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Cultural Commodification in Kalash Valley: A Case Study of Bumburet Village, District Chitral – Saif Uddin (2016-2018)

Cultural commodification is a process in which behaviors and practices of indigenous people are commodified, marketed, sold and consumed by tourists for money. This study aimed to look at the process of cultural commodification of the Kalash culture and its impact on the local Kalash community. The study was carried out in Bumburet village of Kalash Valley. Through the thematic and semiotic analyses of primary data, this descriptive case study shows how cultural commodification is taking place in Bumburet village and also its impacts on the indigenous Kalash community.

Key Findings

1. The process of cultural commodification has both positive and negative impacts on the stakeholders involved in it. Those stakeholders who possess capital in the form of hotels, shops, vehicles and also those involved in the management of the cultural and religious festivals are the beneficiaries of the process of cultural commodification in Kalash valley whereas those stakeholders who lack capital (the majority of local Kalash people) the process has negative impacts on their culture and religion. It is also evident that purchase and sale of cultural commodities can only be sustainable and beneficial for the community at large if Kalash people are involved in process and control of the production of these cultural products.
2. The Kalash people are portrayed as exotic tribe with unique traditions and customs to attract tourists from all over the world. The huge influx of tourists in the valley brings economic benefits to small section of the valley whereas the majority of the indigenous people face the problems in performing their religious and cultural rituals.
3. The study also highlights the application of the concepts of instrumentality of culture as signified by the fact that culture helps people earn and expand their livelihood options. Secondly, the concept of docile bodies also fit in to the context of the current study as the Kalash people are viewed as exotic and unique subjects by the tourists.

Policy Implications

1. There should be controlled tourism in the valley and the tourists should visit particular places rather than disturbing local people and intruding their private spaces by visiting their homes and breaching their privacy.
2. There should be local guides to guide the tourists instead of non-local guides. With the hiring of local guides, the tourists can be guided properly and they can visit particular places and the locals' private life may not be disturbed.