies. It also helps people overcome mental and emotional challenges by changing their space settings from urban to rural or nature-based destinations (Ochiai *et al.*, 2015; Soga *et al.*, 2021). Participant 8 (P8) mentioned:

Every time I feel low in life, I either ask my friends to travel by our cars on the weekend to the Kumaon and Garhwal mountains. We talk, we share and we cry as well but seeing outside the windows of our car or even from our hotels, I feel something is changing me. I forgive people who hurt me and even I forgive myself for the wrong I did intentionally. I regain the lost balance of my life.

##### (3) Theme 6: Compassionate towards surroundings

Participant 1 (P1) mentioned her visits to the ashram near the bank of river Ganga at the isolated place. She said:

I am a frequent visitor to my ashram (spiritual centre), where I practise meditation as it provides my lost composure back. I noticed that back in Kolkata, I am an independent and fierce woman who often expressed aggression on colleagues and subordinates. When I visit the ashram, I come at peace with myself. My aggression fades away and I feel compassionate to people and things around me. So whenever I feel I lost control over my aggression, I rush to my ashram.

Existing literature highlights that communion with self and nature through meditation or other similar practices allows people to develop compassion towards self and others. Compassion is one of the transformation outcomes that benefit people in routine life and enhance their well-being (Heintzman, 2000; Norman and Pokorny, 2017; Sheldon, 2020).

#### **4.3 Stage 3: motivation for involvement in regenerative practices**

##### 1. Theme 7: Increasing pollution in the Himalayan region

India's Himalayan region, including the mountain states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, comprises religious shrines, temples, spiritual centres, ashrams and even famous tourist destinations. The increasing number of tourists and vehicles amplified the level of pollution and



waste that is harming the fragile ecosystem of the Himalayas (Dimri *et al.*, 2020). Almost every study participant complained about the increased pollution level because of the poor civic sense of people and policy lack. Participant 1 (P7) mentioned,

The sacred river Ganga's purity is being compromised. Tourists litter everywhere on the river bank. They leave beer bottles, throw plastic and even dispose of waste. It felt terrible when I realised that I had left Delhi because of pollution, seeing the condition of the river Yamuna which has contaminated water. People litter everywhere and I do not want the same to happen to Ganga and these beautiful places. I participate in the cleanliness drive because I do not want this beautiful natural landscape turning out to be another Delhi.

## (2) Theme 8: Volunteer services are meaningful experiences

Voluntary services, cleanliness drives and respecting the local culture bring appreciation to the tourists. It also encourages people to continue participating in work that brings together people and the planet. Kay Smith and Diekmann (2017) mentioned that active doing, charity and volunteer services in tourism contexts add meaning to people's lives and enhance their well-being. Sheldon (2020) also mentioned that transformation promotes compassion and awakening in people and infuses the feeling of service they nurture in themselves. Participant 4 (P4) said:

My visits to Uttarakhand have always been fascinating. Earlier I used to travel to relax and to find some peace amidst the chaos, but today, I travel for a clean Ganga drive. My association with local NGOs allowed me to be part of the noble cause. We were only a handful of people when we started, but we grew as a family with the local community's participation and volunteers who travel from all parts of the world just to participate in this drive. A simple thank you from the saints by the riverside or just by seeing the involvement of people while we actively engage in drives makes me believe that my actions will reap fruits in the future. I am making a difference.

## (3) Theme 9: Contentment and sense of achievement

Sheldon (2020) mentioned that travel and transformation make us compassionate, particularly in our involvement with nature. The sense of unity, peace and connection with all living beings makes us evolve as better people. Ateljevic (2013) highlighted the emerging trend of "cultural creatives, the people concerned about saving and improving the planet". These creatives are usually volunteers who participate in restoration activities to add spiritual and meaningful experiences to their lives. For example, it was the experience of participant 5 (P5), who said:

I used to live my life for myself and my family before doing something for the society and environment. We celebrated environment day in our offices by clicking selfies, but my introduction to the project "rally for rivers" moved something inside me. I do fundraisers, am actively involved in plantation activities riverside and even travel to schools and colleges to do awareness programmes. When I see young school students participating in such activities with full enthusiasm, I feel blessed and happy inside that I am doing something good for the world. The feeling cannot be expressed in words, you may call it achievement, but I call it contentment. At least I am doing my bit of protecting the planet.

## 5. Conclusion

Regeneration has become a necessity for the planet's survival, but it requires restoring deep spiritual inner life and awakening. In simple words, the well-being of the environment is connected to the well-being of people, but the people need to realise and learn from the consequences of their exploitative and destructive practices. The study is in line with the existing literature that supports the argument that people are using travel and tourism as a tool for transformation. Deteriorating multi-dimensional well-being and health of people in urban centres of industries, capitalist and over-competitive society is a matter of concern (Kastenholz *et al.*, 2012; Macdonald, 2019). People particularly, urbanites find relief from excessive work or personal life pressures in nature-based destinations, rural and wilderness and isolated places, which in the context of the study is the

Himalayan region where they prefer to travel for peace and tranquillity (Heintzman, 2000; Little, 2012; Ochiai et al., 2015). Mezirow (1978) rightly stated that the urge for transformation or change in perspective towards self or others or even the world's viewpoint emerges from the "state of a dilemma", chaos, anxiety and pressure.

The study found that people prefer to travel to the Himalayan touristic destinations for two reasons; first, to escape from the hustle and bustle of cities, excessive population and population, and, most importantly, to get some relief from the routine stressful life. Second, to seek inner peace, healing and calmness that emerges from transformation. Travelling amidst nature and wilderness provides them time to introspect and reflect on their deeds and actions in their personal and professional life. These journeys to the Himalayan states are not the outward journey but inner journeys seeking transformation. Gills (2020) highlighted the significance of restoring the inner spiritual self and Sheldon (2020) stated that inner transformation through travel helps people expand consciousness. The narratives presented in the study as pieces of evidence confirm that unrest in people in the form of mental health issues ignites the urge for transformation and well-being. Once they realise the change in perspective, feel awakened or connected to the surroundings and communion with nature and well-being, they prefer to engage in meaningful experiences and restorative practices. People with a higher level of consciousness understand and value the existence of living beings and the environment. Ross (2010) rightly mentioned that transformation begins with a disorienting dilemma and renders a shift in one's thinking and doing. Thus, to realise the full potential of regenerative tourism, the transformation of self and well-being becomes imperative.

On the one hand, transformational tourism may serve the future of humanity; regenerative tourism will serve the future of ecology and the environment. It is the realisation that exploitative practices for economic gains and material possession lead to devastating effects on self and the planet. Deteriorating well-being, increased mental health anomalies in people and climate change results from a lower level of consciousness. Regenerative tourism allows people to immerse themselves in nature, which generates healing effects for both humans and the planet. Therefore, transformative and regenerative tourism will be the future of tourism and this will be a deciding factor for the co-existence of people and the planet.

The study's authors realised the dearth of evidence and research in regenerative and transformative tourism. The rationale for selecting the Himalayan states of India famous for tourism is the increased level of pollution and climate change in the fragile ecosystem and the region being the most sought-after choice of tourists from metropolitan cities. The issue of mental health anomalies and the well-being of people and the environment requires policy measures from the government and other stakeholders. The study's findings are structured as a narrative plot that may provide a foundation for policymakers to decide on the promotion of travel and tourism amongst the youth, particularly those working and settled in the metropolitan cities of India. However, the same has to be planned so that participation in restorative work comes out of people's will and their trips and tours should not compromise the destination's carrying capacity and sustainability. The study provides findings regarding people searching for more profound travel experiences that facilitate inner transformation. The future of travel organizations depends upon designing transformative tourism experiences that are meaningful and promote the well-being and consciousness of tourists. The tourism suppliers may focus on creating itineraries that promote the communion of humans with non-human species and nature to develop compassion and mutual respect. Such tours may create transformative experiences that may induce regeneration, just as in the case of the present study. The study limitation is the lesser sample size and its finding, which are region-specific. The same can be improved in future research by increasing the sample, adopting a different qualitative approach, structured survey methods and collecting data from different states and countries. The case research method can also be used in future studies to produce model destinations stories and their implications. The present study's findings highlighted the restoring element of regenerative tourism; however, future studies can also

focus on exploring other elements and characteristics of regeneration, particularly regenerative tourism.

The notion of human supremacy over nature resulted in the exploitation of resources and disrespect towards nature and living beings. The present COVID19 pandemic provided a pause for us to reflect on our actions and at the same time, it allowed nature to heal. Awakening, a higher level of consciousness and transformation is the need of people and the planet and it will lay the foundation for a future where co-existence with nature would be a supreme order.

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