

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES AND ALTERED RELATIONS

Locating the material and symbolic factors
shaping local engagement with ecotourism
at India's Corbett Tiger Reserve



Revati Pandya

Propositions

1. Villagers' engagement with (eco)tourism at Corbett Tiger Reserve is shaped by their intersectional material and symbolic positions.
(this thesis)
2. Equitable and progressive conservation is more attainable when micro-politics are accounted for.
(this thesis)
3. The method of conducting research is as important as the research outcome.
4. Human-wildlife interaction as a field of study is incomplete without including attention to local worldviews concerning human-animal relations.
5. Giving space for agential expression recognises and respects the person as more than a subject of structural pressures.
6. Who you are is at the core of the story you tell.

Propositions belonging to the thesis, entitled

Intersecting identities and altered relations: Locating the material and symbolic factors shaping local engagement with ecotourism at India's Corbett Tiger Reserve

Revati Pandya

Wageningen, 18 October 2022

**Intersecting identities and altered relations:
Locating the material and symbolic factors shaping local
engagement with ecotourism at India's Corbett Tiger
Reserve**

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This research was conducted under the auspices of the Graduate School Wageningen School of Social Sciences.

Intersecting Identities and Altered Relations

Locating the material and symbolic factors shaping local engagement with ecotourism at India's Corbett Tiger Reserve

Revati Pandya

Thesis

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor
at Wageningen University,
by the authority of the Rector Magnificus,
Prof. Dr A.P.J. Mol,
in the presence of the
Thesis Committee appointed by the Academic Board
to be defended in public
on Tuesday 18 October 2022
at 1:30 p.m. in the Omnia Auditorium.

Revati Pandya

Intersecting Identities and Altered Relations: Locating the material and symbolic factors shaping local engagement with ecotourism at India's Corbett Tiger Reserve
128 pages

PhD thesis, Wageningen University, Wageningen, the Netherlands (2022)

With references, with summary in English

ISBN: 978-94-6447-406-0

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18174/577012>

The research described in this thesis was financially supported by the Research Council of Norway grant (250975) through the Greenmentality Project.

Financial support from Wageningen University, the Sociology of Development and Change chair group for printing this thesis is gratefully acknowledged.

Cover design by Aditya Pandya

Printed by ProefschriftMaken

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Cover Photo: Corbett Tiger Reserve safari gate entrance and signboard on a village road
Photo by: Revati Pandya

Acknowledgments

My PhD journey has been one of immense learning, listening and understanding. Many people and places have made this possible by being partners in learning, mentors, friends and family. I extend my gratitude and appreciation for the several villagers in the Corbett landscape for sharing their time, stories, homes and delicious meals with me. Particularly my constant family during fieldwork, and now lifelong friends. Hari, I have enjoyed learning together with you over all the field visits and I am thankful that continues even now.

To my supervisors Bram Büscher, Robert Fletcher and Nitin Rai: thank you for all your support and guidance. I first discussed the possibility of working on political ecology research with Nitin Rai in Bangalore at a small tea and snack shop. This led to five years of PhD research, and I am thankful to you Nitin, for the opportunity, for your openness to ideas, understanding and your continued support. The possibility of doing an external PhD was introduced to me by Rob Fletcher with whom I was fortunate enough to learn from during my Master's program as well. Rob, thank you for your consistency, support, empathy and patience in helping me navigate the PhD and encouraging me to write about what I felt needed telling. Bram Büscher, thank you for all your support during the PhD, your insights and for offering a critical lens to consistently sharpen my analysis. I have learnt a lot from each one of you, and for that I am genuinely thankful. I would like to thank the Greenmentality project team for having me onboard and for the research support.

I have benefitted from peer exchange and learning in workshops and courses. Thank you to all the course facilitators and peers.

To my family and friends around the world: you have been a source of immense support and encouragement throughout this journey. Evan, thank you for your patience and the many ways you have supported and encouraged me. To my parents and my brother: thank you for always bringing valuable perspective during this journey, and reminding me, in your own ways, there is more to life. To my aunt, Seema Bhatt, thank you for encouraging me to conduct field work in Corbett, for the field visit and for all the conversations. I have been lucky to share this PhD journey with friends going through the same process, and others who have been interested in my research and wellbeing. There are many other family members and friends who have anchored me during this PhD journey. I am grateful to you, and looking forward to being more present with you all.

Summary

This thesis examines the material and symbolic factors tied to identity positions that shape villagers' work with ecotourism at Corbett Tiger Reserve in India. The history of Corbett Tiger Reserve, located in Uttarakhand state, is rooted in coloniality, preservationist ideas of wildlife conservation and the creation of exclusive spaces for tourism. The Reserve contains a Core protected area of 821.99 sq. km which is exclusively maintained for the tiger population, and a Buffer zone of 466.32 sq. km surrounding the Core area within which some human settlement and livelihood activities are permitted and human-wildlife interactions can occur (NTCA 2012, 2020). The Buffer zone is also designated as an area where local communities are provided livelihood alternatives that reduce their dependence on forests. Ecotourism is promoted as a form of livelihood alternative, employing a neoliberal win-win narrative of simultaneously achieving conservation and community benefits (NTCA 2012).

The areas surrounding CTR are a combination of rural and forest landscape. Historically, livelihood activities in this region largely entailed subsistence agriculture, livestock keeping and forest resource use. The growth of tourism since the early 2000s has heavily influenced land use and livelihoods. Today, the areas adjoining the south and eastern boundary of CTR have a high concentration of villages and hotels. As a result of the tourism economy, villagers have been deriving livelihood from home-stays, safari driving, safari guiding and tour operating.

In this thesis, I examine the nature and impacts of CTR tourism as an expression of neoliberal conservation. Neoliberal conservation is characterised by the commodification, marketisation, financialisation, privatisation and decentralisation (Castree 2010; Igoe and Brockington 2007) of nature to gain economic or political support (West and Carrier 2004). As one common expression of neoliberal conservation, nature-based tourism is intended to function as a support for conservation primarily through provision of incentives that aim to make resource preservation more valuable than extraction (Holmes and Cavanagh 2016). Such incentive structures for conservation have been theoretically examined through the perspective of environmentalities, rooted in Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality which analysis subjectification of individuals through techniques of governance (Foucault, 1991; Luke 1999; Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010). In this thesis, I engage with such a poststructuralist political ecology perspective on environmental governance (Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010). I use neoliberal environmentality to examine (eco)tourism at CTR, incentive structures that are in place, villager's engagement and its implications on their lives. Specifically, I examine people's engagement with tourism and factors- outside of incentive structures of neoliberal environmentality- that shape this engagement. I examine the material and symbolic processes that relate to villagers' subjectivities and its connection to tourism-based work. Chapter 5 provides a broader contextual basis for understanding the physical land use changes underway in the rural landscape around CTR. While critical research on ecotourism has revealed the activity's socio-economic impacts including low-wage employment dependencies, a crucial aspect of ecotourism that lies outside this conventional dependency is land use dynamics, specifically land use change, land sales and land-based entrepreneurship. Critical agrarian and

rural land use change studies has shown that material and symbolic factors influence farmers' decision-making regarding land use change. An agrarian studies perspective thus facilitates a nuanced understanding of tourism-related land use diversification and change. By bringing agrarian and ecotourism studies approaches together here, we contribute to both by emphasising the importance of (eco)tourism in agrarian change and of attention to land use change in ecotourism studies to understand how rural people negotiate and navigate (eco)tourism in relation to land use. Chapter 6 provides a grounded understanding of gender dynamics and women's engagement with ecotourism. This chapter seeks to address the question of intersectional gender dynamics in (eco)tourism work. In this article I use an environmentality lens to examine what shapes women's engagement with ecotourism work. Through ethnographic research, I provide insights into different forms of women's engagement with tourism. The analysis reveals that this engagement does not necessarily produce the environmentally friendly subject that environmentality analysis predicts. Rather, women's engagement is shaped by intersecting dynamics of caste and class and motivated by factors including but not limited to monetary benefits. This chapter thus questions the dominant approach to investigating neoliberal environmentality in particular, that tends to emphasise the influence of monetary incentives in producing environmentally friendly subjects. In Chapter 7, I focus on another form of ecotourism engagement which is homestays. Homestays have been one form of tourist accommodation in the CTR landscape, however the number of homestays are on the rise in the recent years. In the case of homestays at CTR, each host may offer a variation of how they practice their culture and what ecotourism may mean to them, and in the process, they become enterprising individuals. This article thus explores entrepreneurship of villagers who set up homestays and the related dynamics of cultural and ecotourism expression.

Chapter 8, continues to examine grounded agential perspectives of people's engagement with (eco)tourism and CTR governance by focusing on micro-politics emerging from differences in socio-economic positionalities of villagers. By considering micro-politics, the article engages with the Convivial Conservation (Büscher and Fletcher 2019; 2020) vision to explore ways towards just and equitable conservation at CTR. The article calls for explicit attention to micro-politics through engagement with a feminist intersectional lens for enabling convivial conservation. It draws on findings from two forest villages near the Corbett Tiger Reserve in India to demonstrate the micro-politics that shape the variegated access and tourism dependencies experienced by different local residents. Engaging with learnings from implementation of the progressive Forest Rights Act (FRA) in India which intended to redress these issues, this analysis highlights that the FRA serves as both a cautionary and potentially transformative example for furthering the convivial conservation vision of local people's engagement with conservation areas. In this way, this article culminates this thesis focus on local engagement with and responses to (eco)tourism and considers steps towards equitable and just conservation governance at CTR.

The focus of this thesis is on the local people in relation to conservation governance and historic and ongoing State governance. For this purpose, I have chosen to engage with agential perspectives, specifically drawing from intersectional feminist political ecology in its spirit and

intention of recognising lived experience and identity difference that have immense implications on questions of equity and justice. I have also drawn from rural land use change research to locate the broader rural processes that impact such changes; and entrepreneurship that is shaped by aspirations. All these framings are anchored in examining the material and symbolic factors that shape villagers' work, with the intention that this knowledge can help inform equitable and just conservation. Theoretically, this thesis draws from and contributes to a poststructuralist political ecology and works towards an "pluralistic approach to understanding power in environmental governance" (Svarstad, Benjaminsen and Overå 2018: 360).

The conceptual contribution of this thesis is in the following ways:

- i) Draws from agrarian and rural land use change to examine (eco)tourism- based land use change, and in doing so contributes to redressing the relative dearth of research on dynamics of land use change within (eco)tourism studies.
- ii) Provides an intersectional gender perspective to neoliberal environmentality thus contributing to relatively less explored area in neoliberal environmentality analyses.
- iii) Analyses the need to explicitly attend to micro-politics through an intersectional feminist lens in the Convivial Conservation concept and its translation into practice.

1. Introduction

“It’s all politics!”, said Mohan, a safari guide towards the end of our jeep safari in Corbett Tiger Reserve. Mohan said this in response to my question about restrictions on the number of safaris per day, implemented by Corbett Tiger Reserve management, as one way to address the impact of (eco)tourism that the physical and social landscape has experienced for over a decade now. He added that there may be temporary restrictions imposed on tourism, but in the end, there are too many powerful actors- tiger reserve management, the hotel association, jeep driver association, guide association, politicians- for there to be any significant reduction or changes in (eco)tourism. Villagers around Corbett are aware of the powerful actors and related dominance of (eco)tourism on land and livelihoods. Their employment and wage dependencies on tourism have only increased over the past decade, while at the same time they are finding ways to become entrepreneurs or shift their engagement with (eco)tourism within these constraints.

This is a context where ecotourism was formally introduced in the early 1990s, and since then tourist establishments have dominated the physical landscape and shaped livelihoods. It has also been a context of contention and conflict concerning the conversion of land use to enable tourism. Given this context, and people’s knowledge about the impacts of tourism, it was important for this thesis to engage with why and how people are engaging with tourism and what this means for their lives and the landscapes in and around Corbett.

Examining forms of engagement with (eco)tourism, such as employment or labour, is at the core of my research. I examine Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) (eco)tourism as a market-based conservation intervention to explore its impacts on lives and land use. In doing so, I unpack the material and symbolic factors that shape local engagement with ecotourism as a regulatory framework aimed at shaping subjectivities, and examine the implications of this on lives and the landscape.

In the following sub-sections, I first provide a contextual background to Corbett Tiger Reserve and the surrounding rural landscape which was central to my field research. Following this, I set out my research objectives and questions that lead into the theoretical orientations which I engage with in this research.

1.1 Context

The history of Corbett Tiger Reserve is rooted in coloniality, preservationist ideas of wildlife conservation and the creation of exclusive spaces for tourism. CTR is one of the 52 tiger reserves, established under ‘Project Tiger’. The Government of India instituted Project Tiger in 1973 with the goal of stemming the dwindling of tiger populations in the country and reviving the animals’ numbers through the creation of dedicated Protected Areas for wildlife conservation. Project Tiger was inaugurated in CTR, making this site one of the first nine tiger reserves in India. The Corbett site was a hunting area before it was designated as the first National Park of India and mainland Asia in 1936, during the British colonial regime. This area was first named as Hailey National Park, after Malcolm Hailey, an officer of the colonial regime. It was later renamed after Jim Corbett, an officer of the colonial regime, who was known for being a hunter turned conservationist and who spent some years in the sub-Himalayan region before he left India. This history contributed to it being as an important site to launch Project Tiger.

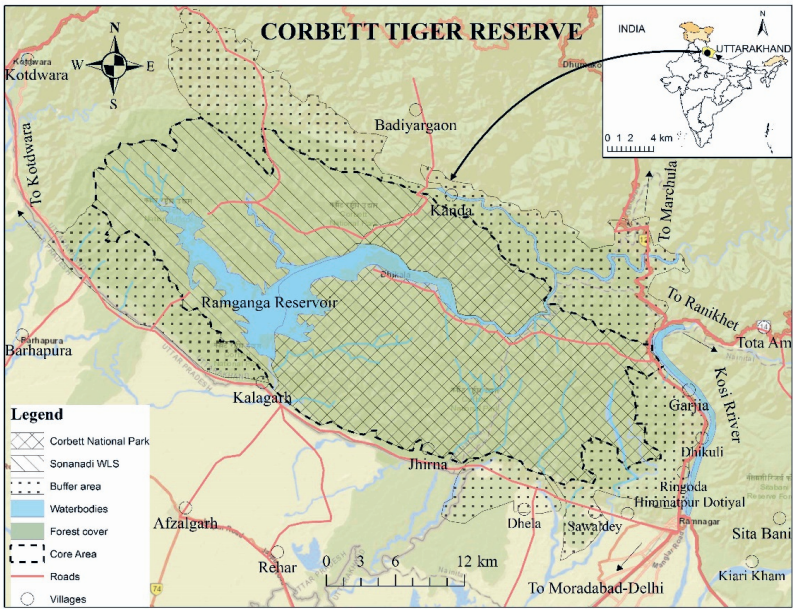


Figure 1. Corbett tiger reserve Created by: Ecoinformatics lab, ATREE

CTR is located in Uttarakhand State in the Sivalik foothill region of the Indian Himalayas. It covers a total of 1288.31 sq. km and encompasses a mix of montane areas and sub-Himalayan tracts called *terai-bhabar*, which include grasslands, wetlands, riverine tracts, and moist deciduous forests (Badola, et al 2011). The forests comprise about 70% of the area with grasslands, wetlands, agriculture, and settlements occupying the remaining 30% (Government of Uttarakhand 2010). The Reserve contains a Core protected area of 821.99 sq. km which is

exclusively maintained for the tiger population, and a Buffer zone of 466.32 sq. km surrounding the Core area within which some human settlement and livelihood activities are permitted and human-wildlife interactions can occur (NTCA 2012, 2020). The Buffer zone is also designated as an area where local communities are provided livelihood alternatives that reduce their dependence on forests. Ecotourism is promoted as a form of livelihood alternative, employing a neoliberal win-win narrative of simultaneously achieving conservation and community benefits (NTCA 2012).

This is similar to how ecotourism is promoted in the context of tiger conservation in India more generally, as promising conservation for wildlife, economic opportunities for local people and education for tourists. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) promotes ecotourism to reduce local people's dependency on forests-based livelihoods and alternatively encouraging livelihoods as guides, in retail businesses or in the "management of low- cost accommodation for tourists" (2012:81). In the guidelines for strategies for tourism in the Tiger Reserve landscapes, NTCA directs State governments to ensure that ecotourism in areas surrounding tiger reserves "does not get relegated to purely high-end, exclusive tourism, leaving out local communities", adding that local community rights must be part of the State-level ecotourism policy (2012: 108).

The areas surrounding CTR are a combination of rural and forest landscape. Historically, livelihood activities in this region largely entailed subsistence agriculture, livestock keeping and forest resource use. Soon after the area was designated a Tiger Reserve, villages from inside the Tiger Reserve started getting displaced. About four villages which contained 411 families, were displaced outside the Tiger Reserve boundaries between 1973 and 2001 (Lasgorciex and Kothari 2009:41). Villages in the rural landscape around CTR are distinguished by two formal classifications: revenue villages and forest villages. Revenue villages are agricultural areas with definitive cadastral boundaries of private land ownership. These villages fall within the jurisdiction of the district administration and the State's Revenue Department (Census of India 2011). Forest villages are located within areas that come under the land ownership and jurisdiction of the State's Forest Department. Individuals and households in these forest villages cannot obtain titles to own land nor set up permanent structures.

Uttarakhand state history and its connections to tourism:

Uttarakhand has had a history of political and economic struggle intertwined with its natural resources. A historical perspective is important for understanding what people do with land; their actions and decision-making are based on knowledge and interpretations which contribute to "political points and even changes in policy or practice" (Peluso, 2012:80). Pre-colonial as well as colonial regimes in the region benefitted from forest-based enterprises (Rangan, 2000). Therefore, enterprises involving natural resources are not new in the region, yet their nature and form have changed over time.

Uttarakhand became an independent state in 2000 after a prolonged movement for statehood. This movement was rooted in demands for development and economic opportunities in the hill regions and the perceived inability of a government in the lowlands to grasp the needs of people living in the hills (Rangan, 2004). Private sector investment was encouraged in the new State through infrastructure projects including tourism (ibid). While industries and investment from outside contributed to growth within the state, uneven development between the hill and plains continued (Mukherjee, 2012). This historical perspective helps to explain people's involvement in tourism in terms of lack of other livelihood options.

As a result of the tourism economy, villagers have been deriving livelihood from home-stays, safari driving, safari guiding and tour operating. The Uttarakhand High Court has called into question the unregulated tourism in and around CTR (The Hindu 2018; Sharma 2018) and has limited the number of safaris. Encroachment by hotels on forest land has been brought up in the High Court (Upadhyay 2018). Yet at the same time, uncontrolled tourism expansion on the periphery of Corbett, influenced by land mafia and corruption, has resulted in blocking wildlife corridors, caused pollution and impacted community cohesiveness (Bindra 2010; Mazoomdar 2012; Rastogi, et al 2015). The growth of tourism since the early 2000s has heavily influenced land use and livelihoods. Today, the areas adjoining the south and eastern boundary of CTR have a high concentration of villages and hotels. There are over a 100 hotels and resorts in the rural landscape along the south and south-eastern boundary of CTR. These hotels include national resort chains, outsiders who have bought the land and set up hotels, or those that are managed by outsiders. Majority of these resorts and hotels are large establishments i.e. over ten rooms, which have caused noise and water pollution (Bindra, 2010; Waste Warriors, 2015). Tourism impacts in the rural areas around CTR have thus been significant, particularly because of its long history as an exclusive protected area and following that the growth of tourism.

1.1.1 Livelihood orientation, gender and micro-political dimensions:

The socio-economic landscape of villages close to the south and south-eastern boundary of CTR has been influenced by (eco)tourism and Tiger Reserve governance. Villages from inside the forest were relocated to forest areas on the periphery of the reserve without any legal land rights. Access to basic resources, education, and opportunities for these villagers continues to be limited and shapes their engagement with tourism even more than those who live on land with secure land rights. Tourism was introduced in this context of a history of dispossession, creating dependencies. Livelihoods in this region have included forest resource use, subsistence agriculture and livestock keeping. State support for these livelihood activities is limited, which has also led many to turn to tourism for employment with aspirations towards modernity and upward economic mobility shaping their involvement with the tourism market. Gender roles for livelihood in this region are divided based on resource and agriculture-based work that is primarily carried out by women, and market economy-based work that is carried out by men (Gururani, 2015). The changes in livelihoods and social aspirations are bringing about gradual changes in this traditional gendered work division with women becoming involved in tourism

as well. Their involvement is sometimes hidden and varied, as in many cases, the face of the tourism enterprise is men, while caste and class differences also influence involvement in tourism.

The traditional livelihood practices of women in villages around CTR involve collecting firewood and fodder from forests, agriculture, and domestic work. This practice of women's work involvement on all domestic fronts is rooted in patterns of male outmigration that began in the late 1700s, continuing through colonial times (Gururani, 2015) and in the present to varying extents. Over time, livelihood patterns have changed due to shifting forest management regimes. Restrictions in access to the forest and forest use and lack of land rights, in addition to people's desire for modernity through upward economic mobility, have meant that tourism-based livelihoods are now common in villages around CTR. The private tourism industry began to thrive in the early 2000.

Ecotourism was formally introduced in the 1990s as a part of guide training offered by the Forest Department (FD) at CTR. The trainings were an initiative of the FD as a part of an eco-development program to address human-wildlife conflict, and ecotourism was introduced to redress this conflict by offering an income linked to wildlife conservation. According to villagers, part of the reason for introducing ecotourism was also that the FD was short staffed, and villager involvement helped address this issue by also enrolling them as conservationists. Those who trained under this initiative worked as CTR guides at the designated safari gates or with the few private entities—hotels or wildlife enthusiasts—who had regular international tourists as clientele. Having gained experience, many of these guides then set up their own safari and travel agencies. These guides are now themselves entrepreneurs who promote a win-win narrative of ecotourism and disapprove of villagers who collect forest produce, as one local guide explained “They don't understand that this [forest] needs to be saved for next fifty generations. We have enough awareness that we need to save wildlife.” which was facilitated by their enrolment in the FD training.

Many men have now sought livelihoods in tourism in their own or neighbouring villages as opposed to migrating out of the state to work. Authorities cite the prominent employment avenues for the inclusion of local people as guides, safari jeep drivers, and small shop owners. A large number of local villagers are also involved in jobs such as cleaners, gardeners or watchmen. The 'local' in this case is largely exclusive to men as jobs such as guides and drivers are inevitably taken up by them on account of dominant gender norms and expectations. Recently, for the first time in the history of CTR, women have been selected as nature guides (Roy, 2020). Another recent State initiative in this direction is training women to take on roles of safari jeep drivers (Azad, 2021). These initiatives are promoted using narratives of women's empowerment and recognition of their roles as traditional conservationists (Azad, 2021). Women's identity as conservationists is used to enrol them into ecotourism jobs, and in the process, it promotes a progressive agenda shifting stereotypical gender roles that shape tiger reserve management.

Material opportunities through the economy are different for men and women (Rankin, 2003), and accessing market-based work is easier for men than for women due to the structurally-set avenues for men. Women are, however, involved in tourism, often in shop-keeping, standing in for their husbands for temporary periods, or managing the shop completely. Occasionally, some women work in hotels and resorts performing jobs like gardening, cleaning, construction labour, and in the administration or finance department. In homestays, however, women's work is crucial and this signifies a space where traditional family duties and tourism work coincide. In many such households, forest-use continues to varying extents through fodder collection for livestock. Some men support their wives in carrying out work outside of their household duties, and were perceived to be more "modern". However, the same men suggested that household and societal expectations called for a traditional way of life for women that is hard to break out of. This tension between tradition and the aspiration for economic mobility and modernity is present throughout the Corbett landscape, but it is more prominent for women because of constraints imposed by social expectations and patriarchy.

1.1.2 Problem statement:

Given this exclusionary conservation and ecotourism history of CTR, it was evident during my field work that restricted access to the forests has impacted people's livelihoods. Ecotourism based work is common in villages around the south and south-eastern boundary of CTR. Critical research has shown that ecotourism impacts the socio-economic landscape by exacerbating structural violence, unequal power relations and may lead to negative ecological impacts (Stronza and Gordillo 2008; Büscher and Fletcher 2017). The alienation from forest-based livelihoods to the introduction of ecotourism meant that villagers were now able to engage differently with the forest (as nature guides) and be able to access the market more easily than before. This is apparent in ecotourism, as a neoliberal conservation initiative which is centred around gaining political and economic support through economic valuation of natural resources (West and Carrier 2004). In this way ecotourism creates not only new interpretations of 'nature', but also seeks to mould new subjects supporting conservation with changing designated identities (Ojeda 2012). Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality has served as a useful frame to understand how such support is garnered through techniques of governance which seek to 'conduct the conduct' of people through incentives (Foucault 2008). Governmentality is the coming together of procedures, institutions and tactics to facilitate the exercise of power over a target population (ibid). Investigation of different ways of conducting the conduct of humans is a useful analytical frame to understand power relations within conservation governance (Foucault 2008).

Forms of conservation governance have been conceptualised as environmentality (Luke 1995; Agrawal 2005) a concept rooted in Foucault's analysis of governmentality as the "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 1991). An initial analysis of environmentality referred to the creation of "environmental subjects" who are in favour of conservation as a result of environmental governance (Agrawal 2005). In neoliberal environmentality, monetary incentives are introduced to conduct the conduct of subjects (Fletcher 2010; 2017). In the rural landscape

around CTR, villagers are aware of the dangers of tourism market-based dependencies that lead to unstable incomes, and its impacts on the land, particularly through witnessing the tourism boom in the early 2000s. In this case then, I began to explore the question: What are the factors, beyond monetary incentives, that motivate villagers to continue work with ecotourism? For these villagers, state policies, family ties to land and related socio-cultural obligations, class, caste and gender identities- all played a role in their decision making and work with tourism. Differences in identities correlate to difference in access and benefits from ecotourism work. This led to exploring the following question: what does difference in identity mean for ecotourism-based work and its implications on people's lives? This problematises the view of ecotourism governance as a neoliberal environmentality which seeks to create environmental subjects through structural incentives. Difference in identities brings with it differences in subjectivities in power dynamics (Nightingale and Ojha 2013).

Each social context where ecotourism is introduced, has its own power dynamics, as difference in gender, caste or class impacts access to and stakes in conservation initiatives (Agarwal 2009). Furthermore, for villagers who are displaced from their homes in protected areas, not only are the impacts of displacement varied but that the demands for claims and settlements can differ based on historical access and dispossession (Kabra 2020). Tied to differences in identities are the material and symbolic factors that shape villagers' decision making and involvement in conservation initiatives such as ecotourism. Everyday lived realities differ based on identities, and related material practices may contribute to changing subjectivities as much of the intersectional feminist political ecology literature explores (Gururani 2002; Sultana 2011; Rocheleau and Nirmal 2015).

Within research in neoliberal environmentality and neoliberal conservation there has been less focus on how local people respond to or negotiate such governance (Holmes and Cavanagh 2016; Fletcher 2017). This thesis contributes to addressing this gap by focusing on different villagers' work with tourism and the material and symbolic factors shaping this in order to foreground identity positions of villagers, related lived experiences and rural change processes contextualised in Uttarakhand state making. Considering these dynamics, a final and ongoing exploration question I ask is: As different identities and subject positions entail different power dynamics, where and how can local agency be located, and if so, is there scope to amplify such agency? Such a focus is particularly important for conservation to be more equitable, just and to better support different community members based on their identity positioning and related politics.

1.2 Research objectives and questions:

What are the material and symbolic factors that shape local engagement with ecotourism as a regulatory framework aimed at shaping subjectivities, and what are the implications of this on lives and the landscape?

I divide this overarching research question into three sub-questions:

1. How are socio-economic and rural agrarian factors shaping the nature of engagement with (eco)tourism? How are conservation and development policies exacerbating existing class, caste, gender inequities related to land use around CTR?
2. What are the compounding privileges and oppression dynamics and life implications resulting from women's engagement with ecotourism?
3. What community-initiated activities are being advanced as a response to CTR governance and what power dynamics occur in these activities?

1.3 Theoretical orientations

In this thesis, I examine the nature and impacts of CTR tourism as an expression of neoliberal conservation. Neoliberal conservation is characterised by the commodification, marketisation, financialisation, privatisation and decentralisation (Castree 2010; Igoe and Brockington 2007) of nature to gain economic or political support (West and Carrier 2004). Neoliberalism in this understanding is not defined by one specific form, structure or pattern; rather it is an ongoing dynamic process that is context specific and remains variegated in characteristics such as the scope and scale of state intervention, patterns of political resistance and incorporation (Peck and Tickell 2002). One of the manifestations of neoliberal conservation has been the push towards nature-based tourism (and ecotourism)¹, commonly promoted as the ideal win-win for conservation and communities alike (Benjaminsen and Svarstad 2010). Nature-based tourism is intended to function as a support for conservation primarily through provision of incentives that aim to make resource preservation more valuable than extraction (Holmes and Cavanagh 2016).

Such incentive structures for conservation have been theoretically examined through the perspective of environmentalities, rooted in Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality which analysis subjectification of individuals through techniques of governance (Foucault, 1991; Luke 1999; Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010). In this thesis, I engage with such a poststructuralist political ecology perspective on environmental governance (Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010). I use neoliberal environmentality to examine (eco)tourism at CTR, incentive structures that are in place, villager's engagement and its implications on their lives. Specifically, I examine people's engagement with tourism and factors- outside of incentive structures of neoliberal environmentality- that shape this engagement. I elaborate this in the next subsection 2.1. Ecotourism promotion and governance structures indirectly or directly incentivise people to adopt market dependent practices, thus becoming attached to a system which is most often beyond direct control of the local communities (Stronza 2001). In this process of change, traditional livelihood practices are often compromised or lost entirely. The socio-economic effects of nature-based tourism include criminalisation of communities and

¹ Nature-based tourism is considered a broad category of many forms of tourism such as adventure tourism, mass-tourism, or low-impact tourism where the tourist site is nature based. Ecotourism entails tourism that has a combination of goals: conservation, support for local people and an educational element for the tourist (Arnegger, et al 2010).

consequently direct or indirect violent eviction from traditional lands. Evictions have been justified as communities being designated eco-threats as opposed to eco-guardians (Ojeda 2012).

In response to the growing literature on impacts of neoliberal conservation, scholars have called for more specific empirical investigation that analyses the ways and means through which market engagement entails neoliberalising nature and the specific ways that local community members negotiate this engagement (Holmes and Cavanagh 2016; Fletcher 2009; Roth and Dressler 2012). Even if local engagement with ecotourism promotes entrepreneurship and market dependencies, it is important to understand the conditions that led a person to take this path. This follows a poststructuralist political ecology path that considers identities and interests of people as an essential issue (Brosius 1999). In this thesis, I respond to this call for greater empirical investigation by focusing on local responses to CTR tourism, addressing the questions of: ‘who’ is engaging with CTR tourism and how is their socio-economic identity shaped their engagement; ‘how’ is the physical and livelihoods landscape changing and in what way; and ‘what’ are the necessary considerations to work towards an equitable and just conservation in CTR?

In addressing these questions, I find value in involving an intersectional feminist political ecology lens which highlights the significance of socio-economic positionalities and lived experiences in relation to conservation governance. I also draw from rural land use change findings to connect with tourism studies in order to locate broader processes of ongoing land use change in villages around CTR. Bringing such interdisciplinary perspectives together to understand local responses to CTR tourism helps to explicitly account for the contextual and social identity-based dimensions of local people’s engagement with and responses to (neoliberal) conservation governance.

A common thread connecting these questions and helping to integrate these conceptual lenses is an emphasis on local agency. Agency, like power, is situated, thus providing a lens through which important insights can be gained in understanding how environmental governance operates on the ground (Arora-Jonsson 2013). Social structures of caste, class and gender can have an impact on governance and its outcomes, and thus attention will be paid to situated practices (Moore, et al 2003). The reason for focusing on situatedness is to acknowledge the particularities of social and geographical structures shaping the research context as well as locals’ negotiation of these and consequently investigate these converging dynamics in relation to governance strategies promoted therein by different actors. In the following sections, I outline the conceptual streams that I engage with and have contributed to synthesising within my overarching analysis.

1.3.1 Environmentality and nuances in subjectivity

Conservation governance has been analysed from the perspective of ‘environmentality’, drawn from Foucault’s conceptualisation of ‘governmentality’, which examines governance as a set of

techniques used to “conduct the conduct” of people (1991). Research concerning environmentality has contributed to our understanding of processes of environmental governance, and people’s perspectives and behaviour in relation to these, through a focus on incentive structures that may shape subjectivities. Following Luke’s (1999) initial examination of environmentality enacted through global environmental governance structures, Agrawal (2005a, 2005b) analysed environmentality as more localised governance influencing subjectivity. He described environmentalities as processes of ‘intimate government’ wherein regulatory frameworks like monitoring or enforcement encourage people to become ‘environmental subjects’ who ‘care for the environment’ (Agrawal, 2005b: 162, 178). The regulatory frameworks and interventions shaping environmental subjectivity can, however, differ based on the different structures of governance that underpin them.

To understand how different forms of environmentalities are operationalised, Fletcher (2010) draws on Foucault’s (2008) late work to describe multiple environmentalities: disciplinary, sovereign, neoliberal, and truth forms, respectively. A sovereign environmentality is reflected in ‘fortress conservation’ (Brockington 2000), entailing strict enforcement of protected area boundaries. By contrast, the villagers in Kumaon that Agrawal (2005b) analysed as environmental subjects, function in relation to a “disciplinary” environmentality aiming to influence behaviour through inculcation of ethical norms (Fletcher, 2010). “Truth” environmentality, on the other hand, is promoted through specific beliefs about what counts as truth in human-environment relations (Fletcher, 2010; Montes, et al., 2020). Neoliberal environmentality, finally, is focused on creating market-based incentives that encourage people to act in environmentally friendly ways (Fletcher, 2010). Neoliberal environmentality draws from Foucault’s analysis of neoliberal governmentality wherein the market economy is predominant in defining governmental action; hence the essence of neoliberalism according to Foucault is that the “exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market economy” (2008:131). Ecotourism framed as neoliberal environmentality implies creation of particular environmental subjects modelled on the *homo oeconomicus*, a man (or woman) of enterprise and production who produces his (or her) own satisfaction (Foucault, 2008). A neoliberal subject, then, becomes someone governable by providing incentives which are defined by engagement in the market economy (ibid). Ecotourism is one of the most commonly identified modalities through which neoliberal environmentality is promoted and exercised in relation to biodiversity conservation (Fletcher 2010; Montes 2019).

All these forms of governance are related to ways of influencing and incentivising behaviours on the part of external actors. However, how people’s behaviour actually manifest’s is dependent on factors that include, but also go beyond, an external governance structure. The ways that people understand and negotiate such governance, and as a result how ‘environmental subjectivity’ is constructed, has been relatively less explored (Singh, 2013; Haller et al., 2016; Fletcher, 2017). A growing body of research is exploring processes of subject formation and the implications of people’s involvement in conservation from the perspective of community-level dynamics (Forsyth and Walker 2015; Haller, et al 2016; Asiyambi, et al 2019). The research has revealed a range of motivating factors in shaping environmental subjectivity.

Within this scholarship, production of environmental subjects in relation to conservation governance is examined by highlighting the importance of local socio-cultural realities. This research demonstrates that there are complex outcomes of environmental governance, and consequently complex subject positions formed through the coming together of interests, aspirations and social differences in specific political settings (Asiyanbi et al., 2019). The social dynamics that emerge contribute to transforming existing social systems. For instance, people may develop strategies and systems to be part of an environmental project while excluding women from what was their traditional role and thus changing the system to personal benefit, for example towards men (Faye, 2016). A study by Machaqueiro (2020) shows a different perspective on environment subject formation. The study examines use of local culture and narratives to promote climate change governance through the UNFCCC (Machaqueiro, 2020). Here, 'environmental subjects' are not distant from local realities, and, Machaqueiro argues, the process of subjectification is in fact based on local specificities. Subjectification is nuanced, and demands recognition of how people negotiate environmental governance which in itself is not static, but can be in a state of flux and transition (Cullen, 2020).

Following a focus on local dynamics, research draws attention to the role of agency in negotiating environmental governance structures. Singh (2013) analyses how villagers protecting the forest is not simply an outcome of environmental governance. Rather, the embodied and material ways of relating to nature play a vital role in shaping local perceptions, which motivate their protection of the forest. Similarly, agency is dealt with through an emic perspective like 'constitutionality', wherein people negotiate and participate in environmental initiatives while forming institutions and collectivising creatively in a bottom-up manner (Haller, et al., 2016). Community-based and agential perspectives illuminate the factors that contribute to the varying relationships with conservation governance that communities exhibit, and the implications of this on different individuals and groups within these communities. These realities include an individual or group's capacities to critically gauge and engage with non-Indigenous or introduced Western scientific techniques in an Indigenous community context (Cepek, 2011). Highlighting community dynamics and socio-economic influences on motivations in conservation interventions, research thus complicates understanding of the process of subject formation in relation to environmentality, revealing that actors' behaviour does not necessarily reflect the eco-friendly subjectivity that interventions like ecotourism seeks to promote (Cepek, 2011; Forsyth and Walker, 2014; Faye 2016). Despite the useful insights it has afforded, however, a focus on gender dynamics within this locally-oriented environmentality research is limited, though growing. Gender is identified as an important element of study; as one aspect of social identity with its particular embodied environmental relationships (Singh, 2013). Faye (2016) examined motivations for conservation as based on power dynamics rather than awareness about the environment, which in turn excludes women previously involved in management. In Gutiérrez-Zamora's (2021) notable contribution, gender mainstreaming is examined within community forest management as a technique of biopower, one that reinforces power inequities expressed through dynamics of race, class and gender, while promoting women as entrepreneurs.

One part of my thesis builds on this strand of environmentality research by focusing on women's engagement with ecotourism (Chapter 6). To operationalise an understanding of women's work with tourism I employ an intersectional feminist political ecology lens. My analysis demonstrates that women's overarching positioning and subjectivity shapes their decision making and engagement with ecotourism, beyond monetary incentives which are generally associated with neoliberal subjectivity.

1.3.2 Intersectional feminist political ecology: embeddedness, subjectivities and micro-dynamics

Feminist perspectives on subject formation have provided vital insights on the co-constitutive nature of space and identities. Feminist political ecologists in particular have unpacked the politics of resource use to emphasise "embeddedness of local gendered environmental struggles" (Resurrección and Elmhirst, 2008:7) in political economic contexts (see also Harcourt and Escobar, 2002; Rocheleau and Nirmal, 2014). By acknowledging contextual realities, the notion of a subject is expanded to include intersectional aspects including ethnicity, class, and religious factors (Elmhirst, 2011; Resurrección, 2017). Intersectional FPE draws attention to the forms of difference and related subjectivities that influence the outcomes of governance interventions by recognising class, caste, race, age or ethnicity. This entails understanding the power dynamics and social structures inherent within a given space that shape gender relations. An intersectionality perspective allows one to consider aspects of gender relations that matter to people beyond marriage, such as social status, including age-based status, or class position (Elmhirst, 2015). I foreground this intersectional lens in Chapters 6 and 8. In Chapter 6, my intention is to bring forward women's work in ecotourism, and emphasise how their identity positioning shapes their work and implications on their lives. In Chapter 8, I argue for the need of an intersectional approach to Convivial Conservation as it pays attention micro-politics which shape access to benefits even in cases of progressive conservation intervention. In Chapter 5 and 7, the focus is on land use change and diversification, and individual entrepreneurship respectively. In both these Chapters, I have anchored by analysis on the material and symbolic aspects, and lived experiences of local people's engagement with ecotourism. This perspective is influenced by a feminist lens.

In understanding local gendered struggles, one strand of feminist research has emphasised the material aspects of gender and environment (Agarwal, 1992, 1994). These include use of and dependence on natural resources for livelihood, survival and socio-cultural factors which determine activities in a community (Agarwal, 1992). Drawing from women's daily practice of firewood and fodder collection from the forest in Kumaon Himalayas, Gururani (2002) points out that women's identities are interrelated with their material work in the forest, and this relationship produces gendered subjects. The forest becomes a space of labour and power dynamics related to coloniality and patriarchy (Gururani, 2002). In a similar vein, identities are bound to space as social relations function within specific social and physical frames, consequently giving meaning to the relationships within the particular setting (Massey, 2005). This dimension of space changes when daily practices and livelihoods change. A feminist lens

provides important insights concerning the multiplicity of subjectivities that converge and within which gender is constantly negotiated and articulated in environmental or socio-political contexts, creating complex or shifting subjectivities (Sundberg, 2004; Sultana, 2009; Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2011). Systems of differentiation based on class, ethnicity or race impact how people's livelihoods are categorised and differentiated between those who are seen to protect and those seen to harm nature (Ojeda, 2012). It is also argued that an intersectional approach has been prevalent in the context of feminist politics in India specifically, as caste and class fundamentally shape a woman's identity in this context, even if analyses are not explicitly labelled in this way (Menon, 2015).

Accounting for differences in caste and class in this context thus recognises the different positionalities of women as they experience them. Two broad findings of research on the relationship between the market and women in particular thus indicate, paradoxically, that: 1) women have access to more opportunities and power through the market, on the one hand; and on the other, that 2) women entering a market become part of another structure over which they have little or no control (Arora-Jonsson, 2014). This paradox is evident especially in cases where women are involved in tourism. As tourism is based on the social and physical setting of a place, gender dynamics are bound to be integral to unpacking tourism. While in certain cases some women may gain social mobility they often largely serve foreign and white tourists, thus reinforcing race, class and nationality-based hierarchy (Johnson, 2018). Other research suggests that tourism has the potential to provide entrepreneurial opportunities to women, and through that offer potential for leadership, political involvement and social mobility (Stronza, 2001; Medina, 2005; Pritchard, 2014). Women's participation in decision making and presence in local governance bodies can also contribute to empowerment (Agarwal, 2010).

However, economic opportunities do not necessarily translate to gender equity or justice (Jackson, 1996). The issue of what empowerment entails is complicated, and calls for an understanding of the context, personal agency and social norms and practices (Goldman and Little, 2015). Women may be empowered at the family level through their engagement with tourism, yet their status within the larger village or society could remain unchanged due to conformity to existing gender roles (Swain, 1993). Often, family responsibilities are expected to be prioritized despite the responsibility for expanding tourism business (Morgan and Winkler, 2020). Consequently, empowerment initiatives can end up burdening women more because of their pre-existing responsibilities that maintain priority (*ibid*). Building on such insights, I employ an intersectional feminist perspective to examine different women's engagement with tourism. The motivations and implications of their involvement invite us to consider how women's engagement in a neoliberal environmentality initiative does not necessarily produce environmentally friendly behaviour.

In my examination of women's association with tourism, the aim is not to romanticise women's struggles, empowerment or agency (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Mollett, 2017). Instead, I aim to examine the multiple factors that lead to specific forms of agency within continued structures of oppression. This, in turn, contributes to challenging certain notions of how subject formation proceeds in relation to environmentality. An environmentality framework remains useful for

this analysis due to its capacity to illuminate the particular ways in which forms of environmental governance aim to “conduct conduct” in pursuit of specific forms of subjectivity, even if these are not necessarily achieved in practice. Combining this with an intersectional feminist focus on how such efforts to conduct conduct are negotiated by actors embodying particular subject positions thus affords a nuanced understanding of how subject formation actually plays out in environmental governance interventions.

1.3.2.1 Intersectionality:

A feminist intersectional lens recognises the multiple axes of power emerging in the articulation of gender with other dimensions of difference including class, race and caste, which, depending on the local context, may come together in different ways to shape patterns of access to and control of resources (Rocheleau et al. 1996; Nightingale 2011; Sultana 2011; Mollett and Faria 2013).

Critiques of intersectionality from the Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) question the logic of the intersections of difference such as race, gender, religion (Bhattacharya 2017; McNally 2017). SRT conceptualises labour- that of the worker and of the woman who births the labourer - as creating and reproducing society (Bhattacharya 2017). SRT scholars argue that an understanding of capitalism must involve reproductive labour and care work of women in creating productive workers (ibid). Through this lens, women’s work is not separate from capitalism, and therefore any form of oppression (i.e. based on gender, ethnicity, or race) are all related to the place of the subject within the overarching capitalist system. From this perspective, consequently, class is understood as the preeminent intersectional factor to which others are subordinate. In this view, patriarchy propagates capitalism, and vice versa (ibid). Bhattacharya (2017) herself states that all gender issues cannot be reduced to class issues, but that class is at the core of society and that patriarchal gender relations support the propagation of capitalism. Broadly, SRT approaches gender issues from a structural perspective.

While this thesis does not contest this view, a full engagement with which is beyond the scope of my project, I continue to find value in the need to explicitly engage with aspects of difference that intersect with class positioning as formative factors in their own right. This allows space for agency, contrary to a single focus on structures assumes that structural power operates largely by itself (Svarstad, Benjaminsen and Overå, 2018). It is through an understanding of the way that caste, class or gender relations come together in particular ways that one can recognise the differences in lived experiences of villagers living within conservation and other contexts.

Reinforcing this approach, research on gender dynamics in India has shown that forest dependencies often vary based on identity and consequently impact vulnerable groups’ stakes in resource management (Agarwal 2009). Yet, despite the obvious intersections of these factors in shaping distributional outcomes, there is a tendency among scholars and policymakers to consider them as separate categories. Thus, Pan (2019: 36) argues that Dalit (a collective term used to refer to socially oppressed castes, also categorised as Scheduled Castes in the Indian

Constitution) politics and mainstream Indian feminism “often suppress difference in order to magnify particular issues and impose universality.” It is in this spirit that I find value in engaging with an intersectional feminist political ecology lens, and have maintain focus on these dynamics for this thesis.

Questions about production of knowledge and its legitimisation are not necessarily new in political ecology, but feminist political ecology and gender research have provided a lens that is explicit in foregrounding *who* it is affected by conservation, *how* and *why*. What this means is using an intersectional analysis to examine how power emerges in specific places and times (Pan 2019; Sundberg 2016). This lens continues to draw out conceptual connections with structural power in political ecology while talking about lives and everyday experience of navigating power structures. Consequently, knowledge about the range of such differential impact, benefits or loss can hold governance institutions, research bodies or non-governmental organisations accountable. This thesis has focused on such intersecting dynamics in the CTR landscape that is dominated by the powerful narratives of tiger and biodiversity conservation and ecotourism.

A feminist intersectional lens provides a valuable framework and grounded approach for understanding the landscapes of conservation that emerge from the interaction between broader policies and programmes and the micro-politics of rights, access, and opportunities differentially available to various groups within areas adjoining conservation areas. This perspective is of particular importance in explicitly engaging with gender and related axes of power. Creating more equitable forms of conservation, such as convivial conservation (Büscher and Fletcher 2019; 2020) must also explicitly engage with gender and other forms of micro-politics, as I will explore further in Chapter 6.

1.3.3 Rural agrarian land use diversification

It is particularly important to examine land use change in the context of ecotourism in rural areas given that ecotourism is often presumed to have minimal impact on landscape (TIES, 2019). Land is particularly contentious and political; it is where socio-cultural relations, state policies, and market values come together and confront one another. The material and symbolic relationship of local people with land often stands in opposition to states’ and market actors’ views of land as a ‘commodity, [where] its specificity [is] replaced by universals’ (Nirmal, 2016, p. 242). Symbolic connection with land includes Indigenous identities that are tied to specific landscapes and the spiritual entities understood to reside therein, on which communities’ social systems and livelihoods depend (Sahu, 2008). Meanwhile, the economic value or legal status attributed to land has material implications, such as ownership titles or the ability to practice agriculture. Formal or legal frameworks tend to define land in a singular way that does not capture people’s multifaceted relationships with land in different contexts (Li, 2014). At the same time, state processes of using land for the purpose of specific investments, such as conservation or development programmes, may be pursued through assembling a range

of factors like technologies, discourses and biophysical entities (Li, 2017). Thus, land becomes a space wherein multiple processes and meanings intersect with different uses. As a result, there is a mosaic of factors influencing land use, including livelihood dependence, ancestral ties and market value. Social factors include land use across generations, which shapes how each generation engages with state and non-state actors (Hall et al., 2015). This is also tied to the temporality of land use, for instance, during a market-influx period or after market-influx (Li, 2014, 2017). In relation to markets, agrarian research has focused on questions of labour, land grabbing and accumulation of land in rural spaces (Hall et al., 2015; Scoones et al., 2012).

Critical agrarian and rural studies have illustrated the ways that land use is altered or diversified with the introduction of neoliberal policies, while reinforcing social differentiation (Andreas et al., 2020; Ferguson, 2013; Gray & Dowd-Urbe, 2013). This research indicates that material and symbolic factors influence farmers' decision-making regarding land use change particularly because land use changes are also responses to broader processes of rural life shaped by agrarian policies, or lack thereof, and socio-cultural factors tied to mobility. In some cases, engagement with the market can provide benefits that national development plans otherwise do not provide (Gardner, 2012). Research has also demonstrated more direct ties between agrarian issues and tourism development. Such broader historical and ongoing processes are tied to land use, and agrarian research has examined the multiple ways that rural people use, change or diversify their land use. Involving this broader perspective is important in ecotourism research as it can speak to questions of rural development and potential ways to reduce market pressures on villagers and reduce land alienation.

The theoretical frames discussed above help to examine the central question of my thesis, that aims to examine the material and symbolic factors shaping people's engagement with ecotourism. Neoliberal environmentality supports an understanding of the incentive structures in place for promoting a win-win narrative of ecotourism. It also supports an understanding of entrepreneurship in the context of environmental governance. However, socio-cultural influences also shape people's behaviour and decision-making regarding livelihoods. An intersectional feminist political ecology lens also illuminates micro-politics, and demonstrates the value of such a lens in examining marginalised lived experiences including and beyond a focus on women only. It is also important to consider broader contextual and State history which shape people's association with land and decision making regarding their livelihoods. Rural agrarian research has provided important insights on livelihood diversification, similarly supporting an understanding of land use change in the context of CTR.

1.4 Methodology

The empirical findings of this thesis are grounded in qualitative research conducted between August 2018 and August 2019. My entry into the research setting was through four key meetings that helped me get anchored in the context. The meetings were with a senior researcher from a wildlife conservation NGO, a local researcher who would become my field

assistant, a villager with tourism enterprises in whose home (homestay) I lived for a year (with intermittent visits to three other homestays), and a senior forest department official. The four contacts were referrals, and the common connection helped my interviewees locate me as a researcher. These meetings solidified my introduction to CTR and the surrounding rural landscape. On my third day in Ramnagar, a local town near CTR, I was encouraged to book a jeep and driver (referred by the NGO researcher) to get a sense of the landscape on the south and south-eastern boundary of CTR. In the same week, I was invited to a community tourism meeting in the village which became my base throughout the field work. These two instances reflected the local people's familiarity with researchers since the Corbett landscape is a common site for wildlife research.

My own positionality in the CTR context was shaped through a combination of identity markers: Indian urban researcher, a woman, who was not from Uttarakhand, comfortable with communicating in Hindi language, and of a relatively privileged background. While I am not from Uttarakhand state, my facial features and name made me appear local to many villagers; this proved to be valuable while connecting to people. My positionality, in this sense, was relational and would often subtly shift based on who I met: forest department officials were generally suspicious as I was a researcher and at times they were uncomfortable since I was collecting qualitative data instead of quantitative data using forms that they could fill in and hand over to me. Older women and men in villages would offer more time to talk about their lives, as 'I was a young woman who was taking time to understand their lives when their own grandchildren were not interested' (paraphrasing one interview respondent). Hotel entrepreneurs, especially from outside of Uttarakhand, remained less interested in engaging in the interviews as questions about the nature of tourism incited discomfort as tourism can be a sensitive and contentious topic in the CTR context.

After my initial physical orientation in the south and south-eastern areas near CTR, I began my deeper orientation into the socio-economic landscape. I was referred to an independent guide and researcher, Hari, who I then employed to help me with my field work, particularly for interviews (especially those for the study in Chapter 5). My positionality at the time of interviews in many cases, was influenced by Hari's identity. Hari is from a town close to CTR, and has worked with NGOs and the Forest Department on various freelance projects. Hari's knowledge of villages and language, not just literal but contextually relevant ways of communicating, and his gender helped when villagers would feel unsure or unable to place me. In such cases, the initial introductions were led by Hari in order to maintain a sense of familiarity and comfort for villagers. I conducted certain sections of my field research independently in the second half of my field work after I had built my own contacts and level of familiarity (Chapter 6 and 7).

1.4.1 Geographical orientation

This thesis is based on research conducted primarily in six villages on the south and south-eastern boundary of CTR. The profile of these villages are described in detail in the following

chapters, and in this section I provide an overview of them. These villages are located by the south and south-eastern boundary of CTR. I selected these villages because of their proximity to safari gates of CTR and their high density of tourism establishments.

Three of these villages are forest villages and the rest are revenue villages. Consequently, villagers are either directly or indirectly dependent on tourism for their household income or livelihood. This formal classification of villages shapes people's livelihood and access to resources. Revenue villages are agricultural areas with definitive cadastral boundaries of private land ownership. These villages fall within the jurisdiction of the district administration and the State's Revenue Department (Census of India 2011). Forest villages are located within areas that come under the land ownership and jurisdiction of the State's Forest Department. Thus, individuals and households in these forest villages cannot obtain titles to their own land nor set up permanent structures for their homes. In revenue villages tourism influences include hotels, restaurants or homestays with villagers working as wage labour and employed in these establishments or as safari guides and jeep drivers. In forest villages, the livelihood dependency on tourism differs as most villagers are wage labourers in tourism.

In addition to these villages, I collected data from members of two village committees in villages located within 40km of the south eastern boundary of CTR. The focus for data collection in these two villages was on homestays and ecotourism narratives (Chapter 7). I visited villages on the northern periphery of CTR to gain an overall understanding of the landscape.

1.4.2 Interviews

Throughout my research I conducted 103 semi-structured interviews where I used a basic set of questions followed by open-ended questions based on the interview respondent's responses. I complimented this format with an active interview style. Active interviews are similar to everyday conversation and allow for questions to tap into understanding of social reality through factual and emotional accounts (Hathaway and Atkinson, 2003). Interview respondents were selected based on referral and purposive sampling (Bernard 2006). The interviews were conducted in Hindi with informed consent from interview respondents. Interview respondents were generally suspicious of written forms for giving consent, so verbal consent was given. Most respondents were also uncomfortable with recorders; therefore, I took notes during the interviews and these were elaborated after the interview. Often, I would meet the same respondent again for clarifications or follow up questions. Verbatim quotes were inscribed immediately, and all respondents were assured anonymity to maintain their privacy.

The data was analysed through inductive coding to identify the prevalent or dominant themes that emerged from interviews and interactions (Bernard, 2006). These themes were layered i.e. themes such as different forms of livelihood and ecotourism dependencies in relation socio-economic classifications of class, gender and caste; and overarching themes of land uses and forms of tourism entrepreneurship. These are reflected in the Chapter 4 to 7.

1.4.3 Participant observation

I was based in one village, at a villager's home, for the majority of my field work. This enabled participant observation as I was able to participate in activities such as farming, household chores, community events and weddings. Observations from participating in such activities and living in the village were recorded in field notes. I was able to gain insights through these immersive experiences, especially from the daily lives of women, which was critical to understand the nuances and subtleties of lives and socio-cultural norms.

In the process of data collection, I strived to be sensitive to and aware of the existing and shifting power dynamics between me as an urban female researcher and the many willing interview respondents and research participants. In this sense, my approach to the research context and interactions was influenced by what can be compared to standpoint theory. Standpoint theory promotes viewing a research context through the perspective of women or marginalised groups so the knowledge formed in interaction between subject and object is embodied in the physical geography and socio-economic contexts (Harding, 1993). Standpoint theory complemented active interviews and participant observation; and was important lens to maintain particularly as the core of my research is understanding local engagement with and responses to (eco)tourism.

1.5 Thesis orientation

The following sections of the thesis are divided into four articles (Chapter 5-8), which address my research question and objectives, and the concluding Chapter 9. Chapter 5, titled “Rendering land touristifiable: (eco)tourism and land use change”² provides a broader contextual basis for understanding the physical land use changes underway in the rural landscape around CTR. While critical research on ecotourism has revealed the activity's socio-economic impacts including low-wage employment dependencies, a crucial aspect of ecotourism that lies outside this conventional dependency is land use dynamics, specifically land use change, land sales and land-based entrepreneurship. This article examines land use dynamics in CTR where promotion of (eco)tourism since the 1990s has influenced significant changes in local land use. These changes were initially facilitated by outsiders buying land and setting up hotels and resorts in villages adjoining the Reserve. Empirical research reveals that while this initial boom of outsiders buying land has waned, land owning villagers are now setting up tourism enterprises on their own land, thereby diversifying land use from agriculture to tourism. Critical agrarian and rural land use change studies has shown that material and symbolic factors influence farmers' decision-making regarding land use change. An agrarian studies perspective thus facilitates a nuanced understanding of tourism-related land use diversification and change. By bringing agrarian and ecotourism studies approaches together here, we contribute to both by emphasising the importance of (eco)tourism in agrarian change

² Co-authored with Hari S Dev, Nitin D Rai and Robert Fletcher, and published in *Tourism Geographies*.

and of attention to land use change in ecotourism studies to understand how rural people negotiate and navigate (eco)tourism in relation to land use. This research article contributes to tourism geographies more broadly by highlighting how land use decision-making shapes local spaces in the course of ecotourism development. The article draws attention to the broader processes of and impacts of ecotourism that shift generational rural land use influenced by changing values of land outside a protected area. Rendering land touristifiable deepens villagers' dependence on the market and alienates them from their land. Ecotourism commodifies nature, and this chapter shows that this commodification extends to rural land outside of ecotourism zones per se.

Following this examination on land use change and rural agrarian dynamics, Chapter 6 provides a grounded understanding of gender dynamics and women's engagement with ecotourism. This chapter, titled "An intersectional approach to neoliberal environmentality: Women's engagement with ecotourism at Corbett Tiger Reserve, India"³, draws attention to motivating factors for women to engage with ecotourism and implications on their lives. This chapter seeks to address the question of intersectional gender dynamics in (eco)tourism work. In this article I use an environmentality lens to examine what shapes women's engagement with ecotourism work. Research in environmentality has provided an analysis of environmentally friendly subject formation through the influence of conservation governance. Within this research, examination of subject formation from the local community perspective is also gaining attention. However, a gender perspective in environmentality research remains marginal. This article thus contributes to environmentality research by drawing on intersectional feminist political ecology to examine women's engagement with ecotourism in the context of India's Corbett Tiger Reserve. Ecotourism as a form of market-based conservation has been commonly framed as an expression of neoliberal environmentality. Neoliberal environmentality is reflected in market-centred incentives used to promote conservation and support for local people via employment in conservation-based work - a supposedly 'win-win' dynamic. Through ethnographic research, I provide insights into different forms of women's engagement with tourism. The analysis reveals that this engagement does not necessarily produce the environmentally friendly subject that environmentality analysis predicts. Rather, women's engagement is shaped by intersecting dynamics of caste and class and motivated by factors including but not limited to monetary benefits. This chapter thus questions the dominant approach to investigating neoliberal environmentality in particular, that tends to emphasise the influence of monetary incentives in producing environmentally friendly subjects.

In Chapter 7, titled "Becoming 'entrepreneurs of one's home': Homestays and ecotourism in the context of Corbett Tiger Reserve in India", I focus on another form of ecotourism engagement which is homestays. Homestays have been one form of tourist accommodation in the CTR landscape, however the number of homestays are on the rise in the recent years. The Uttarakhand state policy that provides subsidies for people to set up homestays has incentivised more villagers to become entrepreneurs of their own homes creating competition. Combined

³ Published in *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*.

with this, homestays are also a means of expressing cultural authenticity and aspirations to shift away from a rural lifestyle in terms of household infrastructure. An agential perspective by Stronza (2001) asserts that hosts can create a boundary between performance of their culture and their 'backstage lives' (2001:273). However, the definition of authenticity or what it means to hosts is also complex and not necessarily always stagnant. Kolar and Zabkar (2010) examine authenticity as a gradient, rather than a fixed and bounded category. In the case of homestays at CTR, each host may offer a variation of how they practice their culture and what ecotourism may mean to them, and in the process, they become enterprising individuals. This article thus explores entrepreneurship of villagers who set up homestays and the related dynamics of cultural and ecotourism expression.

Chapter 8, titled "Micro-politics and the prospects for convivial conservation: Insights from the Corbett Tiger Reserve, India"⁴, continues to examine grounded agential perspectives of people's engagement with (eco)tourism and CTR governance by focusing on micro-politics emerging from differences in socio-economic positionalities of villagers. By considering micro-politics, the article engages with the Convivial Conservation (Büscher and Fletcher 2019; 2020) vision to explore ways towards just and equitable conservation at CTR. The article calls for explicit attention to micro-politics through engagement with a feminist intersectional lens for enabling convivial conservation. Convivial conservation provides a vision for equitable conservation through simultaneously pursuing structural change and addressing context specific micro-politics. This article draws on feminist intersectional research and feminist political ecology to argue that convivial conservation needs to explicitly engage with the ways that intersections of class, gender, caste, and other identity positions shape the micro-politics of power around land rights and opportunities for benefitting from conservation interventions. It draws on findings from two forest villages near the Corbett Tiger Reserve in India to demonstrate the micro-politics that shape the variegated access and tourism dependencies experienced by different local residents. Engaging with learnings from implementation of the progressive Forest Rights Act (FRA) in India which intended to redress these issues, this analysis highlights that the FRA serves as both a cautionary and potentially transformative example for furthering the convivial conservation vision of local people's engagement with conservation areas. In this way, this article culminates this thesis focus on local engagement with and responses to (eco)tourism and considers steps towards equitable and just conservation governance at CTR.

The focus of this thesis is on the local people in relation to conservation governance and historic and ongoing State governance. For this purpose, I have chosen to engage with agential perspectives, specifically drawing from intersectional feminist political ecology in its spirit and intention of recognising lived experience and identity difference that have immense implications on questions of equity and justice. I have also drawn from rural land use change research to locate the broader rural processes that impact such changes; and entrepreneurship that is shaped by aspirations. All these framings are anchored in examining the material and

⁴ Published in Conservation and Society Special Issue: Exploring Convivial Conservation in Theory and Practice.

symbolic factors that shape villagers' work, with the intention that this knowledge can help inform equitable and just conservation. Theoretically, this thesis draws from and contributes to a poststructuralist political ecology and works towards an "pluralistic approach to understanding power in environmental governance" (Svarstad, Benjaminsen and Overå 2018: 360).

Each chapter represents dimensions of local engagement with and responses to (eco)tourism, first by providing an understanding of the historic and political state dynamics that help contextualise land use patterns (Chapter 5). Following this, chapter 6-7 draw attention to the vital micro- dynamics in local communities: first through examining women's engagement with ecotourism and implications on their lives (Chapter 6), and entrepreneurship of villager's own homes as homestays are becoming one way of engaging with ecotourism (Chapter 7). Finally, Chapter 8 emphasises and argues for an explicit focus on micro-politics through an intersectional feminist lens to envision one avenue towards conviviality at CTR.

The conceptual contribution of this thesis is in the following ways:

- iv) Draws from agrarian and rural land use change to examine (eco)tourism-based land use change, and in doing so contributes to redressing the relative dearth of research on dynamics of land use change within (eco)tourism studies.
- v) Provides an intersectional gender perspective to neoliberal environmentality thus contributing to relatively less explored area in neoliberal environmentality analyses.
- vi) Analyses the need to explicitly attend to micro-politics through an intersectional feminist lens in the Convivial Conservation concept and its translation into practice.



Image 1 A sign board advertising sale of hotels, resorts and land in a village on the south-eastern boundary of CTR

Photo by: Revati Pandya

2 Rendering land touristifiable: (eco)tourism and land use change⁵

Abstract

Critical research concerning ecotourism has revealed the activity's socio-economic impacts, including low-wage employment-based dependencies for many rural communities. While these dynamics are important, a crucial aspect of the ecotourism industry that falls outside this conventional sort of dependency is land use dynamics, specifically land use change, sales and entrepreneurship. We examine these dynamics in Corbett Tiger Reserve, India, where promotion of (eco)tourism since the 1990s has influenced significant changes in local land use. These changes were initially facilitated by outsiders buying land and setting up hotels and resorts in villages adjoining the Reserve. Empirical research reveals that while this initial boom of outsiders buying land has waned, land owning villagers are now setting up tourism enterprises on their own land, thereby diversifying land use from agriculture to tourism. Critical agrarian research has shown that material and symbolic factors influence farmers' decision-making regarding land use change. An agrarian studies perspective thus facilitates a nuanced understanding of tourism-related land use diversification and change. By bringing agrarian and ecotourism studies approaches together here, we contribute to both by emphasising the importance of (eco)tourism in agrarian change and of attention to land use change in ecotourism studies to understand how rural people negotiate and navigate (eco)tourism in relation to land use. We also contribute to tourism geographies more broadly by highlighting how land use decision-making shapes local spaces in the course of ecotourism development. We draw attention to the broader processes of and impacts of ecotourism that shift generational rural land use influenced by changing values of land outside a protected area. Rendering land touristifiable deepens villagers' dependence on the market and alienates them from their land. Ecotourism commodifies nature, and we show that this commodification extends to rural land outside of ecotourism zones per se.

Keywords Rural land use; ecotourism; livelihood diversification; Global South; agrarian studies; India

Introduction

Ecotourism is widely promoted as a win-win solution for resource conservation and local people dependent on those resources (Honey, 2008). In many cases, however, ecotourism development instead exacerbates structural violence, unequal power relations and negative ecological impacts contradicting its 'eco' framing (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008; Büscher & Fletcher, 2017; Lasso & Dahles, 2021). Critical research has thus questioned the sustainability of (eco)tourism initiatives, specifically where they are promoted as supporting social development for local people (Scheyvens & Russell, 2012).

⁵ Published in *Tourism Geographies* (2022) with co-authors: Hari Shankar Dev, Nitin D. Rai and Robert Fletcher

Research in critical agrarian and rural studies has illustrated the ways that land use is altered or diversified with the introduction of neoliberal policies, while reinforcing social differentiation (Ferguson, 2013; Gray & Dowd-Urbe, 2013; Andreas et al., 2020). This research indicates that material and symbolic factors influence farmers' decision-making regarding land use change. Thus far, however, agrarian research has not substantially addressed the role of ecotourism in such dynamics. This is despite the fact that tourism continues to be widely promoted in rural areas, especially in the global south, and particularly in former colonies (Duffy, 2008; Fletcher, 2014). On the other hand, tourism research has acknowledged, to an extent, the influence of tourism on land use decisions and patterns (Scheyvens & Russell, 2012). However, integration of an agrarian studies perspective to develop a nuanced understanding of tourism-related land use diversification and change has been less apparent. In this analysis, we bring these two research approaches together to emphasise the importance of ecotourism in agrarian change, on the one hand, and understand how rural people negotiate and navigate land use diversification and change in relation to ecotourism development, on the other.

It is particularly important to examine land use change in the context of ecotourism in rural areas given that ecotourism is presumed to have minimal impact on landscape (TIES, 2019). Our study of these processes focuses on two villages close to Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) in the Uttarakhand state, north India. A large proportion of people living around CTR are dependent on tourism in the form of wage labour or employment, contributing to significant change in the socio-economic landscape. While these dynamics are important, the focus of this paper is on an aspect of the ecotourism industry that falls outside this conventional sort of dependency and that has been largely overlooked in the critical literature thus far: land use dynamics, specifically related to land use change, sales and entrepreneurship on individually-held land.

Inspired by Tania Li's influential paper "Rendering Land Investible" (2017), we term our analysis of these dynamics as "rendering land touristifiable." Li (2017) explores the temporal aspects of the process by which land becomes a commodity capable of purchase, sale, and production for global markets. In building on Li's analysis, our study is centred on the question: what are the (eco)tourism and rural dynamics that render land touristifiable, and with what consequences for rural livelihoods?

To bring attention to the rural realities that influence the process of rendering land touristifiable, our analysis focuses primarily on local residents who have managed to successfully insert themselves into the tourism development process. These remain a minority at present, as not everyone has the capital to shift their land use, and many have instead sold their land and left villages, thus rendering land touristifiable through their absence. We believe this focus on forms of local agency in the context of larger structural pressures is crucial to understand the impacts of an activity that introduces significant changes in local lives and livelihoods in the name of biodiversity conservation.

In the following section, we outline research on (eco)tourism, its impacts on land, as well as research from agrarian studies that focuses on land use and diversification. We then describe

the historical context of our study as well as the qualitative ethnographic research via which it was conducted. Following this, we describe the study's findings from the two villages around CTR. Through an examination of the different tourism enterprises and land use, we show that many villagers retain ownership of their land even while dependencies on the market deepen. Ecotourism commodifies nature, and we show that this commodification extends to rural land outside of ecotourism zones per se.

Land use dynamics in agrarian and (eco)tourism studies

Land is particularly contentious and political; it is where socio-cultural relations, state policies, and market values come together and confront one another. The material and symbolic relationship of local people with land often stands in opposition to states' and market actors' views of land as a "commodity, [where] its specificity [is] replaced by universals" (Nirmal, 2016:242). Symbolic connection with land includes indigenous identities that are tied to specific landscapes and the spiritual entities understood to reside therein, on which communities' social systems and livelihoods depend (Sahu, 2008).

Meanwhile, the economic value or legal status attributed to land has material implications, such as ownership titles or the ability to practice agriculture. Formal or legal frameworks tend to define land in a singular way that does not capture people's multifaceted relationships with land in different contexts (Li, 2014). At the same time, state processes of using land for the purpose of specific investments, such as conservation or development programs, may be pursued through assembling a range of factors like technologies, discourses and biophysical entities (Li, 2017). Thus, land becomes a space wherein multiple processes and meanings intersect with different uses. As a result, there is a mosaic of factors influencing land use; including livelihood dependence, ancestral ties and market value. Social factors include land use across generations which reveal how each generation engages with state and non-state actors (Hall et al., 2015). This is also tied to the temporality of land use, for instance, during a market-influx period or after market-influx (Li, 2014; 2017). In relation to markets, agrarian research has focused on questions of labour, land grabbing and accumulation of land in rural spaces (Hall et al., 2015; Scoones et al., 2012). Market-based conservation initiatives such as ecotourism also impact the social and physical landscape, as elaborated below. While the impact of tourism has been examined as one form of land grabbing, so far this has only been developed to a limited extent (by for instance, Rocheleau, 2015).

By contrast, a substantial body of research has explored ecotourism as a significant factor in shaping social and economic rural landscapes (e.g. Ojeda, 2012; Bury, 2008). This is rooted in the understanding of ecotourism as a market-based instrument, and one important form of neoliberalisation of nature (West & Carrier, 2004). Duffy (2008) indeed, argues that ecotourism does not simply exemplify neoliberalism but is in fact one of the main ways that neoliberal economics and ideology are spread, particularly to rural areas of the Global South. Concrete impacts of ecotourism include evictions, restricted access to natural resources, low wage employment, and intensification of existing inequalities (Ojeda, 2012; Lasso & Dahles, 2021). Livelihoods shift towards tourism-oriented businesses, and for villagers without enough capital,

tourism becomes the only form of income thereby reducing their ability to adapt to fluctuations in the tourism market (Bury, 2008; Lasso & Dahles 2021). Existing research thus offers important insights concerning the sustainability of livelihood shifts towards tourism through employment or wage labour.

While this research demonstrates that local livelihoods are often affected in the process of ecotourism development, however, there remains limited analysis of how the process influences local land use, and decision-making concerning this land use, in particular (West & Carrier, 2004; Fletcher, 2009). Yet, land use changes, such as diversion of land from agriculture to tourism, can be understood as one of ecotourism's most significant impacts. Land use can be altered or reshaped with entry of private tourism stakeholders from outside the village or community (Gardner, 2012). The impact of ecotourism on land-use also reveals that local people often end up having to align themselves to neoliberal or market logics to cater to tourists (West & Carrier, 2004). Conservation initiatives including ecotourism development promoted in new contexts create new dynamics related to the value of land, as when private lands become more profitable, and community lands are not valued (Brockington et al., 2008; Cabezas, 2008; Zimmerer, 2006).

Land sales inevitably become part of the expansion of the ecotourism market, and this is reflected in the amount of capital brought in from outside the local context (Duffy, 2002). Tourism offers an opportunity to sell agriculture land that is unproductive, shifting land use dynamics. Foreigners often end up buying large tracts of land, resulting in further increase in land prices that create barriers for local people to set up their own ecotourism enterprises (Fletcher, 2012). Yet some villagers are also able to use ecotourism as an opportunity to access land rights through joint venture partnerships with outsiders (Gardner, 2012). Such partnerships also take the form of arrangements where ecolodges are built on community commons through partnerships with private actors and NGOs (Lamers et al., 2014). In non-communal land settings, it is landowners who often benefit more than the landless from tourism development through lease partnerships (Scheyvens & Russell, 2012).

The above research demonstrates arrangements within (eco)tourism development that impact land use and related dynamics, particularly through public-private partnership. But land use changes are also responses to broader processes of rural life shaped by agrarian policies, or lack thereof, and socio-cultural factors tied to mobility. In some cases, engagement with the market can provide benefits that national development plans otherwise do not provide (Gardner 2012). Research has also demonstrated more direct ties between agrarian issues and tourism development. For instance, Münster and Münster (2012) examined growth of tourism as driven by an agrarian crises and new modes of farming in south India, wherein a change in agrarian policies, leading to capitalist agriculture, created a climate that encouraged rural people to invest in tourism (ibid). Similarly, Gascón (2015) describes how growth of residential tourism in the Ecuadorian Andes amplified the exchange value of land relative to its use value and hence caused a move away from agriculture as the main livelihood pursuit.

Thus, changing values of land resulting from tourism development can create shifts towards tourism-based livelihood dependencies. Communities threatened by neoliberal initiatives “also see market reforms and market relationships as offering possibilities for political-economic and cultural gains” (Gardner, 2012: 380). Drawing from such dynamics, agrarian and rural research has focused on the multiple ways that land is used, in addition to and beyond agriculture (Ferguson, 2013; Gray & Dowd-Urbe, 2013). However, this body of research has been less focused on land use diversification in the context of rural (eco)tourism in particular.

In the following analysis we examine the impacts of ecotourism on land use in villages around Corbett Tiger Reserve. We draw attention to the broader processes of and impacts of (eco)tourism that shift generational rural land use, and thereby the socio-ecological configuration of rural landscapes. Ecotourism is a complex, and often extractive process, one which leads to local involvement, but also creates market dependences. We also recognise that forms of market engagement contribute to symbolic and material meaning for villagers, particularly in relation to socio-economic mobility. Our aim is to illuminate the key influencing factors that render rural land touristifiable.

Methodology

This research is grounded in critical theory, drawing in particular from a poststructuralist political ecology (PE) perspective. PE critically analyses nature-society relationships through the lens of power relations and political economic structures (Robbins, 2012). A poststructuralist perspective maintains that social life is influenced by structures both discursive and material, but that most people are at least partially aware of the structures and able to resist or negotiate them in order to exert agency and engage in counter-conduct (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Employing this conceptual approach, the ethnographic research for this study was conducted by the first and second authors from August 2018 to August 2019. Data collection was wholly qualitative, entailing semi-structured and active interviews as well as ongoing participant observation. Active interviews are similar to everyday conversations and allow for questions to tap into understanding of social reality through factual and emotional accounts (Hathaway and Atkinson, 2003). As the majority of informants objected to audio recording, data collected in this manner were primarily recorded in field notes, with verbatim quotations inscribed immediately and more substantial notes elaborated after the interview. However, one participant of the study was willing to be recorded, and his interview was subsequently transcribed. Participant observation entailed living in one of the villages under study and participating in activities such as farming, celebrations and weddings. Observations from this experience were also recorded in field notes. Data was analysed through inductive coding to identify the prevalent or dominant themes that emerged from interviews and interactions (Bernard, 2006). Secondary data were also collected through reviewing government reports, articles, and academic literature.

Fieldwork for the overarching research project was conducted in six villages around the south south-eastern boundary of CTR to examine local responses to and engagement with Corbett tourism. As a component of this larger project, this study draws on 23 interviews each lasting between 20-60 minutes with residents of two study villages, researchers and tourism entrepreneurs, in order to understand the range of impact of tourism development. Respondents were identified through referral and purposive sampling (Bernard, 2006). The aim was to interview participants who were involved in tourism through land use, in addition to the traditional livelihoods including subsistence agriculture, small-scale livestock rearing, wage employment and leasing land (Table 1). As noted in Table 1, this includes villagers whose livelihoods shifted from farming and other work, and those whose primary livelihood shifted but hold family farm land where other members of the family practice agriculture. Agriculture practice is ancestral for those who continue to be associated with it, and therefore former livelihoods remain as agriculture.

Prior informed consent for participation and taking interview notes was obtained verbally, because written forms raised suspicion as did the use of recording devices for most participants. Participants’ anonymity was assured in advance as this ensured their comfort in participating; therefore, all research participants are presented anonymously here. While the university hosting the research does not require formal ethical clearance, the research was conducted in conformance with the ethics code of the American Anthropological Association⁶.

These two focus villages were selected for this study because of the significant contrast in tourism-related land use change that occurred in either. In one, Teran, significant land use change has taken place, especially with the arrival of outsiders’ tourism businesses. This village thus represents the tourism boom in the landscape. By contrast, in the other, Kumer, the land use change has been slower and is ongoing, such that villagers are becoming entrepreneurs on their own land. This village thus exhibits a greater role for local residents in the tourism development process. Comparison between the two sites usefully highlights the range of different forms of land use change tourism development influences and the factors responsible for these different trajectories.

Interview respondent (IR)	Land status	Current livelihood (former livelihood in parentheses if transitioned)	Age group
Teran Village			
IR1	Leased	Lease income from hotel (farming)	50s
IR2	Sold	Souvenir shop (farming)	20s

⁶ See <http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/AAA-Ethics-Code-2009.pdf>. (Accessed on August 1, 2021).

IR3	Leased	Farming, rent income, other	40s
IR4	Rent	Tourism operator (farming)	40s
IR5	Rent	Tourism operator (farming)	40s
IR6	Leased	Shopkeeper, lease income from tourism enterprise, farming	50s
IR7	Sold and owned	Guesthouse (farming)	30s
IR8	Owned	Farming, other	50s
IR9	Owned	Restaurant, farming	30s
IR10	Owned, leased	Restaurant, farming	40s
IR11	Rent	Restaurant, farming	40s
Kumer Village			
IR12	Owned	Farming, tourism employee	20s
IR13	Owned	Farming, homestay	20s
IR14	Not owned	Tourism (local market work)	30s
IR15	Owned	Farming, retail, tourism	50s
IR16	Owned	Farming	50s
IR17	Owned, rented	Farming, tourism	40s
IR18	Owned	Farming, homestay	40s
IR19	Owned	Farming, homestay, tourism employee	40s
IR20	Owned	Tourism, homestay, farming	40s
IR21	Rented	Tourism, farming	40s

IR22	Not owned	NGO employee (researcher)	50s
IR23	Owned	Homestay, guide (researcher)	60s

Table 1. Livelihood, land and age characteristics of interview respondents

Context: The Corbett Tiger Reserve

The Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) located in Uttarakhand state of north India, covers 1288.31 sq. km and is divided into core and buffer areas. The south-eastern boundary of the reserve is towards the plain region of the state, leading to a higher density of village settlements compared to other boundary areas.

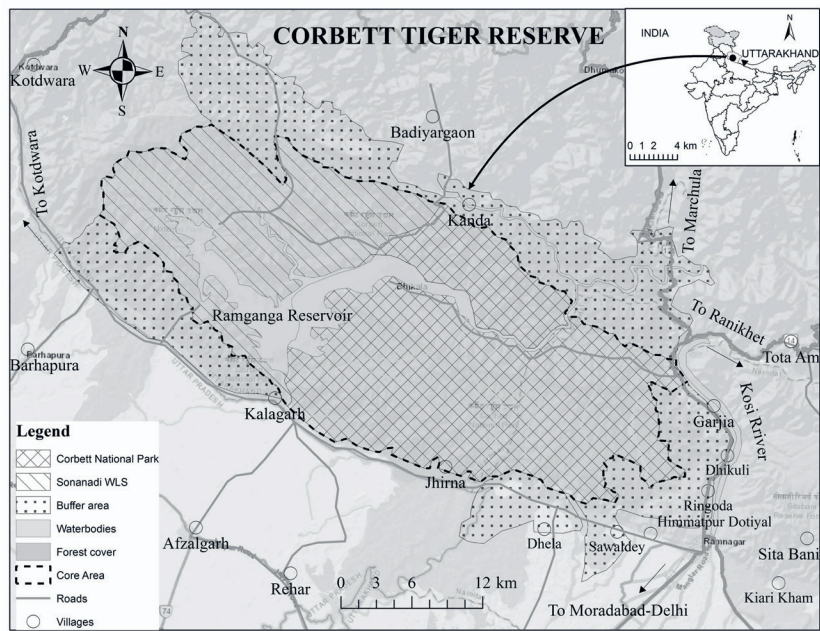


Figure 2 Corbett Tiger Reserve Created by: Ecoinformatics Lab, ATREE

Uttarakhand has had a history of political and economic struggle intertwined with its natural resources. A historical perspective is important for understanding what people do with land; their actions and decision-making are based on knowledge and interpretations which contribute to “political points and even changes in policy or practice” (Peluso, 2012:80). Pre-colonial as well as colonial regimes in the region benefitted from forest-based enterprises

(Rangan, 2000). Therefore, enterprises involving natural resources are not new in the region, yet their nature and form have changed over time.

Uttarakhand became an independent state in 2000 after a prolonged movement for statehood. This movement was rooted in demands for development and economic opportunities in the hill regions and the perceived inability of a government in the lowlands to grasp the needs of people living in the hills (Rangan, 2004). Private sector investment was encouraged in the new State through infrastructure projects including tourism (ibid). While industries and investment from outside contributed to growth within the state, uneven development between the hill and plains continued (Mukherjee, 2012). This historical perspective helps to explain people's involvement in tourism in terms of lack of other livelihood options.

Early 1990s saw the introduction of ecotourism in CTR by the Forest Department, who offered tour guide training to villagers. In 2012, the NTCA promoted ecotourism as a way to support both local communities and conservation. While ecotourism is promoted as a tiger conservation strategy, mainstream tourism forms continue to be dominant in Corbett. A study found that only 20 out of 79 tourist establishments attracted tourists interested in nature-based activities; the rest cater primarily to families, corporate or event-based tourism (Waste Warriors, 2015). Large resort chains have adopted elements of 'ecotourism' such as nature walks or safaris which are popular. According to a CTR official, there is a growing number of Indian tourists who opt for safaris, and a reduction of foreign tourists.

Our study includes villagers who work as safari guides, and are now creating their own enterprises. This aligns with the promotion of ecotourism as primarily "community based and community driven" (NTCA 2012:106). Of the two study villages: Teran and Kumer, Teran is located close to a safari gate and has been dominated by tourist establishments for years. Here, the infrastructure and changes in land use began with the entry of outsiders almost two decades ago. By contrast, Kumer is located away from a safari gate and until recent years had remained less impacted by tourism infrastructure. These two villages represent the temporal and spatial difference in the shifts of land use, exemplifying different phases of the historical and ongoing land use change described below in the following section.

Results

After the initial ecotourism promotion, the mid 1990s saw the beginning of large resort establishment around Corbett. CTR has eight gates for safaris, four of which are located in the south eastern part of the reserve. Villagers claim that since state formation in 2000, governance, and especially land related issues, were not dealt with appropriately by the State as outsiders were allowed to buy land without any restrictions. This observation is in line with the encouragement of private sector investment in the newly formed state. In 2004 the Uttarakhand forest department created a tourism zone within CTR boundaries to promote conservation (Mazoomdar, 2012b). Outside these boundaries the administrative authority permitted the construction of hotels with open access to use of stone and sand from the nearby

Kosi river bed (Mazoomdar, 2012b). Corruption and negligent administration by the forest department and local government led to land acquisition in villages by outsiders (Mazoomdar, 2012b).

Teran: Impacts of tourism on land and post market influx

Teran is located close to a safari gate and the local town that is a main hub for public transport. There are approximately 400 families in Teran spread over 88 ha. According to one respondent, these include families living as tenants. The exact number of such tenants was not known as they form a transient population. Many households rent out part of their homes or build a room on their land, and tenants in these houses are usually from the hill regions, settled in the village for employment related to tourism. Villagers state that there are over 50 tourism establishments here and about 70% of the village population is directly dependent on tourism. Out of 416 official workers, only 23 are agriculture cultivators as per the last government census (Census of India, 2011). The rest work outside the village, in the forest department or have leased part of their land to tourism related enterprises. These enterprises include souvenir shops, restaurants or small snack shops, safari and guide booking agencies, or renting out a room to the taxi drivers who bring tourists by road.

There are different ways in which tourism enterprises are organized in villagers' homes and land. Some of the land owners live behind the shops away from the road, and often hold enough land to also have a small fruit orchard, subsistence vegetable farms, or sometimes a combination of both. Recently, a villager who owned a school has leased the school property for a tourism enterprise. The few villagers who have not used their land for tourism purposes continue to farm but with increasing difficulty due to crop damage caused by wildlife. For many, the changes that have occurred are seen as a step towards better lifestyles.

A farmer who owns a tea shop complained that the lack of limits on tourism development continued to negatively impact the landscape: "There is a lot of noise and garbage now, and our ability to take livestock to graze has become restricted." While navigating issues relating to tourism, this villager rents out a small room in his home for the drivers of tourists' vehicles for extra seasonal income. He continues to farm, and sells produce from his fruit orchard. He claims that his family would be ready to sell their land if there was a financial need.

While many villagers are critical of the type of unchecked tourism that has impacted the village, their livelihoods are tied to this tourism. Citing the growing competition and changing culture in the village, those who could afford to have left the village to seek work elsewhere. Views towards Corbett specific tourism are critical, even for a young villager who has grown up seeing tourism in his village:

I have seen the reduction in value of money while growing up. Here, the money came too easily, too fast. My father started this guesthouse and I studied hotel management for four years. I saw scope in that field. My sister and I help with this guesthouse, but I work [outside] mainly. I don't like it here. There are too many cars, traffic, and always packed with tourists.

The villagers who are not directly involved in tourism have similar responses concerning the negative aspects of tourism. The unchecked tourism development is criticized by all residents in the village, regardless of their engagement with the tourism market. Villagers state that the boom of outsiders buying land in villages reduced after 2013. This shift occurred because the State made it mandatory to legally convert land from agriculture to non-agricultural purposes, or any commercial use, before building on the land. This is a multi-stage process of acquiring permission from the District and then State governments. The land conversion hurdles in the form of bureaucratic processes and the time required has disincentivised land sales. In addition to administrative barriers, there has been a growing focus by the State on local entrepreneurship. The sale of land has been checked due to this government measure, however there are those who had converted their land prior to 2013.

Speaking about his experience in tourism, a respondent recounts that he was exposed to the tourism business while growing up. His father sold their farming land to a hotel in 1994:

After selling the land, we didn't benefit much because we didn't receive the full amount of money. My father kept some land for our home, so we lived by the hotel, and my father worked as an employee in that hotel. My souvenir business is what I developed myself, and I have taken this shop on lease to keep my business going.

State intervention has further facilitated land use change towards tourism. The Uttarakhand State Tourism Department is currently promoting homestays by means of a policy that provides subsidies for the initial set up. The aim is to increase tourism in remote areas by increasing employment and income for home owners and curbing migration (Joshi 2018; UTDB 2020). Homestays are relatively less challenging to set up in one's own home, hence they are becoming a way of diversifying household income and livelihood without having to sell or lease land. While tourism continues to get more State support, there is relatively less support for loss of damage from crops, disincentivising agriculture, as emphasised by many villagers who point out the discrepancy between this and significant State and Forest Department efforts and spending to maintain the protected area.

Kumer: Local entrepreneurship and land sales

Kumer is located at about ten-kilometer distance from a CTR safari gate. It is adjacent to an emerging forest safari route but farther away from main roads. There are approximately 125 families in the village. These families own tracts of land for agriculture, and some have been selling or leasing out their land for what eventually become tourism enterprises. Farming continues here but with difficulties from wildlife incursions into fields. The families who do not own tracts of agricultural land work as agriculture labourers for land owning families, or find employment in the local marketplace or in tourism. Out of a total of 217 workers in Kumer, a majority (135) are agriculture cultivators (Census of India 2011).

According to the village head, about 60% of the villagers do not want more hotels in the village; they see Teran as a cautionary tale of how tourism could take over a landscape. If financial need arises outmigration and land sales remain an option for many. As compared to Teran, there are fewer hotels and resorts in Kumer, even after the tourism boom. Up until 2012, there were three tourism establishments in this village, and the employment of very few villagers was tied to tourism. As of 2019 there were eight hotels, and seven more under construction, in a village area of 99.32 ha (Census of India 2011). Some of those who sell their land move out of the village to buy larger pieces of land in other parts of the region or houses in towns and cities. One tourist establishment is co-owned and run by villagers and set up on their own land. A second tourism establishment owned by a villager is in the process of being set up on their own land and land additionally leased from a neighbouring villager.

While desire for economic mobility prompts the sale of land, familial ties to land play a role in making it difficult to sell land. These contradictory approaches to land indicate strong material as well as symbolic connections to land. One villager explained the material and symbolic factors that they navigate when making decisions regarding land sale or land use diversification:

What we are today is because of our forefather's farming practice. In spite of the troubles we continue to farm because all that we have right now is from the land- from agriculture. But if a person needs money, he is in a desperate situation he has to sell his land, and additionally he gets agriculture land rates so it's not a great situation. But compared to other villages [closer to CTR gates] [this village] is in a better state. Development and destruction are part of the same problem, we just need to balance the ratio of both since it is inevitable that both will take place.

This villager's association with his land provides insights into the entangled nature of land dependencies. These include integration of the market in people's relationship with land while dealing with implications of traditions. It signifies material and symbolic generational and socio-cultural aspects that influence what one does with land. As the man states, selling land at agriculture rates is not as profitable as converting the land for commercial use and getting commercial land rates.

Describing the categorisation of land, an upper-class villager developing his own tourism enterprise, pointed out that,

No one buys land for agriculture now. Whoever farms, is also troubled now. We put in lakhs of rupees in farming but we don't get much in return. But we continue because it is our traditional practice... Now, if in the future, I have faced a problem and need 40 or 50 lakh [rupees], my only option is to sell my land.

The amount of 40-50 lakh (52-65000 USD approximately) is quite high and reflects the high market value of land around Corbett generally. It reflects this villager's ability and ambition to set up his enterprise and further achieve economic mobility.

The financial needs for families are centred around access to education, debt payment, access to infrastructure facilities like health care, transport, and working closer to home rather than out-migrating, which has been a common phenomenon in Uttarakhand. Other socio-cultural factors that prompt selling or leasing out sections of family land include weddings. Hosting a wedding in itself has also influenced land sales, especially for daughters' weddings. Some express disappointment in this trend that emphasises a show of wealth parallel to the trend of 'destination weddings' taking place around CTR. Despite concern over the rise of land sales there is little that other villagers can do to stop anyone from selling their land. Concerning the rise in the material show of weddings, one couple expressed:

The family had to sell part of their land because they had to get their daughters married. It is after all, their personal matter, and they will have their own reasons to sell land. How can we stop them?

Villagers who have been involved in tourism since the late 1990s and early 2000s, initially working for outsiders, have set up their own enterprises ranging from camps to restaurants and adventure parks, with the intention of diversifying services they can offer (see Table 2). The diversification not only in income sources but forms of tourism development reflect the growing entrepreneurial ambition among locals, as well as awareness of competition. Giving an account of diversifying not only land use on his familial land holding, but the type of tourism enterprise, one villager remarks:

I have worked in tourism since 2008. I saw that through Goibibo or Makemytrip [online travel agency platforms] customers call and see what each hotel charges and what packages they have. So there is a lot of competition and it will get tough. I will be an addition in to what five people are already doing. After converting part of my agriculture land into commercial land, I am working on building an adventure park. I have also taken part of my neighbour's land on lease for this park.

In line with such local entrepreneurship, there are five homestays, and one locally owned and managed eco-camp.

<i>Interview respondent (age group in years)</i>	<i>Land use change</i>	<i>Livelihood</i>	<i>Village</i>
<i>IR1 (40-50)</i>	Renting a room to tourists	Farming, shop keeping, seasonal tourism	Teran
<i>IR2 (50-60)</i>	Leased land for a hotel	Tourism	Teran
<i>IR3(45-55)</i>	Section of land leased to tourism entrepreneurs	Non-farm, tourism	Teran
<i>IR4(25-35)</i>	Guest house	Tourism, farming	Teran
<i>IR5(40-50)</i>	Restaurant	Tourism, farming	Teran

<i>IR6(40-50)</i>	Restaurant, leased out part of land to tourism	Tourism	Teran
<i>IR7(20-30)</i>	Homestay	Farming, tourism	Kumer
<i>IR8(35-45)</i>	Adventure park	Farming, small business	Kumer
<i>IR9(35-45)</i>	Eco-camp, homestay, tented camp	Tourism	Kumer

Table 2 Forms of land use change by interview respondents in Teran and Kumer

Discussion

Partly as a consequence of the introduction of ecotourism, villagers around CTR have been changing land use, through selling or leasing land, land as a form of income and livelihood diversification. Livelihoods entailing small-scale agriculture and livestock keeping have been diminishing over the years. Land use change or diversification is often directly from agriculture to development of tourism establishments such as camps or hotels. These shifts in land use indicate that the (eco)tourism market contributes to changing land values, and consequently incentivises land use diversification. In this process, (eco)tourism market renders land touristifiable. Related factors such as challenges in farming, and access to infrastructure and desire for economic mobility also contribute to land use change or diversification.

(Eco)tourism development is now about a generation old, and has created dependencies that are not sustainable. Villagers point out that they suffer due to sudden closure of tourism operations or during the low tourist season. These aspects are typical of ecotourism as it commodifies nature and creates wage or employment dependencies (Fletcher and Neves 2012). Simultaneously, villagers state that it is the only form of work they can access due to their skills and low returns from agriculture.

Both villages, Teran and Kumer, illustrate the impacts of land use change, reflected temporally and spatially. In Teran, many villagers sold their land for tourism to gain economically in the 2000s which resulted in a rapid change in the landscape with a majority of agricultural land sold (Rastogi et al 2015). The impacts of sale of land and post-market influx dynamics experienced by villagers is evident here. In the early 2000s, many villagers saw the growing tourism market as an opportunity to sell part or all of their land and earn money overnight (Bindra 2010). Some of the biggest properties around Corbett are owned by influential outsiders (Mazoomdar 2012b). The surge of investment by outsiders led to the changing landscape in the village. Villagers growing up with an exposure to the tourism market became interested in setting up their own enterprises. The initial tourism boom has impacted current land use and created conditions that determine future investment in land (Li 2017). Teran also represents for many an example of how tourism infrastructure led by outsiders can negatively impact the landscape. As Li points out, “Booms and busts are not just cycles, they are historical events that

initiate novel trajectories that should be tracked across time” (2017:2). The significant and fairly rapid acquisition of land in Corbett drew negative attention in the media (Bindra 2010; Mazoomdar 2012a, 2012b) and led to a policy report on the impacts of tourism on the landscape (Bindra 2010).

With a reduction in outsider involvement in land, villagers with capital are setting up enterprises or leasing land. In Kumer, the number of hotels is relatively lower than in Teran and villagers are wary about the extent of tourism development. There are, however, discrepancies in the extent of tourism-based enterprise and land use change. Villagers sell land or shift land use for financial and economic mobility. Those who own land and are of a higher class have been able to set up tourist establishments, or plan large scale ones, such as an adventure park. Kumer is located further from a safari gate as compared to Teran and up until the time of the study the rate of land sale and land use change were relatively lower than in Teran.

Entrepreneurship on one’s own land has meant that these villagers have been able to retain ownership of their own land and have moved away from working as employees in outsiders’ hotels and resorts. Material and symbolic factors influencing these decisions include: wildlife damage to crops, aspirations to economic mobility, financial debt and ability to work close to home rather than outmigration. The ability to retain land is advantageous and while not always explicit, some villagers have been able to gain livelihood options or use tourism as a means of economic mobility. Yet as they themselves express, this is still within the context of limited options and opportunities and constraints of broader market dynamics. The possibility of retaining land and gaining higher returns than agriculture has meant that tourism becomes the more attractive livelihood option within a limited horizon for a select few landowners.

Land remains a highly valuable asset for those who retain it and lease it, and appears to give owners more flexibility in deciding what they do with the land. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in particular caused a loss of business for all tourist enterprises around Corbett. According to the second author’s observation in Teran, after the first and second wave of Covid-19, villagers who worked in bigger cities were returning as they lost their jobs due to the lockdowns. While it was not possible to gather empirical data on impacts of the pandemic, this study paves way for a future examination of the relationship between land use and ecotourism in relation to Covid-19 both for residents of and those returning to the villages.

Conclusion

Ecotourism is known to impact social-economic dynamics by creating employment-based dependencies in a landscape. This paper has focused on a different form of dependency: land use change and diversification in the rural context around Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttarakhand. The purpose of focusing on land use change is to provide insights on the growing influence of tourism and the factors that contribute to villagers’ involvement in the industry.

Around CTR, in addition to selling land, land owning villagers are looking to tourism not for employment in hotels, but to set up enterprises or lease out their own land. This is in a context where land has largely been used for agriculture. The history of Uttarakhand State formation and rural migration helps situate the ongoing calls for better access to development and infrastructure, which influences what people do with their land.

In developing this analysis, the study integrates insights from agrarian and tourism studies, and in particular, contributes to redressing the relative dearth of research on dynamics of land use change within tourism studies. By bringing perspectives from agrarian studies into conversation with (eco)tourism research, we contribute to both fields by emphasising the importance of (eco)tourism in agrarian change and of attention to land use change in ecotourism studies to understand how rural people negotiate and navigate (eco)tourism in relation to land use. In the process, we also contribute to tourism geographies more broadly by offering a conceptual framework for understanding how land use decision-making shapes local spaces in the course of ecotourism development.

Decision making regarding land use, or sale, is driven by the need to diversify livelihood from agriculture which, for many, continues to give minimal productive returns. Livelihood diversification is triggered by wildlife-caused damage to crops, debt payments, education, weddings and aspirations for economic mobility. The deepening dependence on the market contributes to villagers' alienation from their land in ways that agriculture did not, and creates greater vulnerability to national and global tourism trends. The affective connection to land through ancestral inheritance also influences decision-making regarding land sale. The changes in land are thus situated within both material and symbolic registers. Additionally, the historical, ongoing lived-experiences of aspirational and tourism-based changes influences people's land use.

These broader historical and ongoing processes connect to a strand of agrarian research that explores the multiple ways that rural populations use land and how land use is thereby diversified. This study calls for future research on (eco)tourism to focus on the ways tourism development processes affect patterns of land use and local stakeholders' decision-making concerning use of their land. Understanding land use change or diversification via tourism could provide insights concerning questions of the sustainability of tourism-based work generally. Further research in this area has potential to shape ecotourism and rural development policies that respect connection to land and counter market pressures that cause alienation and dependency.



Image 4 A woman walking through farm lands carrying grass to feed livestock
Photo by: Revati Pandya

3 An intersectional approach to neoliberal environmentalism: Women's engagement with ecotourism at Corbett Tiger Reserve, India⁷

Abstract

Research in environmentalism has provided an analysis of environmentally friendly subject formation through the influence of conservation governance. Within this research, examination of subject formation from the local community perspective is also gaining attention. However, a gender perspective in environmentalism research remains marginal. This study thus contributes to environmentalism research by drawing on intersectional feminist political ecology to examine women's engagement with ecotourism in the context of India's Corbett Tiger Reserve. Ecotourism as a form of market-based conservation has been commonly framed as an expression of neoliberal environmentalism. Neoliberal environmentalism is reflected in market-centred incentives used to promote conservation and support for local people via employment in conservation-based work - a supposedly 'win-win' dynamic. Through ethnographic research, I provide insights into different forms of women's engagement with tourism. The analysis reveals that this engagement does not necessarily produce the environmentally friendly subject that environmentalism analysis predicts. Rather, women's engagement is shaped by intersecting dynamics of caste and class and motivated by factors including but not limited to monetary benefits. This study thus questions the dominant approach to investigating neoliberal environmentalism in particular, that tends to emphasise the influence of monetary incentives in producing environmentally friendly subjects.

Keywords

Neoliberal environmentalism, gender, ecotourism, intersectionality, feminist political ecology

Introduction

This study examines women's involvement in tourism at the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR), India, where ecotourism is promoted as a win-win project for both conservation and local community development. Ecotourism as a form of market-based conservation is commonly framed as an expression of neoliberal environmentalism (Fletcher, 2010; Bluwstein, 2017). Neoliberal environmentalism is reflected in market-centred incentives used to promote conservation and support for local people via employment in conservation-based work - a supposedly 'win-win' dynamic. It is considered a form of multiple environmentalities intended to enrol local stakeholders as subjects in favour of conservation. Environmentalism has thus provided a productive lens to understand how conservation governance is promoted and with which local people engage. However, the ways that people understand and negotiate such governance, and as a result how 'environmental subjectivity' is constructed, has been relatively

⁷ Published online in *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* (2022)

less explored (Singh, 2013; Haller et al., 2016; Fletcher, 2017). Previous research has demonstrated how the production of environmental subjects in relation to environmentality is not a straightforward equation and hence the value of a bottom-up perspective in understanding this process (Cepek, 2011; Singh, 2013; Forsyth and Walker, 2014). Within this discussion, however, a focus on gender has, thus far, remained marginal (for a notable exception see Gutiérrez-Zamora 2021). To address this gap, I draw from feminist political ecology and intersectionality to recognise the multiple identities that emerge as a result of intersecting influences from gender, class and caste (Nightingale, 2011; Resurrección, 2017; Mollett, 2017). I argue that while women's involvement in ecotourism is indeed promoted through an external structure that incentivises involvement in a market, this does not necessarily imply the creation of subjects who are environmentally friendly. Rather, women's intersecting identities shaped by gender, caste and class have a bearing on their decision making, and the implications thereof. This approach thus contributes an additional perspective to environmentality research as it considers the socio-economic positioning that influences women's engagement with ecotourism.

In the following section, I outline the research on environmentality to which this study contributes. I focus on environmentality research involving community dynamics that illuminate agency, local alliances, interests and aspirations. These perspectives highlight the importance of attending to the lived experiences of local community members involved in conservation intervention landscapes, yet a focus on gender and women's experiences in particular has remained marginal in this discussion. To address this deficiency, the focus here remains on women's identities and work engagement with tourism. Following this, I provide contextual findings for my analysis from a village near Corbett Tiger Reserve by examining how differences in engagement with tourism, based on class and caste, contribute to specific forms of agency, life options or changes in women's lives. The forms of agency, mobility or restrictions resulting from tourism work thus continue to be shaped by prevailing caste and class structures that women must manoeuvre. In developing this analysis, the study contributes gender insights in relation to environmentality, and adds to research serving as a "counterpoint" to conventional environmentality approaches (Forsyth and Walker, 2014) in demonstrating that women's involvement in conservation interventions does not necessarily imply the adoption of environmentally friendly behaviour.

Environmentality and environmental subjects

Research concerning environmentality has contributed to our understanding of processes of environmental governance, and people's perspectives and behaviour in relation to these. Environmentality is drawn from Foucault's concept of governmentality which examines governance as a set of techniques used to "conduct the conduct" of people (1991). Following Luke's (1999) initial examination of environmentality enacted through global environmental governance structures, Agrawal (2005a, 2005b) analysed environmentality as more localised governance influencing subjectivity. He described environmentalities as processes of 'intimate government' wherein regulatory frameworks like monitoring or enforcement turn people into

'environmental subjects' who 'care for the environment' (Agrawal, 2005b: 162, 178). The regulatory frameworks shaping environmental subjectivity can, however, differ based on the different structures of governance that underpin them. To understand how different forms of environmentalities are operationalised, Fletcher (2010) draws on Foucault's (2008) late work to describe multiple environmentalities: disciplinary, sovereign, neoliberal, and truth forms, respectively. A sovereign environmentality is reflected in fortress conservation, entailing strict enforcement of protected area boundaries. By contrast, the villagers in Kumaon that Agrawal (2005b) analysed as environmental subjects, function in relation to a "disciplinary" environmentality due to the ethical norms that governance institutions promote (Fletcher, 2010). "Truth" environmentality, on the other hand, is promoted through specific beliefs about what counts as truth in human-environment relations (examples are deep ecology or traditional ecological knowledge) (Fletcher, 2010; Montes, et al., 2020). Neoliberal environmentality, finally, is focused on creating market-based incentives that encourage people to act in environmentally friendly ways (Fletcher, 2010). Neoliberal environmentality draws from Foucault's analysis of neoliberal governmentality wherein the market economy is predominant in defining governmental action; hence the essence of neoliberalism according to Foucault is that the "exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market economy" (2008:131). Ecotourism framed as neoliberal environmentality implies creation of particular environmental subjects modelled on the *homo oeconomicus*, a man (or woman) of enterprise and production who produces his (or her) own satisfaction (Foucault, 2008). A neoliberal subject, then, becomes someone governable by providing incentives which are defined by engagement in the market economy (Foucault, 2008).

Complexity and nuances of environmental subjectivity

All these forms of governance are related to ways of influencing and incentivising behaviours on the part of external actors. However, how people's behaviour actually manifests is dependent on factors that include, but also go beyond, an external governance structure. A growing body of research has thus explored processes of subject formation and the implications of people's involvement in conservation from the perspective of community-level dynamics. The research has revealed a range of motivating factors in shaping environmentality. Within this scholarship, production of environmental subjects in relation to conservation governance is examined by highlighting the importance of local socio-cultural realities. This research demonstrates that there are complex outcomes of environmental governance, and consequently complex subject positions formed through the coming together of interests, aspirations and social differences in specific political settings (Asiyanbi et al., 2019). The social dynamics that emerge contribute to transforming existing social systems. For instance, people may develop strategies and systems to be part of an environmental project while excluding women from what was their traditional role and thus changing the system to personal benefit, for example towards men (Faye, 2016). A study by Machaqueiro (2020) shows a different perspective on environment subject formation. The study examines use of local culture and narratives to promote climate change governance through the UNFCCC (Machaqueiro, 2020). Here, 'environmental subjects', are not distant from local realities, and, Machaqueiro argues, the

process of subjectification is in fact based on local specificities. Subjectification is nuanced, and demands recognition of how people negotiate environmental governance which in itself is not static, but can be in a state of flux and transition (Cullen, 2020).

Following a focus on local dynamics, research draws attention to the role of agency in negotiating environmental governance structures. Singh (2013) analyses how villagers protecting the forest is not simply an outcome of environmental governance. Rather, the embodied and material ways of relating to nature play a vital role in shaping local perceptions, which motivate their protection of the forest. Similarly, agency is dealt with through an emic perspective like ‘constitutionality’, wherein people negotiate and participate in environmental initiatives while forming institutions and collectivising creatively (Haller, et al., 2016). Community-based and agential perspectives illuminate the factors that contribute to the varying relationships with conservation governance, and the implications of this on different individuals and groups. These realities include an individual or group’s capacities to critically gauge and engage with non-indigenous or introduced Western scientific techniques in an indigenous community context (Cepek, 2011). Highlighting community dynamics and socio-economic influences on motivations in conservation interventions, research thus complicates understanding of the process of subject formation in relation to environmentality, revealing that actors’ behaviour does not necessarily reflect the eco-friendly subjectivity that interventions like ecotourism seeks to promote (Cepek, 2011; Forsyth and Walker, 2014; Faye 2016). This study builds on this strand of environmentality research by focusing on women’s engagement with tourism. A focus on gender dynamics in environmentality research is limited but growing. Gender is identified as an important element of study; as one aspect of social identity with its particular embodied environmental relationships (Singh, 2013). Faye (2016) examined motivations for conservation as based on power dynamics rather than awareness about the environment, which in turn excludes women previously involved in management. More recently, Gutiérrez-Zamora (2021) has examined gender mainstreaming within community forest management as a technique of biopower, one that reinforces power inequities expressed through dynamics of race, class and gender, while promoting women as entrepreneurs. Research within feminist political ecology has brought together theoretical contributions combining agential and subjectivity-oriented perspectives (see Truelove, 2011) which provide a productive frame to examine women’s motivation in tourism work and its implications on their lives. The following sections attend to feminist theory to draw out women’s work, everyday practices and their socio-economic positioning in the context of environment governance.

Embeddedness and subjectivities

Feminist perspectives on subject formation have provided vital insights on the co-constitutive nature of space and identities. Feminist political ecologists in particular have unpacked the politics of resource use to emphasise “embeddedness of local gendered environmental struggles” (Resurrección and Elmhirst, 2008:7) in political economic contexts (see also Harcourt and Escobar, 2002; Rocheleau and Nirmal, 2014). By acknowledging contextual realities, the notion of a subject is expanded to include intersectional aspects including ethnicity,

class, and religious factors (Elmhirst, 2011; Resurrección, 2017). Intersectional FPE draws attention to the forms of difference and related subjectivities by recognising class, caste, race, age or ethnicity. This entails understanding the power dynamics emerging from the space, and those emerging from social structures that shape gender relations. Intersectionality allows one to consider aspects of gender relations that matter to people beyond marriage, such as social status, including age-based status, or class position (Elmhirst, 2015).

In understanding local gendered struggles, one strand of research has emphasised the material aspects of gender and environment (Agarwal, 1992, 1994). These include use of and dependence on natural resources for livelihood, survival and socio-cultural factors which determine activities in a community (Agarwal, 1992). Drawing from women's daily practice of firewood and fodder collection from the forest in Kumaon Himalayas, Gururani (2002) points out that women's identities are interrelated with their material work in the forest, and this relationship produces gendered subjects. The forest becomes a space of labour and power dynamics related to coloniality and patriarchy (Gururani, 2002). In a similar vein, identities are bound to space as social relations function within specific social and physical frames, consequently giving meaning to the relationships and the particular setting (Massey, 2005). This dimension of space changes when daily practices and livelihoods change. A feminist lens provides important insights concerning the multiplicity of subjectivities that converge and within which gender is constantly negotiated and articulated in environmental or socio-political contexts, creating complex or shifting subjectivities (Sundberg, 2004; Sultana, 2009; Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2011). Systems of differentiation based on class, ethnicity or race impact how people's livelihoods are categorised and differentiated between those who are seen to protect and harm nature (Ojeda, 2012). An intersectional FPE approach thus seeks to integrate various focal points of difference and understand varying subjectivities which reveal the heterogeneous and non-static nature of a subject. It is also argued that an intersectional approach has been prevalent in the context of feminist politics in India specifically, as caste and class fundamentally shape a woman's identity in this context, even if analyses are not explicitly labelled in this way (Menon, 2015).

Accounting for differences in caste and class in this context thus recognises the different positionalities of women as they experience them. Intersectional research has focused largely on space and time in relation to identities (Cole, 2017). Subject formation is a result of the intersecting aspects of a social relationship or structure that actors must negotiate in order to exert situated forms of agency (Elmhirst, 2015). Subjectivities may either be reinforced or emerge as contradictory or contesting certain systems of power, thus revealing the momentary or "unstable processes of subject formation" (Sundberg, 2004:47). Sundberg's examination of women's medicinal plant group revealed that the group was formed through external intervention shaped by power dynamics of patriarchy and race. Simultaneously, some women felt that the group provided space for women to participate and challenge gender relations (Sundberg, 2004). This space is co-produced and redefined as multiple power dynamics of race, class, gender intersect (Nightingale, 2011). The influence of the market on shaping identities, its impacts on lived experiences and women's lives is a critical dimension to examine in conservation spaces.

Intersecting identities: women and markets

Research on the relationship between feminist movements and neoliberalism points out that there is increasing focus on recognition rather than redistribution or representation (Fraser, 2009). This entailed increasing focus on issues of lack of women's involvement on platforms or work places, and less on actual redistribution of wealth and income. Contributing to Fraser's historical analysis of feminist movements, Newman (2013) shows the complexities that come with incorporating women in the economy. For instance, women entering a work force even though it may be within a patriarchal structure brings the question of gender into a dynamic from which it may have previously been absent. Newman also challenges the assertion that feminism is necessarily co-opted by neoliberalism by teasing out the relationships between culture, economy and institutional logics which are not always erased with the imposition of neoliberalism. The contribution she offers is the shift towards understanding how the market, culture and existing feminist or activist movements can coexist and contradict one another while creating spaces for expressing agency despite dominant power structures. From this perspective, she argues that new spaces of power and agency can open up for women. As resource management is increasingly becoming market oriented, mobility in rural areas is also increasing (Elmhirst, 2011), and it is vital to unpack what forms of mobility take place and their implications for women's lives. Two broad findings of research on the relationship between the market and women thus indicate, paradoxically, that: 1) women have access to more opportunities and power through the market, on the one hand; and on the other, that 2) women entering a market become part of another structure over which they have little or no control (Arora-Jonsson, 2014). This paradox is evident especially in cases where women are involved in tourism. As tourism is based on the social and physical setting of a place, gender dynamics are bound to be integral to unpacking tourism. While some women gain social mobility they largely serve foreign and white tourists, thus reinforcing race, class and nationality-based hierarchy (Johnson, 2018). Gendered relations can be reflected and reproduced in tourism transactions (Swain, 1995). A study on ethnic tourism in Thailand revealed that women are employed to "capitalize on hill tribeness" (Ishii, 2012:306) and women seemed to fulfil that perception, while older men are left unemployed. Identities are interrelated with tourism practice, especially when selling a specific aspect of culture for tourism business, like handicrafts or folk dance. Women perform and sell culture in tourist areas, and that aspect of identity often merges with their daily life (Li, 2003). Identity is also tied to agency and empowerment; in some cases, women have been able to negotiate the local-tourist power dynamics to their favour. In this process they are able to form their identities as entrepreneurs on equal footing with tourists, and not just as serving tourists (Cone, 1995). Mollett (2017) examines Afro-descendent women's experiences of living and working in a tourism dominated space as they navigate historical dispossession that is aggravated by race and gender. Such examples show that intersecting elements of class, age, race, gender or education, working together, can reinforce discrimination (Sultana, 2021).

Other research suggests that tourism has the potential to provide entrepreneurial opportunities to women, and through that offer potential for leadership, political involvement and social mobility (Stronza, 2001; Medina, 2005; Pritchard, 2014). Women's participation in decision making and presence in local governance bodies can also contribute to empowerment (Agarwal, 2010). However, economic opportunities do not necessarily translate to gender equity or justice (Jackson, 1996). The issue of what empowerment entails is complicated, and calls for an understanding of the context, personal agency and social norms and practices (Goldman and Little, 2015). Women may be empowered at the family level through their engagement with tourism, yet their status within the larger village or society could remain unchanged due to conformity to existing gender roles (Swain, 1993). Often, family responsibilities are expected to be prioritised despite the responsibility for expanding tourism business (Morgan and Winkler, 2020). Consequently, empowerment initiatives can end up burdening women more because of their pre-existing responsibilities that maintain priority (Morgan and Winkler, 2020). The research outlined above indicates that women's involvement in tourism can have diverse outcomes in terms of how and whether they benefit. This difference depends on existing social dynamics and specific forms of intervention. It also shows that there is no singular form of subjectivity which is derived from women's involvement in tourism. Intersecting dimensions of class, caste, race, or ethnicity lead to multiple subjectivities. An emphasis on intersectionality aims to capture these. In the above cases, work through tourism relates to the production of gender norms, as well as challenging them. Feminist research captures such nuance in subjectivity- production and contestation (Sultana, 2009; Nightingale, 2011; Clement, et al., 2019).

In the following analysis, I employ this perspective to examine different women's engagement with tourism. The motivations and implications of their involvement invite us to consider how women's engagement in a neoliberal environmentality does not necessarily produce environmentally friendly behaviour. In my examination of women's association with tourism, the aim is not to romanticise women's struggles, empowerment or agency (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Mollett, 2017). Instead, I aim to examine the multiple factors that lead to specific forms of agency within continued structures of oppression. This, in turn contributes to challenging certain notions of how subject formation proceeds in relation to environmentality. An environmentality framework remains useful for this analysis due to its capacity to illuminate the particular ways in which forms of environmental governance aim to "conduct conduct" in pursuit of specific forms of subjectivity, even if these are not necessarily achieved in practice. Combining this with an intersectional feminist focus on how such efforts to conduct conduct are negotiated by actors embodying particular subject positions thus affords a nuanced understanding of how subject formation actually plays out in environmental governance interventions.

Methodology

This study is based on ethnographic field research conducted between August 2018 and August 2019, using semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I employed an active

interview style, using a basic set of questions. Active interviews are similar to everyday conversation and allow for questions to tap into understanding of social reality through factual and emotional accounts (Hathaway and Atkinson, 2003). I was based in one village for the large part of my study period, and this helped to provide a more immersive experience into the lives of women, supporting participant observation. I was able to take part in the daily activities of different women including household chores, fodder collection from the forest, farming, community meetings and social events. While the cases described here are from the specific village I was based in, my research in other villages around CTR also contributed to my general understanding of gender dynamics. I also draw on interviews with men, as well as on my field observations and notes. The duration of interactions with research participants ranged from twenty to ninety minutes. Participants' consent was sought verbally in order to build a relationship of trust where physical consent forms and formalities created discomfort. Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity and privacy. The focus on varied social backgrounds was important to reveal that women experience varying degrees of agency or change in their existing positions as they engage with tourism. In order to maintain this perspective, I also draw from standpoint theory. Standpoint theory promotes viewing a research context through the perspective of women or marginalised groups so the knowledge formed in interaction between subject and object is embodied in the physical geography and socio-economic contexts (Harding, 1993). My position as a woman contributed to affinity with the often-shifting subjectivities that the women with whom I interacted also embodied. My social position, a woman from a privileged caste and class, and my identity as a researcher made me someone with a different kind of lifestyle and knowledge – important points of difference. Yet, living in the village and participating in the local activities helped build trust which was important for creating a space of open sharing. In my interactions I was equally questioned about my life and how I expect it to be. Such exchanges were important as they allowed for insights into one another's lives, and eventually contributed towards mutual connection and understanding. When in the presence of men, my interaction with the women, and vice versa, tended to be different, as there was then more general discussion about livelihood issues. This revealed the larger power dynamics that were guided by patriarchal values.

Women's work and tourism around Corbett Tiger Reserve

Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR), established in 1973, is one of the first tiger reserves located in the northern state of Uttarakhand, India. The management of a tiger reserve is based on core and buffer areas (NTCA, 2020). Core areas are inviolate spaces where human habitation is prohibited and specific sections are demarcated for tourism (safaris), while the buffer area is a multiple use zone where human habitation and activities are permitted (WLPA, 2006; NTCA, 2020). Within the buffer zone, conservation-friendly livelihoods are promoted as an explicit means to encourage local residents' support for conservation, one of the most widespread of which is involvement in ecotourism. Ecotourism in all tiger reserves is promoted as a triple win by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) guidelines (2012:106). The guidelines assert that "ecotourism has the potential to enhance public awareness, education, and wildlife

conservation, while providing nature-compatible local livelihoods and greater incomes for a large number of people living around natural ecosystem which can help contribute directly to the protection of wildlife or forest areas, while making the community stakeholders and owners in the process". The guidelines promote the need for local participation and benefit sharing rather than high end tourism that does not adhere to ecotourism (NTCA, 2020). They envision ecotourism for "incentivizing local people for protecting forests and wildlife" (NTCA, 2020:86). This is significant as the intent is to promote eco-friendly behaviour. Thus, villagers are intended to be enrolled in ecotourism to create environmentally friendly subjects. It is within this context that the following sections focus on the ways the women engage with tourism that challenges certain notions of environmentalty.

A majority of the population in villages bordering CTR is dependent on tourism for income. Access to forest resources have been restricted within CTR, and alienation from forest-based livelihood and village displacement from inside the forest goes back to 1936 when it was first designated a Corbett National Park (Lasgorceix and Kothari, 2009). Villages from inside the forest were relocated to forest areas on the periphery of the reserve without any legal land rights. Access to basic resources, education, and opportunities for these villagers continues to be limited and shapes their engagement with tourism even more than those who live on land with secure land rights. Tourism was introduced in this context of a history of dispossession, creating dependencies. Livelihoods in this region have included forest resource use, subsistence agriculture and livestock keeping. State support for these livelihood activities is limited which has also led many to turn to tourism for employment with aspirations towards modernity and upward economic mobility. Gender roles for livelihood in this region are divided based on resource and agriculture-based work that is primarily carried out by women, and market economy-based work that is carried out by men, (Gururani, 2015). The changes in livelihoods and social aspirations are bringing about gradual changes in this traditional gendered work division with women becoming involved in tourism as well. Their involvement is sometimes hidden and varied, as in many cases, the face of the tourism enterprise is men, while caste and class differences also influence involvement in tourism.

The traditional livelihood practices of women in villages around CTR involve collecting firewood and fodder from forests, agriculture, and domestic work. This practice of women's work involvement on all domestic fronts is rooted in patterns of male outmigration that began in the late 1700s, continuing through colonial times (Gururani, 2015) and in the present to varying extents. Over time, livelihood patterns have changed due to shifting forest management regime. Restrictions in access to the forest and forest use, lack of land rights, in addition to people's desire for modernity through upward economic mobility, have meant that tourism-based livelihoods are now common in villages around CTR. The private tourism industry began to thrive in the early 2000. With no limits to building hotels nor availability of land bought from villagers, hotels mushroomed. The nature and extent of tourism has impacted the physical and social landscape around CTR.

Ecotourism was formally introduced in the 1990s as a part of guide training offered by the Forest Department (FD) at CTR. The trainings were an initiative of the FD as a part of an eco-

development program to address human-wildlife conflict, and ecotourism was introduced to redress by offering an income linked to wildlife conservation. According to villagers, part of the reason for introducing ecotourism was also that the FD was short staffed, and villager involvement helped address this issue by also enrolling them as conservationists. Those who trained under this initiative worked as CTR guides at the designated safari gates or with the few private entities—hotels or wildlife enthusiasts—who had regular international tourists as clientele. Having gained experience, many of these guides then set up their own safari and travel agencies. These guides are now themselves entrepreneurs who promote a win-win narrative of ecotourism which was facilitated by their enrolment in the FD training.

Many men have now sought livelihoods in tourism in their own or neighbouring villages as opposed to migrating out of the state to work. Authorities cite the prominent employment avenues for the inclusion of local people as guides, safari jeep drivers, and small shop owners. A large number of local villagers are also involved in jobs such as cleaners, gardeners or watchmen. The ‘local’ in this case is largely exclusive to men as jobs such as guides and drivers are inevitably taken up by them on account of dominant gender norms and expectations. Recently, for the first time in the history of CTR, women have been selected as nature guides (Roy, 2020). Another recent State initiative in this direction is training women to take on roles of safari jeep drivers (Azad, 2021). These initiatives are promoted using narratives of women’s empowerment and recognition of their roles as traditional conservationists (Azad, 2021). Women’s identity as conservationists is used to enrol them into ecotourism jobs, while also seen to be promoting a progressive agenda shifting stereotypical gender roles that shape tiger reserve management.

Women’s self-help groups are formed in villages to enable financial independence through a loan system that is created by funds pooled by group members every month. Other support systems include NGO projects and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs of companies, banks, and resorts which include training in activities such as stitching clothes or beautician courses. While these are also important factors in women’s lives in villages around Corbett, they are beyond the scope of this paper. Here, I focus on women’s specific engagement with tourism.

Material opportunities through the economy are different for men and women (Rankin, 2003), and accessing market-based work is easier for men than for women due to the structurally-set avenues for men. Women are, however, involved in tourism, often in shop-keeping, standing in for their husbands for temporary periods, or managing the shop completely. Occasionally, some women work in hotels and resorts performing jobs like gardening, cleaning, construction labour, and in the administration or finance department. In homestays, however, women’s work is crucial and this signifies a space where traditional family duties and tourism work coincide. In many such households, forest-use continues to varying extents through fodder collection for livestock. Some men support their wives in carrying out work outside of their household duties, and were perceived to be more “modern”. However, the same men suggested that household and societal expectations called for a traditional way of life for women that is hard to break out of. This tension between tradition and the aspiration for economic mobility

and modernity is present throughout the Corbett landscape, but it is more prominent for women because of social expectations and patriarchy. Gender expectations and subjectivities are evident in women's everyday practice of care work, as well as in the expected and promoted narratives of shifting from away from rural lifestyle.

Despite their involvement, women's access to tourism and its implications for any change in socio-economic factors in their lives varies based on positions of class and caste. The specific village on which this analysis focuses on comprises of approximately 125 families, most of whom are upper caste. These families own tracts of land for agriculture, and many have been selling or leasing out their land for what have eventually become tourism enterprises. At the time of the study, the village had eight hotels and seven more under construction, all bought or managed by those who are not villagers. One tourist establishment is co-owned and managed by villagers and set up on their own land. Majority of villagers still own land in this village, and so farming continues but with difficulties from wildlife incursions into fields. Families considered lower caste do not own tracts of agricultural land, and those who can, demarcate a small section outside their home to grow vegetables or a small crop. These families work as agriculture labour for higher caste families, or work in the local market.

Carving space

Social positioning and access to tourism work

Firewood and fodder collection from the forest is reducing due to increasing restrictions in forest access; access to and affordability of cooking gas, and families keeping fewer livestock. In a conversation, a man who was explaining the lives of women, claimed that women still want to go to the forest, and sometimes they have to, but that times are changing. He added, "they also go to gossip" and implied that this was why they enjoy the tradition of visiting the forest. I accompanied two women into the forest when they went to collect fodder for the week. They complained about their lives and the drudgery of having to go into the forest. They expressed how it was hard work, and it was indeed, to navigate the forest for the best fodder while making sure to avoid elephants, as are commonly found there, and sometimes tigers. After collecting the fodder and tying it up in large heavy bundles, they carry the headloads back to the village. These women recognized their daily work struggles, as they compared my life to theirs, and concluded that even if they wanted to do anything different, they could not, because this is the work that they have always done and known. Both women are conscious of their everyday work defined by their subject position as rural women and expected work. In addition to the functional nature of this activity, for these women this was time away from their homes to catch up on their lives, joke about amusing incidents that happened on their previous visit to the forest, and share troubled domestic experiences. The forest as a physical space and its related everyday activities shape social relations (Gururani, 2002).

Both women are from landless families i.e. do not own farm land and work on others' land in return for a portion of the harvested crop or income. While not from a low caste, they fall within a lower class as evident in their lack of farmland. They also work in a local tourist camp

to earn income. This work, albeit seasonal, allows them to earn extra income even as they keep their household functioning. The nature of women's work, their experiences and feelings towards it, represents the "entangled nature-society relationship" where spaces like the forest meet material needs but also influence "social relations and identities" in the village (Gururani, 2002:240). While forests are used to access resources, they also signify power relations in the gendered practices that take place in the forest space (Gururani, 2002). Men usually do not go to the forest for firewood or fodder collection. While tourism adds to the spaces that women occupy and work in, and presents new avenues for women to earn income, it also represents power relations that are gendered. Subject positions emerging from tourism work and space both reinforce and contest the gender roles and expectations wherein men have been involved in enterprise-based work and women are caretakers. Women are involved in the tourism work, yet the ownership of enterprises is by men. Men who are local entrepreneurs, guides or jeep drivers, promote the win-win narrative of wildlife tourism. They see their role of guides or wildlife safari operators as vital for protecting the forest, in line with environmentally friendly subjects. One guide operator compared how aware local tourist operators are with villagers who still go into the forest for resources: "They don't understand that this [forest] needs to be saved for next fifty generations. We have enough awareness that we need to save wildlife."

On the other hand, women get involved with the incentive of the potential to access income, but this does not necessarily reflect environmental subjects. Tourism has diversified sources of income for a few women. With the need to pay school fees for children, and alcoholism affecting some of their husbands' ability to maintain stable jobs, women work part time, or seasonally, when needed at tourism establishments. The women explain that going to work there has brought them income that would otherwise be hard to find. For instance, Shayla does not own farmland and works in others' farms. The death of her husband meant that she had the additional burden of managing her family. While her son now works in the forest department, she continues to earn a livelihood through different means. Shayla is from a low caste and the access to work such as construction labour is most often defined by her class and caste. She also cares for her cow, but like others, with difficulty because of restricted access to fodder from the forest. For Shayla, access to opportunity in tourism has, as for most of her life, been shaped by caste structure. In addition to farming, she has carried out labour work for constructions of hotels. As she related:

"I helped build that hotel. I would walk up two and three floors with a load on my head. Today, no one will speak up to say who built that hotel. It was two or three of us women, with some men; we were the labour. I worked in some other hotels for labour work when I was younger, but now I work in only one, for inside work like washing clothes, bedding, cleaning and so on. It is good because it is a safe working space too. We need to earn money, so sometimes we also wash the dishes when asked. The inside work is better than outside work like construction or digging."

Shayla now works in a community owned and managed ecotourism enterprise where the staff is from the village. Shayla's everyday labour work reflect caste and gender-based subjectivities. This subjectivity shifts in the tourism space, where even though she is engaged in labour, there is an improvement in the nature of labour. The space and related material practice shift the

longstanding caste subjectivities to better 'inside work', but continue to reinforce gender subjectivities. Opening a homestay is not an option for Shayla as she does not own enough land. The shift from "outside work" to "inside work" in a safe space- the hotel - illustrates how Shayla's past experiences with tourism, in intersection with her caste, contribute to shaping her current work in tourism as relatively positive. Simultaneously, the hardship she experiences on account of her not owning farm land as a form of future security continues. Similarly, Tanu also farms for others as she does not have any farmland of her own. She is the leader of a women's self-help group and has guided this group's earning potential towards tourism. Yet, tourism is also the reason that her other source of livelihood is being threatened as land sales has meant reduction in farm work for her and women like her. She explains:

"There have been a lot of changes in the village over the years; there's electricity, roads, phones. Tourism has also increased. Since about five years we can see there is more land sold and less farm work for us. Now, the people from cities are running towards the mountains to live there, and people from villages are running to the cities to live there. There will be more and more hotels, and villagers will go away. And this will not be good for us. The villagers have their land, our daily wage often comes from farming on their lands. So, if they have sold their lands, where will we get work from? That's why we [the self-help group] thought we would get the tent house [large awning]. If there is no other option to work, then we do have to work in tourism."

The idea for the women's group to own and rent out tent houses was initially offered by a villager who co-owns and manages a tourism enterprise. He suggested this as one way for women to be empowered and earn a form of living, which would simultaneously ensure that tent awning business stays within the village as opposed ordering from other suppliers. Neither Tanu nor her husband are directly associated with tourism, yet tourism has affected her access to income from farm work, but also created access and dependence on a new income option. The self-help group that she leads collectively owns a large awning and chairs, which are rented out to different hotels or resorts for events. Her involvement in tourism is due to a lack of other options, and not necessarily with a view to increasing personal profits. For Tanu, tourism has also not meant in anyway an ownership in the process of engagement, and the problems that come with not owning farm land will continue for her.

Carving out the home space

Among the different tourism enterprises, homestays are a particularly important space to examine gender dynamics. The promotion of homestays, managing tourist interactions and bookings are usually carried out by men. It is the women who are primarily involved in the actual work of running the homestay. This involves cooking, cleaning, and hosting guests. While homestays lead to an increase in sources of income in a household, the housework burden for women, in fact, increases. Taking care of children, cooking, cleaning, and sometimes even farming, remain as the expected responsibilities of many women, even if they are involved in tourism for income. Homestays are marketed as spaces providing insights into local culture and food. This is in turn tied to gender norms. It is the gendered subject positions

that women draw on and reinforce, simultaneously gaining space to exercise agency. Mira is a high caste woman married into a family with agriculture land. She is of the opinion that subsistence farm and livestock work are not worth pursuing because this does not provide adequately and is too strenuous to continue in the face of increasing wildlife incursion in the fields, combined with the labour required for rearing livestock. Mira and her husband Kamal have tried to convince his mother to let go of livestock keeping as she is getting older, and milk access is easy enough from the market. Mira's mother-in law, however, cannot let go of this work as it is part of her tradition; she is attached to it, and it is something she has known all her life. Mira's vision for her own life was to do some "other" work to earn an income. With the help of her husband, they started a homestay. Most of the decision-making concerning dates and times for guest visits, and initial interaction with the guests, is carried out by Kamal. All work required for the homestay is carried out by Mira. When the guests' schedules and numbers call for extra help in cooking, Kamal helps out if he is able to. The homestay has become fairly successful, and they value the interaction with guests and exposure to new experiences for their daughters. For them, the extra income supports household expenses and contributes to private schooling for their daughters.

Nevertheless, Mira's in-laws, who live with them, expect Mira to carry out all the cooking duties. Expectation of traditional duties fall more heavily on women than men in this region. The homestay becomes a space into which certain traditional burdens are not always carried. In many family traditions here, women who are menstruating are not allowed to enter the kitchen, touch utensils or cook. While Mira and Kamal do not follow this tradition, due to changing views in the younger generations, they must adhere to it as long as they live with his parents who hold strong views about it. Mira cannot enter the kitchen for these days, yet she is comfortable being in the homestay space- one room and a terrace - as she interacts with me. During this time, since she had other guests, she called on a girl from the village to cook meals and paid her. The homestay space provides a specific sense of independence for Mira, even though it is temporary. In her work for the homestay, Mira, reinforces gendered subject positions of care work; simultaneously, within the homestay space, she contests gendered expectations. The temporal aspect, when guests visit the homestay provides a space of decision making and agency, and contributes to shifting subjectivity.

Soni is a young woman in her early twenties, and along with her sister, is the first generation of girls in her family to be educated up to an undergraduate degree. For her, similar to Mira, involvement in tourism represents a choice she made in order to do something different with her life. Soni is from a higher caste and class, and has family land for agriculture. Soni's older sister also completed her higher education and worked in a city for a few years. Their family is open to their daughters working and aspiring for better jobs. Soni states:

"I had finished my undergraduate degree, and I was sitting at home without much to do, so I thought I should do something. I got to know, from a relative who worked in the hotel, that they require help. I explored this option and ended up working in the hotel for a year. First, I was there as a trainee, and now I am part of the front office team. I am not a permanent staff yet, but we get our salary on time for most months. My interest in working at the hotel was to earn some money, and the hotel is so close to

home. I also feel good when interacting with guests from outside, and seeing how people from elsewhere are. I was also approached by another hotel to join them with more salary. But right now, I am fine with what I have. I do know though, that I don't want to continue with this line of work, I want to focus on accounting, which is what my degree is in. My brothers don't really like it that I work there because of the type of guests we get sometimes and it gets quite late to come back home. They would prefer if I apply for a government job."

In addition to this job, Soni helps her mother during harvest season and caring for their livestock when needed. Her household responsibilities are significantly lower as her parents' aspirations for her also align with more modern work and upward economic mobility. Her identity as an educated rural woman display a shift in subjectivity from expectations (of household care and farm work that most women here hold) to her employment in the hotel where she is able to use her education and interest. Soni's work in the hotel is different from her housework expectations, in that it draws from her educational background. Yet, the mobility derived from her education, does not negate the existence of patriarchy, caste, class and conservation regimes that shape her every day practice.

Intersectionality, multiple and shifting subjectivities

The cases presented above provide insights into different forms of women's engagement with tourism and its implication on their lives. They engage in tourism- based work to supplement income in the household, for lack of options for other work, as well as, also a matter of choice. Caste and class play key roles in these decisions. Both Mira and Soni, two upper caste women, expressed a desire to work in tourism, as a matter of choice. Their subject positions, shaped by their socio-economic identity influenced their involvement in tourism work and shifted their gendered subjectivity spatially and temporally to a form of agency. By contrast, Shayla and Tanu, from lower caste and class positions, respectively, were led into tourism related work out of relatively limited alternative options. The intersecting positions of women in their families and society thus shape how they approach tourism and the difference it makes in their lives, and subjectivities. In the case of Mira and Soni, their caste and class impacted their ability to engage in a specific way with tourism— through a homestay and by working in the administrative team of a hotel, respectively. The homestay work draws from Mira's existing gendered subjectivity of care work. Having a source of income through the homestay contributes to a sense of agency for her. At the same time, the house also represents a space where patriarchal values and gender expectations are expressed and performed on a daily basis. The home space symbolises these different power dynamics, and therefore the space itself is not defined by any one factor. The homestay is an example of a space which holds dual meaning and subjectivity for women.

For Shayla and Tanu, involvement in tourism was an outcome of a direct need for income generation, which arose from replacing one job with another. In both cases, women's pre-existing identities of gender, class and caste played a role in the particular ways they have engaged with tourism. For Shalya, tourism meant an additional form of work, first as

construction labour, then as “inside work” that has become part of her work identity. This inside work has provided a welcome sense of safety for her. It also signifies a shift in her class and caste-based subjectivity that previously meant construction labour work.

However, despite marginal mobility, her tourism work this does not significantly change her life. Tanu’s engagement in tourism is stemmed primarily from the lack of options. But, as she explained, tourism has also meant reduction of traditional agriculture work for her due to land sales. Shayla and Tanu’s engagement with tourism reveals a complex dynamic; it is not a simple equation of gaining agency through tourism. For Shayla, her current tourism work is better in comparison to earlier; for Tanu, tourism has limited one livelihood opportunity, but provided another. An intersectional lens thus makes visible the “co-constitutiveness of power and oppression” (Sultana, 2021:158). In the latter case, despite Tanu’s self-help group engagement with tourism, the co-constitutive nature of her class position – materialised in lack of agricultural land- and its disadvantageous power dynamics are reinforced through tourism. Therefore, women’s engagement with tourism remains focused on labour, rather than promotion of conservation or the ‘eco’ in such tourism, as their work remains interconnected with their overarching identities and life-worlds.

Conclusion

Tourism thus represents a form of tightrope that these women walk as they try to tap into a form of agency or better work while balancing the realities of caste, class, patriarchy and conservation governance reflected in tourism establishments set up around CTR. Ecotourism, as an expression of neoliberal environmentality, commonly functions by seeking to change the external structures that motivate an individual to act in a certain way, thus leading to particular forms of subjectification (Foucault, 2008). However, research concerning environmentality also shows that involvement in conservation governance does not necessarily lend to eco-friendly subjectivities. Reinforcing such findings, my analysis demonstrates that women’s overarching positioning and subjectivity shapes their decision making and engagement with conservation interventions.

Understanding the reasons and forms of engagement with ecotourism through an intersectional lens thus contributes to research from the perspective of environmentality by offering a nuanced view on how subjectivity is negotiated in relation to conservation governance. Adopting an intersectional perspective contributes to research offering a “counter-point” to conventional understandings of subject making in the environmentality literature (Forsyth and Walker, 2014). While a range of factors may influence subject formation in relation to neoliberal environmentality, framing engagement with tourism through an intersectional FPE perspective helps to better capture the overall experience of as well as differences amongst women within such a process. Examining the ways that women navigate their traditional roles as well as different types of engagement with tourism and their implications in terms of their particular caste and class positions reveals that involvement in tourism has implications beyond just monetary benefits and the neoliberal subjectivity such benefits promote.

Indeed, women's involvement in tourism market has more meaning than simply being subject to conservation governance in whatever form. In addition, as previous research on tourism and gender points out, engaging with the market can lead to specific types of benefits, as well as further oppression. Such plurality often gets obscured in the broad glossing of people's behaviour through a frame of neoliberal environmentality. The differences in the nature of women's engagement in tourism-based work, and the difference this makes in their lives, signifies that their involvement also contributes to a repositioning of their social standing to varying extents. Intersecting categories of caste, class and gender merge and can create different subjectivities via the specific forms of agency (Nightingale, 2011, 2018) that women are able to exert as they move incrementally into a different space, socially or economically. At the same time, this form of mobility does not negate the pre-existing structures of caste, patriarchy and conservation governance that also impact these women in other aspects of their lives. An intersectional feminist perspective aims to provide insights from women's efforts to claim agency in engagement with tourism as neoliberal environmentality without discounting the importance of broader structural forces in also shaping these efforts.

Women's interactions with the tourism market in villages around CTR thus illustrates the complex and situational nature of their participation in these market spaces, which are not defined strictly by tradition nor by capitalist values alone. Instead, it is the synergy between culture, market and women's social positions that contributes to their involvement in tourism, and the implications of that involvement for their lives. It is the complex intersection among these factors that motivates their engagement with tourism rather than simply their constitution as eco-friendly subjects. In relation to policy, this study of intersectional dynamics through an FPE lens can also contribute to "making visible the mechanisms by which environmental governance takes place- the daily practices of knowledge production and action, so as to be able to find openings for better environments but also a more just society" (Arora-Jonsson, 2014:306). More research from intersectionality and feminist perspectives concerning environmentalities, ecotourism and environmental governance can offer insights into dynamics of local engagement in such initiatives and their implications for attainment of more just and effective conservation.



Image 3 A look-out platform on the edge of farm land turned into a small homestay
Photo by: Revati Pandya

4 Becoming 'entrepreneurs of one's home': Homestays and ecotourism in the context of Corbett Tiger Reserve in India

Abstract

Homestays have often been considered a form of community-based ecotourism as local people can directly engage with tourists, share culture and facilitate ecotourist activities such as nature walks, safaris or bird watching. This paper examines homestays development around the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) in India's Uttarakhand state with a focus on two village committees and individual village entrepreneurs through ethnographic data collection between August 2018 to August 2019. While homestays have long been a small part of the ecotourism experience in the CTR landscape, there is a rise in homestay operations recently. This is in part because of Uttarakhand state subsidy scheme for homestays across the state. This study contributes to studies on homestay through an entrepreneurship perspective which is relatively less explored so far (Janjua, et al 2021). My analysis demonstrates that homestays represent neoliberal conservation wherein development aspirations of individuals find expression (Silva, et al 2015), particularly in shaping what rural life means to village entrepreneurs in contemporary times in a landscape that has been deeply influenced by Corbett Tiger Reserve governance. By focusing on entrepreneurship, the study also brings local peoples' lives and aspirations in discussion about ecotourism particularly in direct connection to local ownership-based models of ecotourism. The analysis of local entrepreneurship also reveals how people navigate a particular set of ideals about nature, culture and the relationship between these. I also draw from and develop Airbnb research that looks at dimensions of entrepreneurship of one's own home. While there are comparisons between homestays and Airbnbs, this study offers a contextual understanding of home entrepreneurship and what it means for villagers who undertake such initiatives in historically unequal tourism contexts and how they shape rural life in alignment of their aspirations. This study also highlights the needs for more research to examine role of such homestay entrepreneurship in protected area landscapes in changing power dynamics both among communities and with other stakeholders, and its relationship with rural land.

Keywords Homestays, entrepreneurship, rural culture, authenticity

Introduction

Ecotourism discourse in the context of tiger conservation in India commonly promotes a typical win-win-win rhetoric, promising conservation for wildlife, economic opportunity for local people and education for tourists. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) promotes ecotourism to reduce local people's dependency on forests-based livelihoods and instead encourage alternative livelihoods as guides, in retail businesses or in "management of low- cost accommodation for tourists" (2012:81). In the guidelines for strategies for tourism in the Tiger Reserve landscapes, NTCA directs State governments to ensure that ecotourism in areas surrounding tiger reserves "does not get relegated to purely high-end, exclusive tourism, leaving out local communities", adding that local community rights must be part of the State-

level ecotourism policy (2012: 108). The guidelines apply to all Tiger Reserves in the country, and each State government and its agencies are directed to create area specific plans for ecotourism (ibid). Such guidelines are relatively recent given that some of the most popular and tourism prone Tiger Reserves in India were established already in the 1970s. Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR), one of the first Tiger Reserves in India, is located in Uttarakhand state. It is a landscape dominated by hotels and resorts, largely owned by outsiders, and a majority of the villagers have become dependent on the tourism market either directly or indirectly since the early 2000s. Villagers' typical work includes employment as guides, safari jeep drivers, hotel staff and wage labourers, as well as gradually increasing local entrepreneurship in the form of restaurants, shops or small-scale accommodations. The focus of this paper is on one particular aspect of this growing local entrepreneurship: homestays in villages near CTR.

As the NTCA promotes ecotourism in Tiger Reserve landscapes, Uttarakhand state also promotes wildlife and nature-based tourism. Recently, homestays have been incentivised by the state government, through a subsidy scheme introduced in 2018. One of the primary reasons to promote homestays is to reduce outmigration and its negative impacts that have affected many villages of Uttarakhand. In this way, this state scheme was introduced to address a broader development agenda, i.e. to reduce outmigration particularly from specific parts of Uttarakhand, but it has also resulted in more villagers around CTR setting up their own homestays. This is in addition to the existing homestays in Uttarakhand and around CTR. Homestays were part of the tourist experience even prior to the recent state scheme, particularly due to their popularity in the nature-based and wildlife tourism circuits. Additionally, ecotourism promotion in Corbett began in the 1990s, with local villagers being trained as nature guides. Following that, village development committees and villagers have been promoting ecotourism through forest walks and bird watching as well as via homestays since the early 2000s. With a growing interest in homestays, competition is increasing and there is more individualisation in homestays which reflect villagers' ideas of ecotourism tied to individual aspirations; such as, modern or urban facilities in the house and in the process reshaping what rural life means to them. In this paper, I examine homestays development around CTR with a focus on two village committees and individual village entrepreneurs.

Previous research on homestays has focused on sustainable tourism development, community-based ecotourism, women's work and rural tourism (Janjua 2021:13). Within homestay literature, studies of homestays through an entrepreneurship perspective are relatively infrequent (Janjua 2021). More specifically there has been little attention to how community members adapt to changing contextual realities inciting competition that effectively encourages local homestay owners to become 'entrepreneurs of their own homes'. This framing emphasises the neoliberal dimension of homestay promotion, which Foucault (2008) has characterized as working to create subjects who function as 'entrepreneurs of oneself'. While this aspect of neoliberalism as a form of 'intimate government' (Agrawal 2005) – what Foucault (2008) calls a neoliberal governmentality - has been analysed in the context of ecotourism development generally (e.g. Fletcher 2009; 2014), similar analysis has not yet been undertaken concerning homestays in particular, which display unique dynamics in the sense that they demand that not only oneself but also one's private, 'backstage' (Stronza 2001) spaces be incorporated into the

entrepreneurial enterprise. In this way, intimate governance may extend beyond one's subjectivity to encompass one's intimate domestic environment as well. Within existing research, there is also little focus on the variations and shifts over time in how homestays function, as well as how community members adapt to government intervention through new tourism policies, and growing numbers of (and consequent competition among) homestays. In addressing these relatively neglected issues, this analysis explores how villagers are becoming entrepreneurs of their own homes, and how their interests and aspirations for life mobility are reflected in their homestay promotion.

In developing an analysis of these dynamics through the lens of neoliberal environmentality (governmentality applied to environmental politics), this study explores the expansion of homestays as a form of neoliberal conservation. I explore homestays as a process of intimate governance within neoliberal conservation, and bring into discussion people's aspirations expressed through their entrepreneurship. In doing so, I examine whether homestays represent the neoliberal conservation wherein development aspirations of individuals find expression (Silva, et al 2015), particularly in shaping what rural life means to village entrepreneurs in contemporary times in a landscape that has been deeply influenced by Corbett Tiger Reserve governance. In the process, it also contributes to inclusion of homestays within discussions of strategies through which neoliberal environmentality is enacted, as despite the important neoliberal dimensions they exhibit homestays has been largely absent from this literature thus far (a notable exception being Montes and Kafley (2019), although they do not emphasise the entrepreneurship dynamics focused on herein).

My analysis of local entrepreneurship reveals how people navigate a particular set of ideals about nature, culture and the relationship between these. Despite being entrepreneurs, I find that not all participating individuals may agree with a set of ideals promoted through the market as the basis for homestay promotion. I also draw from and develop Airbnb research that looks at dimensions of entrepreneurship of one's own home. While there are comparisons between homestays and Airbnbs, this study offers a contextual understanding of home entrepreneurship and what it means for villagers who undertake such initiatives in historically unequal tourism contexts and how they shape rural life in alignment of their aspirations.

In the following sections, I first review literature on ecotourism-based entrepreneurship and homestays as a common form of low-impact tourism. Studies on homestays examine dimensions of authenticity of culture, extent of community participation and the type of support received for setting up the enterprise. Following this, in the next section I draw attention to Uttarakhand state homestay subsidy scheme that influences the growth and shifts in homestay entrepreneurship in villages around CTR. In this process, different ideas about ecotourism, and about rural life are expressed through the homestays set up by village entrepreneurs.

Ecotourism and entrepreneurship

Ecotourism, or community-based wildlife tourism, is commonly promoted as a win-win for local communities through simultaneously generating employment, incentivising conservation and offering education to both hosts and guests. Safaris are one of the most prevalent forms of ecotourism at CTR. Existing research on ecotourism, framed as neoliberal conservation, has however shown that negative impacts of such initiatives include alienation or shifts from resource-based livelihoods, exacerbation of socio-economic difference, competition in a community, and commodification of local culture and nature (e.g. Ojeda 2012; Youdelis 2013; Münster and Münster 2012; Sonjai, et al 2018). A critical aspect of ecotourism promotion is a common emphasis on the need for local participation, commonly encouraged through monetary incentives to work in or set up tourism enterprises (Duffy 2006). Local participation could be influenced by a number of factors even with the knowledge that market engagement may not necessarily provide long term benefits (Silva, et al 2015; Pandya 2022).

Such market-based incentives are framed as ‘neoliberal conservation’ initiatives (Fletcher 2010), drawing from Foucault’s influential conceptualisation of neoliberalism as a novel form of governmentality (Foucault 2008). Within the realm of environmental governance, neoliberal environmentality is thus understood as governance that uses the market to incentivise conservation and reduce local communities’ dependency on resources (Fletcher 2010). Foucault elaborates that a neoliberal society which is regulated by a market ceases to be based on exchange, but rather on competition which takes centre stage in this market influenced governance, promoting what he calls “an enterprise society” (Foucault 2008:147). The neoliberal subject, or *homo economicus*, in this way is governed (or motivated) by competition, investment and stimulation of self-interest (Read 2009). In Foucault’s analysis, neoliberal subjectivity is thus organised around an individual’s their own interests or choices that can be made to best serve them, encouraging all actors to become “entrepreneurs of oneself” (Foucault 2008:226). Within this neoliberal landscape, the state continues to be involved in creating the conditions for the market to continue to function and to promote entrepreneurs (via education and other forms of organized competition) who will vie for control of resources among themselves (ibid).

Entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial ventures are often promoted through ecotourism activities as one avenue of community participation. Community participation thus often entails promotion of entrepreneurship for local residents, commonly resulting in competition. Studies show that competition in ecotourism contexts particularly through entrepreneurship promotes individualistic values within a community and can produce new social conflicts (Youdelis 2013; Montes and Kafley 2019). Entrepreneurship also perpetuates marketisation and commodification of wildlife, nature and local culture as part of a neoliberal approach in which ecotourism developed is largely grounded (West and Carrier 2004; Ojeda 2012; Buntén 2008; Fletcher and Neves 2012; Duffy 2008). In ecotourism particularly, local people’s involvement is not always a straightforward form of enrolment; rather, ecotourism can incentivise local people to promote local culture through their entrepreneurial initiatives or enact specific

aspects of culture that may appeal to tourists. Youdelis shows that with the growing competition and individualism from ecotourism, local people end up promoting their identity as being "self-sufficient, nature-loving" (2013:170). For instance, participation can be shaped by ownership of land or other assets; and outcomes include community members navigating the market by combining capitalist and tradition values in what is termed as 'hybrid uptake of neoliberal conservation' (Silva, et al 2015:51; see also Palmer and Chuamuangphan 2018; Pandya, et al, 2022). The contextual realities are therefore important to consider in examining participation, especially where livelihoods have historically been impacted by conservation governance or lack of government support. Entrepreneurship becomes a common way for local people to engage with the ecotourism market, and as a consequence this can bring about changes in the socio-economic landscape of the community or village.

Homestays

Among other entrepreneurship avenues for ecotourism and community participation, homestays have been widely promoted as a low impact way for tourists to engage with local culture and ecology. Homestays are commonly considered a part of community-based ecotourism initiatives which promote a win-win dynamic intended to reconcile local livelihood creation, conservation and cultural preservation (Reimer and Walter 2013: 123). While there is no standard definition of homestays, they are generally understood as accommodation offered to tourists in the homes of villagers, with the intention of supporting the rural household monetarily and serving as a space of cultural exchange (Janjua 2021). As in many cases of market-based intervention, homestays can create competition among villagers, open avenues for outsiders to buy land and contribute to changing human-nature relations (Kontogorgopoulos, et al 2015; Montes and Kafley 2019). Marketing rural culture and relationship with nature is the core identity of a homestay in the context of ecotourism. Homestays may thus also exemplify the contradiction in ecotourism as a capitalist fix and expansion of capitalist logics that changes local relations with nature (Fletcher 2011; Fletcher and Neves 2012; Duffy 2015).

The success of a homestay depends on satisfying the tourist. Tourist experience in homestays is often measured through State or private entity certification standards. Similar to hotels or resorts, the standards include quality control, regulation, management and promotion (see Kontogorgopoulos, et al 2015; Ogucha, et al 2015). Within national contexts, village level ecotourism or community-based tourism development can encourage consolidated rural homestay networks or public-private alliances which have their own set standards, and a system of booking and sharing benefits (Kontogorgopoulos, et al 2015; Ogucha, et al 2015; Bhalla, et al 2016). Such systems institutionalise 'authenticity', fixing rigid meanings to this ambiguous concept that are marketable.

Marketing is in itself a complex process, especially when local groups or individuals lead the process. Marketing one's home and culture often contradicts promotion of 'authentic' cultural experience (Kontogorgopoulos, et al 2015). Buntén (2008) analyses how local cultures are

marketed through creating a particular persona that balances expectations of the tourist and one's own identity. Ye et al (2018) examine concepts of authenticity and commodification together to investigate how authenticity is perceived by tourists and how that perception is influenced by commodification (p52). They find that the yardstick of authenticity is shaped by tourist experience (ibid). In the process, striving towards 'authenticity' can end up creating new power dynamics in the community wherein dominant discourses about ecotourism suppress alternative discourses (Mura 2015). Youdelis shows that villagers involved in ecotourism started promoting a particular idea of rural identity as an opposite to the market-based promotion (2013). Homestay programs can contribute positively to people's lives, especially in cases where they are the more sustainable livelihood option and help supplement incomes without compromising on culturally specific ways of being (Anand, et al 2012). An agential perspective by Stronza (2001) asserts that hosts can create a boundary between performance of their culture and their 'backstage lives' (2001:273). However, the definition of authenticity or what it means to hosts is also complex and not necessarily always stagnant. Kolar and Zabkar (2010) thus examine rural authenticity as a gradient, rather than a fixed and bounded category. Each host may offer a variation of what or how they practice their culture and what ecotourism may mean to them, and in the process, they become enterprising individuals.

Homestay promotion is now taking on a digital technology format through platforms such as Airbnb. Airbnb is a digital platform where anyone can register and offer their homes or rooms for rent to tourists with the intention that tourists feel at home and can get a taste of living like a local- an alternative to mass tourism (Roelofsen and Minca 2018). Online marketing through such platforms also involves the construction of social interaction strategies which create affinity with the tourist for an authentic experience (Qiu, et al 2022). Particularly by the host who performs and undertakes deliberate practices, such as acting and looking a certain way when guests visit (Pennell 2021). Hosts have incentives to become 'superhosts' through a series of guidelines set by Airbnb, essentially governing the host's hospitality and etiquette judged by guests (Roelofsen and Minca 2018). This governance includes penalties for under-performing hosts in the form of financial or account deactivation, however these are not common (ibid). As a digital platform with such regulatory systems, new power dynamics emerge wherein the internet can be viewed as the panopticon or a type of biopower that manipulates hosts' ways of being in efforts to maintain business and profits (Pennell 2021).

Pennell has examined how the Airbnb system facilitates the commodification of homes and governs hosts' behaviours. She observes a paradox wherein hosts are expected to give an authentic experience, cater to the guest and be available when needed, but also disengage from interaction to give the guests space and privacy as they enjoy the host's home (2021:12). The absence of a host is common in Airbnbs, particularly when entire homes are offered to guests (Roelofsen and Minca 2018). Consistent with such studies, Airbnbs have also been critiqued for its neoliberal nature by creating unregulated markets (Martin 2016). And an important motivator for hosts to offer their homes on Airbnb is the entrepreneurial nature of the exchange- hosts can set up their homes and offer services as per their interests (Benoit, et al 2017).

In most rural homestays, the hosts are involved in the guests' experience, including cooking for them, group activities such as nature walks, bird watching and village walks. Thus, entrepreneurship of one's homes is tied to authenticity. Additionally, entrepreneurship, in homestays or Airbnbs, has a paradoxical relationship with authenticity as hosts perform certain aspects of culture in order to give guests an authentic experience (Pennell 2021; Sowards and Banerjee 2021). Rural homestays are highly influenced by the contextual and socio-cultural dynamics of the place as well. Homestays may also shift work dynamics by hiring outside labour (Walter, et al 2018). Most often, setting up homestays can be a steep learning curve for villagers, particularly in attempts to balance business marketing and familial or social responsibilities that are contextually relevant. Dahles and colleagues (2019) examine homestays as a form of social enterprise initiated by NGOs that boosts community participation but is limited in knowledge about business management (p 826). Panta and Thapa (2018) find that homestays are one avenue for women's empowerment through economic independence and more decision-making ability in the household but challenges from household responsibilities and cultural expectations continue. Similarly, there were a higher number of women entrepreneurs in small businesses related to tourism in Kinabalu National Park, Malaysia, and most businesses were marketed through word of mouth only (Jaafar, et al 2015:22). In some cases, institutional or government support through micro-credit and marketing programs for homestays could be beneficial for their sustenance and provide a better scope for community participation (Sood, et al 2017).

Community participation and incentives for the same has been analysed through the lens of neoliberal environmentalism, albeit infrequently thus far. Drawing from this lens, homestay promotion by State or national governments is also a development strategy wherein governments promote such tourism as one avenue for local employment (Walter, et al 2018; Montes and Kafey 2019). This could take place in contexts where government support towards livelihoods may have historically been minimal. In general, homestays and other ecotourism interventions are introduced in contexts where traditional livelihoods are either under threat or continue in a hybrid format as tourism is promoted as a development strategy (Duffy 2015). Stronza and colleagues point out that studying the impacts of ecotourism should be in relation to what other activities may have taken place in the absence of ecotourism (Stronza et al. 2019:244).

In the CTR landscape, the influence of tourism on land and livelihoods have been increasing since the early 2000s, and villagers have been shifting from agriculture to tourism-based enterprises through land use change or diversification (Pandya, et al 2022). Among the different ways of shifting land use and livelihood diversification, homestays may represent one of the most intimate form of market influence on people's lives through the presence of the market into people's homes. I unpack the growing homestay trends by viewing homestay owners as entrepreneurs mobilised by State policies and socio-economic aspirations and in a context where local villagers have thus far been largely side-lined by conservation policies. This study thus also aims to develop on and contribute to Airbnb research as well, by providing contextual analysis of entrepreneurship of one's own homes, particularly in rural contexts where tourism has been dominant and thus what entrepreneurship means to the villagers.

In the following sections I first examine the homestay promotion and ecotourism discourse in Uttarakhand state and in the Corbett Tiger Reserve landscape. Following this, I examine two case studies of homestay networks part of a collective yet individualised in how they are set up and hosts' ideas of rural identity in relation to their aspirations.

Methodology

This study is based on research conducted from August 2018 to August 2019. The data collection is grounded in qualitative methods, where I employed semi-structured interviews, participant observation and active interviews. Active interviews are similar to everyday conversations, in that, they allow for questions to tap into lived realities through understanding of factual and emotional accounts (Hathaway and Atkinson 2003). I collected data from villages on the South and south eastern boundary of the Corbett Tiger Reserve. In addition, I collected data from leaders and members of two village Societies⁸ in two villages located within 40kms of the south eastern boundary of Corbett Tiger Reserve. The two villages have both direct and indirect connections with the Corbett Tiger Reserve, through tourism and village Societies. The focus of data collection in these two cases was their homestays and ecotourism narratives. Other members of the Societies live in villages around Corbett, including the villages I have collected data from. For this paper, I draw from 30 interviews, as well as participant observation as I lived in one homestay for the majority of my research and three others for shorter durations. Pseudonyms are used to maintain privacy of villagers. In the homestays where I was a guest, data collection was supplemented by field notes and observations. Secondary data was collected through reviewing independent and government reports, articles, and academic literature.

State promotion of homestays in Uttarakhand

In 2018, as previously noted, Uttarakhand government introduced a subsidy scheme for setting up homestays. The objectives of the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Griha Awas (home-stay) Development Scheme include increasing rural tourism and curbing outmigration, especially from the hill districts of Uttarakhand. Through enrolling in the scheme, the host villagers are supported in a number of ways including renovating their home, online marketing through a website and mobile app and hospitality training, in addition to financial incentives such as tax reliefs (UTDB 2018). The Scheme allows for hosts to have up to six rooms (ibid). Villagers in the hill regions of the state receive a higher subsidy compared to homestays in the plains due to the terrain and historical inaccessibility to infrastructure and employment. This Scheme has contributed to a growing number of homestays; as per the latest state tourism report, there are

⁸ A legal category for entities or groups working for literary, scientific or charitable purposes (Societies Registration Act, 1860).

3773 homestays registered with the Uttarakhand State Tourism Department (UTDB 2021). The homestay scheme is promoted by the State Tourism Department as rural tourism within the umbrella of ecotourism in the state (Government of Uttarakhand 2021).

Ecotourism and wildlife tourism are not new in Uttarakhand given that the state is home to six national parks, seven wildlife sanctuaries and four conservation reserves (WII 2022). Yet there is no clear implementing body for ecotourism as such: the Forest Department has its own ecotourism wing and the State Tourism Department is now increasingly promoting all forms of tourism, including ecotourism. The Uttarakhand state Forest Department ecotourism discourse include strategies such as: capacity building of stakeholders, operating manuals, accreditation schemes, local community support, regular monitoring and evaluation of carrying capacity in an area, marketing strategies for an ecotourism destination and government loans, subsidies and tax exemptions for ecotourism activities (Uttarakhand Forest Department 2022). There have been efforts to create a standardised ecotourism policy, and over the years, draft ecotourism policies for the State have been developed but none have been finalised (Pande and Sharma 2018). The latest Draft Ecotourism Policy (2020) prepared by the UNDP for the Government of Uttarakhand has received criticism for being biased towards tourism, and leaving inadequate space for the Forest Department to provide inputs on forest areas that could be designated for ecotourism (Aggarwal 2020).

Prioritising tourism at the cost of land, resources and wildlife is not a new phenomenon in the State, particularly in the context of Corbett Tiger Reserve. Uncontrolled tourism expansion on the periphery of Corbett, influenced by land mafia and corruption, has resulted in blocking wildlife corridors, caused pollution and impacted community cohesiveness (Bindra 2010; Mazoomdar 2012; Rastogi, et al 2015). Over a 100 hotels and resorts surround Corbett, dominating the landscape, especially close to the south eastern boundary of the reserve. Villagers in this area are either employed on fixed terms or are daily wage labourers in tourism enterprises. The tourism market has also facilitated entrepreneurial ventures such as restaurants, safari and guide booking agencies and homestays. There are approximately 28 registered homestays in villages around Corbett, with the number growing as more villagers seek to avail benefits from the State Homestay scheme (UTDB 2021). Homestays are marketed through online travel platforms such as Airbnb, Booking.com, and other national web-based platforms, to access national and international tourists. Homestays here are influenced by market-based conservation of CTR, and in many cases, they also represent the different manifestations of ecotourism based on host ideals which I will discuss.

Ecotourism, local ownership and entrepreneurship

Corbett village development committee:

Corbett village development committee of Chhoti Haldwani village is located south-east from the Corbett Tiger Reserve. This village is known for its direct association with Jim Corbett who

was an officer of the colonial regime, and in his later life celebrated for being a hunter-turned-conservationist. Corbett's affinity to the forests around the tiger reserve was cemented when he built a cottage for himself in this village in 1922. Villagers explain that Corbett wanted to set up a small hamlet around his home, and therefore leased land to about forty tenants who could live there and practice agriculture. Later, he made the tenants owners of the land. Corbett's home was sold to the Forest Department who converted it into a museum in 1967. The legacy of Corbett and his direct association here has meant that wildlife enthusiasts and student groups from around the world visit and tour this village to get glimpses into Corbett's life in addition to tiger reserve and nature safaris. The Forest Department run museum is one avenue through which to conduct ecotourism. Educational events such as wildlife week and readings or plays about Corbett's life take place in the museum. Other ecotourism ventures in the village include bird watching, heritage walks, folk dance, bicycle trails, souvenir shop and homestays. These activities are guided by villagers who are part of a village development committee registered in 2004. The committee promotes ecotourism in order to counter the changing nature of tourism, and they are conscious about the type of guests they host- generally those who are interested in the rural heritage and wildlife.

Over the years, the influence of tourism has deepened in the village with guest houses, cottages and more homestays. The newer homestays do not necessarily follow any ecotourism ideals that village committee members have sought to maintain. Increasing options of accommodation within the village also make it challenging for the committee to maintain a standard for ecotourists. Consequently, each host may follow their version of how a homestay functions, which is a matter of concern for the village committee. The committee also fear more competition in the village and incoming tourists who may not be interested in wildlife or may not get a chance to experience the social and natural heritage of the village because of more accommodation options.

A core member of the committee, Shekhar, who is also a nature guide, states:

“Things like homestays... they start working like and looking like hotel rooms. So, there should be some boundary between both, some rules to what counts as a homestay. With the new government scheme, homestays are becoming more individualised, so the role of village committee, like ours, is reducing. There is big difference between ecotourism and tourism, which people don't understand. Things are changing from ecotourism to tourism [with the growth of individual homestays]. Same thing happened close to Corbett [Tiger Reserve], it started small then expanded to more rooms and now hotels host weddings there.”

Committee members defy the image of a rural home by building concrete homes that align with their aspirations and economic mobility. The committee member continues:

“The other village has many resorts, it is changing, whereas in our village now there are many houses being constructed. It's like a modern village now. Corbett wanted it to be a model village, and that's how it has been for tourism, but now people say that this village has houses [instead of thatch sheds]. So,

what? Villagers can't have pakka [solid, concrete] houses? Some say leave the houses kachha [raw, thatch roof], so we've left some with that look, but why should we not live in a pakka house?"

His own one room homestay is made of mud, has a rough rustic interior, and is next to his concrete home. Other homestays that are in the village and associated with the committee are in concrete homes of villagers, but hosts make sure to focus on sharing rural culture and food, in addition to cultural exchange sought from the tourists. Most often, the hosts of the homestay are the women in the family, and wildlife and nature education through walks and safaris is conducted by the male village committee members. There is relatively less tourism in this village as compared to villages closer to CTR, and apart from educational or workshop groups, most tourists use this village as a stop enroute to hill stations. But with the growing accommodation options in the village, marketed online and some with hoardings on the side of the road, tourists are stopping by, though not necessarily for any form of rural or ecotourism specifically.

There are ten homestays in the village with at least two rooms in each. There are six registered homestays, and when needed committee guests can use homestays of non-registered members as well. Homestays registered under the committee charge a standard rate to guests referred by the committee, particularly for ecotourism events. One villager, whose homestay was initially part of the village committee has left it and owns a three-room guest house with one more under construction when this research was conducted.

The village development committee continues to promote ecotourism, adding new initiatives such as promotion of organic farming in the village, but has limited control over the other forms of tourism. Many committee members find it challenging to control the growing tourism in the village. Since the number of accommodation options outside of the committee are increasing, it is even harder for them to control the nature of tourism. However, some members of the committee are confident that they will be able to stop this "hotel type of tourism". As one way to reduce the changing nature of tourism, committee members state that they now prefer day tourists who would not need a homestay, but can avail themselves of the nature and heritage guide services offered. Guiding tourists offers local hosts an opportunity to create awareness about the ecology and rural culture, thus promoting ecotourism to control the village from turning into a mainstream tourism centre.

The history of tourism in this village began with ecotourism related to Jim Corbett's history; as one lead committee member stated, "the foundation of this village is tourism because of Jim Corbett, he set up this village, it's his village". But the village is also undergoing changes, partly with locals inspired to set up their own homestays and some moving towards accommodations like guest houses. The existing committee-led ecotourism work is not financially sustainable as committee members work other jobs as well. One committee member and nature guide expressed his frustration to me about the unsustainable finances. He stated that along with homestays, they want to get registered as official nature guides so they can go on forest safaris and earn a steady income like the CTR guides. He added that the village youth are uninspired

by ecotourism work because of the financial unsustainability as well as disinterest in learning about wildlife.

Increasing accommodation options and disinterest in the ecotourism that the village development committee is promoting has made it challenging to retain a particular form of tourism or ensure its continuation with the younger generation. The committee members are promoting a certain form ecotourism and one way of doing that is to encourage more day trips rather than over-night stays where they may not be able to offer what tourists expect. They are also aware that their own aspirations for better housing challenge tourists' expectation of rural homes.

Pawalgarh homestay and nature protection committee:

This homestay is located within the larger Corbett landscape, in a Conservation Reserve, where safari tourism is growing. The homestay owner, Arvind, was inspired by the need to promote local livelihoods and nature during the movement for separate Statehood. As a result, the homestay was set up in the early 2000s, with the intention of promoting local livelihoods through ecotourism where, according to Arvind, "the local culture, wildlife and nature are not disturbed and people can find beauty in them." The homestay has a total of six rooms, with a common set of restrooms. It caters to school groups, researchers, professional or educational workshops and meetings. They offer nature walks, bird watching, camping and other activities for children. The host and his wife used their land to set up three buildings: one with the guest rooms and bathrooms, their home, and a dining hall and kitchen which also functions as extra dorm space for big groups. They prefer hosting a specific type of tourist: one who is interested in nature and likes to be by themselves. They particularly value long-term tourists who are genuinely interested in low impact lifestyle and groups on educational tours. In line with this, they believe in a certain aesthetic of the homestay that is basic and minimal in line with their own rural life.

The homestay is one of the leading ecotourism initiatives in the area, part of a not-for-profit nature conservation Society established in 2015. This Society, with ten registered members, has partnered with government and non-government institutions for ecotourism activities locally and at the state level. The Society has over 20 members from nine villages located within the Conservation Reserve and on the periphery of the Corbett Tiger Reserve. Villagers in the Society include homestay hosts and nature guides who work in tourism enterprises in their villages. This Society offers a platform for members to voice their concerns about tourism-based work. For instance, they appealed for official guided safaris in the Conservation Reserve which can support local guides in the same way that Corbett safaris do. The safaris that take place in the Conservation Reserve are dominated by guides and drivers who work in Corbett. This competition with CTR-based opportunities is driven by the greater tourism market of the Tiger Reserve.

The Society members who live closer to CTR are able to benefit more than others because of the higher number of tourists. This has also resulted in villagers' interest in homestays in addition to the incentives offered through the government homestay scheme. Some have constructed rooms that resemble hotels or guest houses, and not always inside their home. One such entrepreneur, Rohit, stated the reason for building his three-room homestay away from his home, on a different piece of family land, as being that the village would get too noisy for guests. His homestay is located near Forest Department land which would ensure that no one could build on that land and hence he would have an option to expand his enterprise on his own land. For him the envisioned idea of homestay is being in nature away from the rural landscape. There is a clear separation between a village and forest area in his vision of an ecotourism homestay. In this, he also acknowledges the fact that the village itself is transitioning away from the quiet rural area that it used to be.

In another case, a villager's new homestay includes a small kitchenette, making it like a studio room. This is unusual in homestays as one of the marketing aspects of homestays is traditional food. The host explained that if guests wanted traditional village food they would be served from the family kitchen, otherwise they could be self-sufficient. This type of accommodation arrangement caters to long term guests. Most households in the village have gas stoves in addition to the traditional wood fire mud stove. The other extreme of a homestay is a farm shed originally used as a watch platform for animals raiding crops. The shed is located at the edge of the farm and mainly attracts foreign tourists, as the host is aware that a certain rustic aesthetic may not draw many Indians. Others in the Society believe that homestays should be comfortable and accessible. The same hosts draw on the rural life and nature-based activities to promote their homestays, but they believe there should be a certain level of comfort in the room, for instance they offer a cooler in the peak summer season and a television- both of which they use when they do not have guests. Such signifiers of comfort, of a rural aesthetic or of a basic farm shed all draw from different villagers' lives and lifestyle and in the process reveal differences in what ecotourism, expressed through homestays, could mean.

Discussion and conclusions

After a tourism boom dominated by outsiders on the periphery of Corbett Tiger Reserve, homestays owned and managed by local villagers are on the rise. In both cases presented above, villagers have collectivised to promote ecotourism activities such as nature walks, bird watching and heritage walks in order to counter mainstream tourism. The Corbett village development committee is actively encouraging day tourists to counter a form of mainstream tourism that is emerging from the variety of accommodation options in their village. The goal of encouraging day tourists is to reduce tourists who want to stay overnight as most of the existing and perhaps competing accommodation options are not in line with the village committees' perception of ecotourism. The income from day visits would be from the birdwatching or village walks, and meals hosted by the committee. This is also a strategy to manage the competition that emerges as a result of the growing market, and the long-term impacts of this strategy may not be visible as yet. The competition is also in part a result of state promotion of homestays, signifying

market integration as an “exercise of political power” (Foucault 2008:131). Neoliberal conservation facilitates entrepreneurship that can contradict community-oriented goals (Yodelis 2013; Montes and Kafley 2019). The village development committee is critical of such contradictions to community-oriented goals, as reflected in Shekhar’s concern with the individual homestays and how they are different from ecotourism goals.

In turn, they are shaping the meaning of conducting ecotourism through homestays, which, in villages around Corbett Tiger Reserve, feature the ‘rural’ significantly. This could be partly because entrepreneurship is most accessible for people with capital who live in villages that over the years have seen a relative increase in infrastructure. This is also a landscape wherein tourism is a generation old and the tourism market, though dominated by outsiders, has seeped into the local physical and social fabric. In this context, homestays represent local ownership, rather than employment or labour. Homestay operators have more control over the process of implementing this element of ecotourism, and as a result prescribe variegated meanings to it. Homestay owners are aware of the type of accommodation tourists would find attractive: for instance, maintaining a more rural look, while homestay owners live in concrete houses. At the same time, homestays are an avenue for many to express their lifestyle aspirations in acquiring coolers or television which they use when not hosting guests.

The ability to retain ownership of homes and land and have direct access to the tourism market is achieved through homestays- an important aspect of market engagement wherein alternative dependencies through employment or labour in enterprises owned by others could be even more precarious. Other forms of market engagement include land sales, which are not necessarily ongoing dependencies as work with tourism would entail. However, the village committee members’ concerns about individualistic values and growing number of homestays could intensify the impacts of tourism not just on the landscape and livelihoods, but also on people’s own homes. With the growing number of homestays, villages may become saturated with tourism in areas which were previously left out- their homes. While there are continued efforts by villagers to retain a low impact and culturally respectful ecotourism, they have an inability to control the expansion of tourism market. Additionally, state support for livelihoods is orienting towards a tourism which continues to be precarious and competitive.

A focus on entrepreneurship in homestays is a research area that has remained relatively less examined (Janjua, et al 2021) and this paper contributes to this gap by framing such enterprises through the lens of neoliberal environmentality as encouraging subjects to become entrepreneurs of oneself (Foucault 2008). Such entrepreneurs are governed through a neoliberal structure where individual interests or choices are encouraged (ibid). Specifically, this paper focused on ways that community members are adapting to the increase in and variations in the type of homestays. In doing so, it shows how homestays also represent different variations in ecotourism or rural life based on local peoples’ aspirations and their own life changes, particularly in a context where CTR tourism has been dominated by hotel and resort industries. For some, the growth of individual homestays represents moving away from ecotourism goals as there is no accountability that comes from a community-oriented homestay with a set of guidelines.

By focusing on entrepreneurship, the study also brings local peoples’ lives and aspirations in discussion about ecotourism particularly in direct connection to local ownership- based models of ecotourism. Homestay owners are becoming entrepreneurs of their own homes, and in the process adapting to competition and creative ways of marketing aspects of their culture while imbibing their own interest and aspirations to better lives. Homestay owners’ neoliberal subjectivity is contextualised by considering not only the State homestay subsidy and village competition, but by recognising that the Corbett landscape has been dominated by outsider owned tourist establishments, with which burgeoning local initiatives must also compete. This study thus also develops on research on Airbnbs and entrepreneurship of homes, with a focus on contextual understanding of entrepreneurship, villagers’ aspirations and relatedly, shifts away from community-oriented homestays to individualised ones.

Ecotourism expression through homestays around Corbett, in the context of state promotion of homestays, provides insights into rural social life in transition. The aim of this paper is also to invite more research and examination of homestays in critical ecotourism research as the market enters one’s homes and villagers are gaining more access to internet services. Tied to this, future research could examine the role of local entrepreneurship in ecotourism and protected area landscapes, in changing power dynamics both among communities and with other stakeholders, and its relationship with rural cultures.



Image 4 A farm land with seasonal mustard crop

Photo by: Revati Pandya

5 Micro-politics and the Prospects for Convivial Conservation: Insights from the Corbett Tiger Reserve, India⁹

Abstract

This research article calls for explicit attention to micro-politics through engagement with a feminist intersectional lens for enabling convivial conservation. Convivial conservation provides a vision for equitable conservation through simultaneously pursuing structural change and addressing context specific micro-politics. This research article draws on feminist intersectional research and feminist political ecology to argue that convivial conservation needs to explicitly engage with the ways that intersections of class, gender, caste, and other identity positions shape the micro-politics of power around land rights and opportunities for benefitting from conservation interventions. It draws on findings from two forest villages near the Corbett Tiger Reserve in India to demonstrate the micro-politics that shape the variegated access and tourism dependencies experienced by different local residents. Engaging with learnings from implementation of the progressive Forest Rights Act (FRA) which intended to redress these issues, this analysis highlights that the FRA serves as both a cautionary and potentially transformative example for furthering the convivial conservation vision of local people's engagement with conservation areas.

Keywords: intersectionality, feminist political ecology, micro-politics, equity, tiger conservation, India

Introduction

Conservation has been long critiqued for its top-down and market-centred emphasis (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Dempsey and Suarez 2016). Consequently, there are increasing calls for alternative forms of conservation policy and practice that foreground social justice and equity. Convivial conservation is one such proposal rooted in a political ecology that critiques propagation of capitalist economics and nature-culture dichotomies through Protected Area (PA) creation and other forms of conservation programming (Büscher and Fletcher 2019, 2020). While proponents of the idea recognise that dimensions of difference within local communities can shape the micro-politics of conservation, they have not yet critically engaged with how these differences intersect to create a differentiated landscape of ownership, access rights, and livelihood opportunities in the vicinity of conservation areas. To address this gap, this paper draws on feminist intersectional research and feminist political ecology (Harris 2015; Scoones et al. 2018; Nirmal and Rocheleau 2019) to argue that the convivial conservation concept needs to explicitly engage with the ways that intersections of class, gender, caste, and other identity positions in local communities shape power dynamics around land rights and opportunities to benefit from conservation interventions. It thereby joins Krauss (2021) and

⁹ Published in *Conservation & Society* (2022) in the Special Issue: Exploring Convivial Conservation in Theory and Practice

Collins (2021) in calling for more explicit focus on gender and power differences in the convivial conservation concept and its translation into practice.

I illustrate my argument by examining the ways that land rights have shaped the differentiated socio-ecological context of everyday life and livelihood opportunities for people in villages adjoining the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) in India. Named after Jim Corbett, a British colonial official who turned from tiger hunting to tiger conservation, CTR is one of the first Tiger Reserves (TRs) to be established in India (in 1973). It has served as the model for subsequent tiger reserves established in other parts of the country. It is also home to the highest number of tigers within a defined Wildlife Protection Area in India (Jhala et al. 2020). The substantial tiger population in CTR has propelled tourism promotion by the state, resulting in a booming industry shaped by both the state forestry agency and private enterprise. However, accessing the economic opportunities associated with tourism is strongly influenced by the intersection of differentiated land ownership and access rights in relation to micro-politics emerging from caste, class and gender differences within households in adjoining villages. My study of the intersectional feminist political ecology of CTR, thus, offers a critical contribution concerning the potential of the overarching convivial conservation proposal to generating transformative change in mainstream conservation thinking and practice.

In the following sections of the research article, I begin by outlining the key elements of the convivial conservation proposal and then provide a short overview of feminist research which addresses the political ecological dimensions of conservation in terms of understanding local difference and micro-politics around land rights and forest access. I use the example of the Corbett Tiger Reserve to illustrate the way intersections of class, caste and gender articulate local differences in land rights and livelihood access. Engaging with learnings from recent implementation of progressive legislation via the Forest Rights Act (FRA), this article explores how micro-politics affect access to rights in relation to this development. My analysis suggests that the FRA represents potential to further a convivial vision in local people's engagement with CTR as long as these important micro-politics are sufficiently acknowledged and addressed. I highlight the importance of paying explicit attention to the micro-politics of access and equity in pursuit of a just and equitable conservation landscape that embodies the values and aspirations expressed in the convivial conservation proposal.

Convivial conservation and its conceptualisation of local power dynamics

The concept of convivial conservation was put forward by Büscher and Fletcher (2019, 2020), in response to the neo-preservationist (Wilson 2016) and new conservation (Kareiva et al. 2012) proposals, to address the growing problem of global loss of biodiversity. The neo-preservationist proposal privileges and reinforces the separation between non-human nature and human society by expanding PAs, ideally to cover at least half the earth's surface while largely excluding any economic activities within them. The new conservationist proposals, on the other hand, promote explicitly capitalist approaches in integrating economic development into conservation programming, even as they seek to go beyond nature-society dichotomies embodied in PAs by calling for integrated spaces in which humans and non-humans overlap. In contrast to both of

these perspectives, the proponents of convivial conservation call for radical transformative change in conservation thinking and practices grounded in post-capitalist politics and a co-constitutive understanding of nature and society.

The convivial conservation perspective draws on a growing body of scholarship that similarly argues for alternative frameworks for conservation policy, programmes, and practices. This scholarship calls for equity and justice in conservation based on recognising cultural diversity (Kothari et al. 2014), building self-reliant regional economies (Shrivastava and Kothari 2012; Büscher and Fletcher 2019), and pursuing redistribution and reduction in both production and consumption (Demaria et al. 2013). The overarching vision for convivial conservation entails moving beyond monetary valuation of nature and redefining value in terms of the social, cultural or affective ways that people live with, and relate to, nature in everyday life (Büscher and Fletcher 2020). This entails a focus on both short term and long-term change, as well as engaging different groups of actors involved in conservation. Büscher and Fletcher (2020) argue that conservation interventions continue to disproportionately target rural or forest dwelling communities who are least responsible for the capitalist accumulation and resource extraction threatening conservation both locally and globally. Their critique is thus directed partly towards political and economic elites who are responsible for and promote capitalist approaches to both economic development and the conservation practice and governance intended to counter this. Their proposal, thus, calls for a radical transformation in conservation policy and practices that pursues both large-scale structural change and micro-level political organisation simultaneously.

Büscher and Fletcher (2020) outline several elements that articulate this vision across multiple scales ranging from macro governance structures to the level of local implementation. One of these key elements centres on moving away from ‘protected’ area thinking and towards ‘promoted’ areas wherein co-existence between humans and non-humans is encouraged. Another element concerns historical reparations for rural or forest-dwelling communities negatively impacted by past conservation interventions and other forms of uneven development. Potential forms of reparation include land distribution and co-ownership or co-management. Other elements address the need to move away from short-term voyeuristic tourism centred on charismatic wildlife towards long-term engagement with everyday nature; to reduce reliance on revenue from external tourism for conservation; and to introduce some basic welfare payments, such as a Conservation Basic Income, for households and individuals living in villages adjoining conservation areas.

Büscher and Fletcher (2020) recognise that contextual realities of local community politics matter in conservation interventions. They articulate the importance of a co-constitutive understanding of power that acknowledges micro-politics in relation to larger structural factors. They argue that while power is indeed situated within micro contexts and is complex, it is vital to also relate these complexities to the ways they are shaped and constrained by capitalist structures. Thus, they promote a co-constitutive understanding of structure and agency. They also call for the co-constitutive understanding of resistance movements, asserting that these must go hand in hand with movements that pursue broader structural change. Drawing inspiration from Gibson-Graham’s (2006) community economies approach that highlights potential for cultivating post-capitalist practices and spaces within an overarching capitalist system, Büscher and Fletcher (2020) suggest that short term and long-term strategies to subvert

capitalist logics at both micro and structural scales must be implemented simultaneously. They also relate issues with the separation of nature and culture and intensifying oppression along lines of race, gender, and coloniality.

While these are important points, here I suggest that the convivial conservation proposal warrants more explicit and substantial engagement with micro-contexts and the intersectional dimensions of difference they contain. I propose that a feminist intersectional lens is particularly suited for such analysis as it explicitly articulates and draws connections between these dimensions of micro-politics and the overarching societal structures in which they are situated.

Feminist Intersectional Perspectives on Micro-Politics and Conservation

Intersectionality involves viewing lived realities and identities as multidimensional (May 2014). A feminist intersectional lens recognises the multiple axes of power emerging from the articulation of gender with other dimensions of difference including class, race and caste, which, depending on the local context, may intersect in different ways to shape patterns of access to and control of resources (Rocheleau et al. 1996; Nightingale 2011; Sultana 2011; Mollett and Faria 2013). Thus, a feminist intersectional framework provides insights into local social dynamics centred around patterns of differentiated access to resources and livelihoods as well as into larger community or regional resource management structures (Sultana 2020). For example, research on gender dynamics in India has shown that forest dependencies often vary based on dimensions of local difference such as gender, caste, and class, consequently impacting vulnerable groups' stakes in resource management (Agarwal 2009). Yet, despite the obvious intersections of these factors in shaping distributional outcomes, there is a tendency among scholars and policymakers to consider them as separate categories. Thus, Pan (2019: 36) argues that Dalit (a collective term used to refer to socially oppressed castes, also categorised as Scheduled Castes in the Indian Constitution) politics and mainstream Indian feminism "often suppress difference in order to magnify particular issues and impose universality." Joshi (2011) notes similarly that water reform policies in India commonly consider caste and gender as separate categories, and hence that the benefits targeted on the basis of either caste or gender do not reach most Dalit women.

The invisibility and under-representation of women in forest access and management in India is well documented and points to the ingrained patriarchal relationships within communities and households. Agarwal (2001) argues that due to the combined influence of class and patriarchal power dynamics, community forestry groups often exclude women despite the official mandate to include women. Notwithstanding the fact that it is largely women in forest and rural areas who are the primary collectors of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), most women are represented through the men in their families (Sarin et al. 2003).

Feminist intersectional analyses concerning community dynamics and local participation in commons or forest management programmes in India reveals the ways that power dynamics between different caste groups can align to create strategic alliances for livelihood needs, but also end up perpetuating hierarchies wherein tribal community and women are dispossessed (Parthasarathy 2015). For instance, in a village in Odisha widely known for its forest protection,

much of the work for protecting the forests was led by lower caste women and men, yet after the forest regenerated, the village elites belonging to higher castes asserted control over the management and extraction of resources by using their capital and gaining the support of state forest department officials (Sarin et al. 2003). Sarin and colleagues point out that the rights and interests of different groups within a village community are not congruent and that these differences are often institutionalised in their customary forms of forest governance and management systems. One major dimension of difference within any village community is class, which is directly related to land ownership status and size of holding and often overlaps with caste status and access to bargaining power. Naidu (2013) demonstrates that landholding not only defines access to benefits, but also facilitates circumventing restrictions on forest access or benefiting from alternative economic avenues. She points out that pre-existing class differences reinforce inequalities within a village and further marginalise the landless households who often belong to lower castes.

Feminist political ecology (FPE) approaches have often integrated intersectional perspectives in their framework of analysis. FPE is “more about a feminist perspective” than “a single focus on women and/or gender” (Rocheleau 2015: 57). The emphasis of the approach is on environmental and social justice, focusing attention on local experiences of marginality, vulnerability and dispossession emerging from the intersections of gender, class, caste, race, and ethnicity (Baviskar 2001; Sundar 2001; Resurrección 2017; Joshi 2014; Shrestha and Clement 2019). It also examines the lived experiences of marginalised groups and situated knowledges which recognise multiple ways of relating to nature and place rather than only in terms of the strict nature-culture separation that state politics and modern science often promote (Rocheleau and Nirmal 2015). For instance, Aiyadurai (2018) demonstrates that the Mishmi community’s spiritual kinship with tigers is challenged by conservationists’ agenda of creating a tiger reserve to separate humans from tigers. Pandey (2017) examines how Dongria Kondh’s legal battle against a mining corporation in Odisha remains a landmark case in the recognition of tribal communities’ spiritual and material identities tied to their land. In this way, it represents the ongoing resistance of local and tribal groups to State prioritising corporate interests. Similarly, Baviskar (2004) examined the anti-dam movement in Narmada valley by highlighting the cultural relations of a tribal community to their land and river, revealing the discrepancies between identities used by the State to oppress and those embodied by the community. Other feminist political ecology scholars have highlighted how social dynamics of caste are reflected in access to programmes and benefits within communities targeted for conservation and development projects (Rastogi et al. 2014; Kabra 2020). Kabra (2020), for instance, notes that when people in villages are displaced from their traditional homes for creating conservation areas, not only are the impacts of displacement varied but also that the demands for claims and settlements can differ based on historical access and dispossession.

A feminist intersectional perspective thus provides a valuable framework and grounded approach for understanding the landscapes of conservation that emerge from the interaction between broader policies and programmes and the micro-politics of rights, access, and opportunities available to various groups within areas adjoining conservation areas. In the following sections, I use this approach to illustrate the micro-politics of access, alienation, and dependencies in forest villages adjoining the Corbett Tiger Reserve in India.

The Corbett Tiger Reserve

Context

The Government of India instituted the Project Tiger in 1973 with the goal of stemming the dwindling tiger populations in the country and reviving their numbers through the creation of dedicated PAs for wildlife conservation. Project Tiger was inaugurated in Corbett National Park, making this site one of the first nine tiger reserves in India. CTR has a strong preservationist history. The CTR site was a hunting area before it was designated as the first National Park of India and of mainland Asia in 1936, during the British colonial regime. It is named after Jim Corbett, an officer of the colonial regime, who was known for being a hunter-turned-conservationist and who spent some years in the sub-Himalayan region before he left India. This history contributed to it being as an important site to launch the Project Tiger.

CTR is located in Uttarakhand State in the Sivalik foothill region of Indian Himalayas. It covers a total of 1,288.31 sq. km and encompasses a mix of montane areas and sub-Himalayan tracts called Terai-Bhabar which include grasslands, wetlands, riverine tracts, and moist deciduous forests (Badola et al. 2010). The forests comprise about 70% of the area with grasslands, wetlands, agriculture, and settlements occupying the remaining 30% (Government of Uttarakhand 2010). CTR contains a Core protected area of 821.99 sq. km which is exclusively maintained for the tiger population, and a Buffer zone of 466.32 sq. km surrounding the Core area (see Figure 1) within which some human settlement and livelihood activities are permitted and human-wildlife interactions can occur (NTCA 2012, 2020). The Buffer zone is also designated as an area where local communities are provided livelihood alternatives that reduce their dependence on forests. Ecotourism is promoted as a form of livelihood alternative employing the win-win narrative of simultaneously achieving conservation and community benefits (NTCA 2012).

The areas surrounding CTR are a combination of rural and forest landscape. Historically, livelihood activities in this region largely entailed subsistence agriculture, livestock keeping and forest resource use. Soon after it was designated a Tiger Reserve, the villages that existed within the demarcated boundaries were displaced and moved outside to the areas controlled by the State Forest Department (Lasgorciex and Kothari 2009). The growth of ecotourism since the early-2000s has heavily influenced land use and livelihoods. Today, the areas adjoining the south and eastern boundary of CTR have a high concentration of villages and hotels. The villages are distinguished by two formal classifications: revenue villages and forest villages. Revenue villages are agricultural areas with definitive cadastral boundaries of private land ownership. These villages fall within the jurisdiction of the district administration and the State's Revenue Department (Census of India 2011b). Forest villages are located within areas that come under the land ownership and jurisdiction of the State's Forest Department. Thus, individuals and households in these forest villages cannot obtain titles to own land nor set up permanent structures.

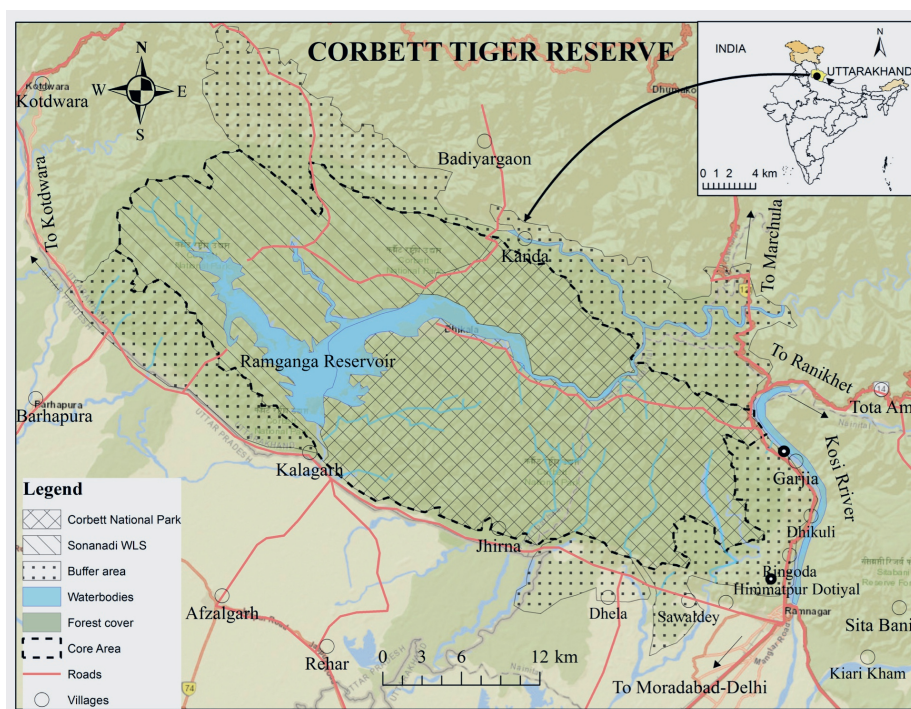


Figure 2. Corbett Tiger Reserve

Created by: Ecoinformatics Lab, ATREE

Methods

I conducted ethnographic research in the villages near CTR between August 2018 and August 2019. I used qualitative methods such as participant observation and individual and group interviews in villages located outside the south and south-eastern boundary of CTR. I employed a field assistant to assist me with identifying research participants and for interviews. I used a basic framework of questions on family history and relationship to CTR and the area, livelihoods and association with tourism to guide the interviews. When necessary, I repeated interviews with the same respondents. Participant observation was recorded in field notes. In addition, I collected data on CTR from secondary sources such as independent and government reports, newspaper articles, and published academic research. I analysed the field data through inductive coding and drawing themes that supported comparing and contrasting information (Bernard 2006).

For this research article, I focus on forest villages of Amer and Beran (pseudonyms). Fifty-three (53) participants were identified through a combination of referral and purposive sampling based on their dwelling location, livelihoods, and socio-cultural backgrounds. I provided full information about the research project and sought respondents' verbal consent before proceeding with the interviews. I use pseudonyms for the two villages to ensure full anonymity and privacy for participants. I did not ask participants about their caste status and only made note of it when it was freely offered by them. I was conscious of my positionality as a non-local,

urban woman researcher from a substantially different socio-economic background and sought to maintain reflexivity during data collection. The field assistant was a local male from a nearby town, and his gender and situated knowledge about local social dynamics was critical for mediating initial doubts or concerns expressed by participants when they arose.

Amer and Beran

The forest village of Amer is located near the eastern boundary of CTR near the highway that runs along the Kosi River corridor. The village comprises 101 families, most of whom were relocated outside the PA after the area's designation as a Tiger Reserve in 1973. Relocation from inside the CTR area to land belonging to the State Forest Department outside the reserve boundary meant that the families held no legal rights to land ownership or forest access rights. The Forest Department initially employed people in the relocated settlement in plantation work in its Reserved Forests (Tiger Conservation Plan 2015). The majority of families in Amer are classified as falling within the officially defined low-income category (Tiger Conservation Plan 2015). Households in the village belong to upper and Scheduled Castes (SC) (low castes identified in one of the Schedules of the Indian Constitution for affirmative action), with the latter continuing to face enormous social stigma and oppression in local society. The average household size is 6 and approximately 90% of the households in the village rely on income from wage labour in tourism. According to information from field interviews, four individuals, all men belonging to upper caste groups, have relatively stable daily wage jobs in tourism: one is a guide and three are safari vehicle drivers. Women are primarily involved in household care and forest resource collection. Some households maintain vegetable plots adjoining their homes, but most rely on purchasing their basic food requirements from local markets and government subsidised ration shops.

Beran is also a forest village located near the eastern boundary of CTR. It is home to nearly 500 families, all of whom fall under the category of SC and are identified as low-income households. Most of these households migrated to Beran from the nearby hill areas in the early-1970s to work as labourers for the forest department and seek employment in nearby urban areas. Since Beran is located within land owned by the State Forest Department, households do not have rights to own land. In addition, the CTR management plan has identified Beran as part of a wildlife corridor and has proposed the relocation of households to other sites. The majority of households depend on wage labour for their livelihoods, with nearly 80% linked to tourism. Men work as labourers in tourist lodges, for the forest department, in building and in road construction. Women are responsible for household care, firewood collection, and maintain small vegetable plots around their homes. Some women have found work in a local factory and piecework through local NGOs.

In comparison with these two forest villages, revenue villagers can own land, and many have sold their land to out-migrate or continue living on part of their land while leasing a section to tourism enterprises. The revenue villages near CTR have some of the densest tourism services. Revenue villages have a mixed composition in terms of class and caste, but are generally higher class and caste owing to their land ownership status. Most households in such villages depend

on or supplement income through tourism. Tourism work includes safari jeep drivers, safari guides, safari booking agents, homestays, guest house owners, restaurant entrepreneurs, souvenir shopkeepers and hotel staff. These villagers have relatively easier access to facilities as there are government primary schools, electricity and water access for farming in villages. Government schemes for supplementing livelihoods, such as silviculture, are also accessible to revenue villagers.

The Corbett Tiger Reserve and the politics of access

Variegated access and tourism dependency

Amer and Beran are similar to many forest villages located around the Tiger Reserve where households' tourism dependencies through tourism-based work is increasing. However, the ability to gain better outcomes from tourism work is influenced by socio-economic status. A village elder from Amer pointed out that current restrictions on forest access is a contrast to his ancestors' time. His family, along with other villagers, was relocated in 1978 from the forest inside CTR with their agreement. While tourism has served as one source of income due to lack of options, it is also a form of restriction on villagers' lives:

“They keep taking the tourists inside the forest and tell us to keep quiet. 30 safari jeeps go into the forest twice a day from the gate next to our village, but there is no issue with so many people going in. The issue is always with us entering the forest. All the kids from this village who work in tourism wash dishes. The better jobs go to people with contacts”.

Steady employment, as per the Census definition (i.e., which provides income for more than six months of the year (Census of India 2011a) in Amer is very low. At the time of fieldwork, only four men in Amer belonging to higher caste groups held steady employment in tourism. Daily wage work, such as washing dishes, is most common in forest villages, followed by work for local businesses and government infrastructure projects. The village elder's assertion that better jobs in tourism go to those who are of higher socio-economic status and have direct access to powerful people or power brokers is repeatedly mentioned in forest villages. Other researchers refer to 'gatekeepers' who can influence the flow of benefits or funds as their social networks stem from their dominant caste position, thus allowing them to position themselves as links between the State and rural community (Kabra 2020).

The variegated access to steady employment and the type of work is more striking when households in forest villages are compared to revenue villages. In the latter case, more than 80% of the working population in the neighbouring revenue village were employed in farming their own land and had steady employment in tourism. For example, when CTR was being actively developed as an ecotourism destination in the early-1990s, the State Forest Department offered a safari guide training course for people from surrounding areas. The majority of trainees selected were from nearby revenue villages who later were worked for the State Forest

Department or with private hotels. Some of these guides have since set up their own travel agencies, including safari booking agencies, as well as homestays. During the tourism boom in the 2000s, and after, landowning households in revenue villages were able to set up their own tourist accommodation facilities; one villager from an upper caste, landowning family explained: “we had land and set up a 16-room hotel”. Other landowning households in revenue villages, since the 2000s, have built small shops on their land and some rent these out to tourism-related retail businesses, and set up restaurants. Since households in forest villages do not own titles to the land they occupy and are not permitted to build permanent structures on forest department land, they cannot set up similar businesses to take advantage of CTR tourism.

Access to development schemes, infrastructure, and benefits

In addition to the lack of land ownership, households in forest villages have little to no access to government schemes and subsidies, and infrastructure facilities such as electricity and water supply connections (Upadhyay 2019). Although road infrastructure in the area has improved, most forest village households point to the lack of electricity and water supply. A couple in Amer whose son works in a hotel spoke of the marginal change to their lives since they were relocated to the forest village: “We were married here, we had children and now grandchildren, but no facilities over these generations. We don’t even have an electricity connection”. Although lack of electricity supply is a critical issue for forest villages, some settlements on forest land have been able to access electricity due to their proximity to major religious shrines or revenue lands purchased by wealthy outsiders. A resident of Beran village noted that its neighbouring settlement on forest land has been able to access electricity because “Bania people (trading communities higher up the caste ladder) from a nearby town have bought land near the village”. Another resident of Beran added “there are people with contacts who have influence in that area which is why they got electricity access. There is a big temple there which attracts a lot of people, which is also why they get it [electricity]”.

Households in Beran also emphasised their disadvantaged position for access to formal education. Since most adult males work as daily wage labourers for construction or road work or as gardeners or guards in hotels, they see formal education as necessary for their children and grandchildren to gain access to better jobs. A teacher in the local primary school and resident of Beran said, “We have been trying to get a high school set up here, it would be very good if we had one.... We cannot ruin our children’s future, but not everyone supports that idea even within the village”.

Unequal access to development schemes not only affects households in forest villages near CTR, but also people belonging to lower socio-economic status within adjoining revenue villages. The village head, who is often a male from the dominant upper castes, exercises power in decision-making for the village as a whole and functions as a gatekeeper for government schemes, grants, and subsidies that village household may be eligible to access. One member of a local women’s association noted that,

“Most government schemes [for women’s benefit] are not implemented in these [revenue] villages, unless you have contacts with the village head. But in a forest village there is no formal village head and so that

is the biggest difficulty. Even in revenue villages, if a family who is well-off needs resources to rebuild their home or bathroom, they will be able to get resources to do so, but the poorest will not get the same”.

Access to forest rights and community mobilisation

Livelihoods based on forest access and resource collection are becoming more restricted for households in both forest and revenue villages. The restrictions imposed by the CTR management are more severely felt by forest village households in Amer and Beran since they lack tenure security. These residents, along with those from other forest villages on the periphery of CTR, have been seeking ways of accessing legal forest rights through existing legislation. However, finding common ground for demanding forest rights has been challenging. As one resident from Amer pointed out: “Even within villages there are differences in coming together to demand for forest rights”. Factors that influence differences include local elite alliances with political parties that attempt to secure ‘vote banks’ by promising benefits such as electricity supply, cooking gas, and food ration subsidies to village households. A resident of Beran remarked, “this village has a two-party [political party] support”, which resembles swing voting, and supporting political parties promising support and advocating for their rights, such as electricity connection. The villager also implied that people ally with political parties that have a chance of winning, with the hope of thereby building social capital through the parties’ networks of influence. Nevertheless, despite divergent political allegiances, a Forest Village Association was formed to mobilise communities around CTR that lack security of tenure. The association threatened to boycott voting in the upcoming elections unless their demand for revenue village status was recognised (Upadhyay 2019). This demand has not yet been met.

Gender dynamics

The insecurity of tenure for households in forest villages affects both men and women in terms of land ownership. However, women bear significant responsibility for cultivating food plots near their homes and collecting firewood and other produce from nearby forests. The restrictions imposed by CTR on forest access by local households have made it more difficult for women to carry out these activities. Due to gendered expectation and cultural norms, access to wage labour in tourism remains easier for men than women. Hotels are mostly unwilling to employ women from the villages, citing the inability of management to be responsible for their personal security and safety.

A forest village near Amer, and located close to the highway, has a number of small food stalls for tourists. Two women run such shops full time, while other women from the village may find temporary work or fill in for their husbands when they are otherwise committed. Several women from Beran worked at a local factory until the management changed and terminated their employment. About 10 young women from Beran received training in sewing and embroidery through a local non-government organisation. These women have been able to do piecework and contribute to their household income. Such work opens up avenues for income, but access to assets such as land remains impossible in forest villages, and most especially for

women. While access to land ownership and better waged work remains a hurdle for male forest villagers, women remain more vulnerable due to the ingrained everyday practices of patriarchy.

Although revenue villagers are able to own land titles, land ownership titles are in the name of men in the family through a patrilineal system, except for widows who can claim ownership as a primary heir (Deo and Dubey 2019). In Uttarakhand state, rights to inheritance of agricultural land are secondary for daughters, and unmarried daughters have greater rights to land than married ones (ibid.). However, changes are taking place. The legal inheritance provisions have recently been clarified for the Hindu Succession Act of 2005, such that daughters will now have equal inheritance rights (Deo 2020). The Uttarakhand government recently supported women's co-ownership of land, specifically pointing out the imbalance in agricultural work between husband and wife (Das 2020). However, despite the existence of reformed inheritance laws, women's rights may continue to be curbed through the micro-politics of power and access to local economic opportunities associated with CTR.

Land ownership and forest access: intersectionality and the micro-political dynamics of conservation

The cases of Amer and Beran show the differentiated access to work and benefits, not only on account of landlessness but also in relation to intersecting dimensions of caste, class and gender. CTR's history as an exclusive space for elites has continued, although now shifting from hunting grounds to ecotourism. Ecotourism in the form of safaris is one direct new restriction on use of forests that were previously home to the forest villagers. Such differentiated access follows and reinforces historical and ongoing oppression of lower caste and class groups. Tiger reserve governance and tourism has emphasised the lack of access to opportunities for work and use of space. The CTR forest is used for multiple jeep safaris every day, while forest villagers who were living in the same forest are restricted from using the same space. Job opportunities and economic mobility for forest villagers remain limited, except for those who are able to gain access through social capital. This takes place primarily through allegiance with those in power, which does not necessarily lead to benefits for the community as a whole with respect to rights or access. Most landowning villagers in revenue villages have been able to gain jobs in tourism, including as drivers, guides or entrepreneurs through use of their own farm land. Villagers who are able to train as guides and successfully become part of the guide association are rarely from forest villages. This is shaped by the historical disadvantage in the form of education, infrastructure and socio-cultural subjugation based on their landlessness, caste and class.

In the context of tiger reserve governance, forest villagers have been marginalised, most significantly because of landlessness. Forest resource access also remain restricted. To address the issue of historical injustice to forest dwellers and tribal communities in India, the Forest Rights Act was legislated. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 (FRA) is a legal instrument for forest use reparations and land rights in India. In calling for redressing historical injustice suffered by forest dwelling and tribal communities, the FRA has forged a radical path for conservation and in many ways can be seen as a forerunner for convivial conservation. However, the implementation of this

progressive legislation has faced hurdles emerging through micro-politics in local contexts which are discussed below.

Forest access and use: institutions and socio-dynamics

The FRA is the outcome of a prolonged movement led by a grassroots and marginalised forest people's coalition; one that began in 2002 after a ruling by the Supreme Court of India on evicting forest dwellers (Kumar and Kerr 2012). The FRA was enacted by the State to address the historical injustices perpetrated on forest dwelling communities by providing them with legal rights to access and use forest produce, as well as the ability to cultivate land. I highlight the FRA in this context due to its relevance for forest dwellers around CTR and its potential to constitute one step towards enacting the convivial conservation vision. The provisions of the Act include recognition of forest rights in PAs, right to cultivate forest land, ownership, access and rights to the conversion of forest villages into revenue villages (Clause 3(1)(h) and 4(2) FRA, 2006). The FRA is a progressive legislation that encapsulates elements of the convivial conservation approach such as the idea of promoted areas. Through the recognition of rights in the FRA, communities have been able to generate revenue from forest harvest and create a self-sufficient model of livelihood while ensuring for ecological sustainability (Broome et al. 2017). For instance, after the recognition of Community Forest Rights titles, villages in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary have been able to earn high revenue from sustainable harvesting and selling of bamboo, and have ensured their management plan is guided by their traditional knowledge (Kukreti 2018). FRA also promotes gender equity as it requires land titles for individual forest rights to be in the joint names of husband and wife, or a single household head regardless of the gender (CFR-LA 2016). In the state of Rajasthan, 60 women have filed rights claims as single women, and joint claims from 22 villages have the woman's name as the first claimant (ibid). It is precisely because of these radical possibilities of the FRA to revolutionise conservation that the conservation administration, particularly the tiger conservation apparatus, has hindered its implementation and actively sought to undermine it (Rai et al. 2019). There have been reports of violation of the FRA in TRs and a lack of state support even after rights are recognised (Fanari 2019; Gupta et al. 2020).

Despite the FRA being an emancipatory State intervention, local socio-cultural contexts have resulted in inconsistencies in its implementation. Kodiveri (2016) has recorded instances of discrimination against SC during the implementation of the FRA. Differences in local engagement, politics of identity, local bureaucracies and diverse local livelihood interests have also plagued FRA implementation and curtailed its emancipatory objectives (Bose et al. 2012; Kodiveri 2016; Sen and Pattanaik 2019). Similarly, Ramdas (2009) examined how the FRA officially recognised rights of women, yet the State ended up using tribal women's rights over land to promote plantation growth instead of their traditional farming practice. Local power dynamics influenced by identity differences and institutional cultures thus pose hurdles for implementing the FRA (CFR-LA 2016). These, in no way, diminish the crucial and necessary role of the FRA in recognising forest rights. Instead, they point to important issues that must be confronted in implementing progressive structural change, offering lessons that can be learnt by focusing on micro-politics and identity differences.

Connecting the threads

I draw from experiences in the implementation of the FRA over the last decade to highlight how different community dynamics and social identities have implications on the outcomes of implementing such a legislation. I do this to illustrate the larger argument of the research article regarding the need to focus on micro-politics, particularly those relating to caste, class and gender. The FRA presents a potential model or pathway for convivial conservation in undoing historical injustice and recognising legal rights of access and use. The FRA also provides valuable insights for implementing progressive legislation that explicitly tackles the micro-politics emerging from intersecting differences of caste and gender.

Conclusion

In this research article I have examined the ongoing micro-politics in forest villages around CTR to demonstrate the possible hurdles that could emerge in the implementation of progressive conservation measures such as convivial conservation. I have emphasised the value of a feminist intersectional approach for understanding the micro-politics of difference within communities, and related issues of distribution of access and benefits while considering dimensions and divisions of caste, class and gender. Attention to differences emerging from the intersectionality of caste, class, gender will be vital for ensuring that interventions do not further marginalise but instead proactively benefit the most marginal in affected communities. I engage with FRA, as an existing legal measure to address historical injustice and recognise rights of forest dwelling communities, to demonstrate a potential form of convivial conservation measure aiming to redress these issues of marginalisation. By drawing out the issues concerning differential access based on caste or gender, however, I show that this progressive legislation has also faced hurdles in implementation related to similar dimensions of local micro-politics.

If the promoted areas element of convivial conservation were to be initiated in CTR, one of the key steps would be to pursue reparations with respect to land and forest access and use through the FRA. This would not only address the historical injustices of alienation experienced by forest villagers but also reveal the ways in which the micro-politics of conservation and ecotourism contribute to marginalisation of these groups by gender, class and caste. The value of an intersectional feminist lens for convivial conservation is in its explicit focus on confronting patriarchy and overcoming other forms of oppression in pursuit of social and ecological justice.

6 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine how local people respond to and engage with (eco)tourism at Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) in the northern state of Uttarakhand in India. I locate CTR (eco)tourism within research on neoliberal conservation. Neoliberal conservation is distinguished through discourses or practices of commodification, marketisation or privatisation of nature and wildlife (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Holmes and Cavanagh 2016). The practices or techniques of such governance are analysed through the lens of neoliberal environmentality, drawn from Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality (Foucault 2008; Fletcher 2010; 2017). Governmentality, which describes techniques and tactics of subjectification enacted through various modes of governance, is useful for understanding the nature of the incentives offered to induce local participation in conservation governance. Among the various forms of neoliberal environmentality/conservation, ecotourism is promoted as an initiative that is intended to simultaneously benefit local people, nature and wildlife, and tourists as an educational activity. Local involvement in ecotourism is incentivised through employment or wage work in the various tourism businesses, most often owned by entrepreneurs who are not themselves local.

Ecotourism, as an expression of neoliberal environmentality, commonly functions by seeking to change the external structures that motivate an individual to act in a certain way, thus leading to particular forms of subjectification (Fletcher 2010; 2017). However, research concerning environmentality also shows that involvement in conservation governance does not necessarily lead to eco-friendly subjectivities defined by monetary incentives. This thesis demonstrates that women's intersecting identity positioning shapes their decision making and involvement with conservation interventions. This thesis has explored this element of subjectification and questions what other factors play a role in people's decision making to engage with (eco)tourism and what are the implications of that. Additionally, while research on neoliberal conservation initiatives such as ecotourism has shown their impacts on the local landscape and livelihoods, there is relatively less empirical research on how people engage with and respond to neoliberal conservation governance (Holmes and Cavanagh 2016). Specifically, Holmes and Cavanagh note that "there has not been much *empirical* attention to the ways in which processes of neoliberalisation may alter the social impacts of protected areas" (2016:201, emphasis in original).

This thesis aimed to contribute to this relative gap in research through empirical research that was conceptually framed through a poststructuralist and political ecology lens. In the CTR context with a longstanding history of wildlife conservation and tourism, it was important to understand people's modes of engagement with tourism and how they are responding to the tourism market. Thus, the following central research question guided this thesis:

How do people living around Corbett Tiger Reserve engage with and respond to (eco)tourism?

This overarching research question was divided into three sub-questions:

4. How are socio-economic and rural agrarian factors shaping the nature of engagement with (eco)tourism?
5. How do intersectional gender dynamics influence (eco)tourism work?
6. What are the implications of (eco)tourism engagement for local people's lives and land use?

In the process of understanding people's engagement with and responses to (eco)tourism through interviews, participant observation, and being based in Kumer village for the duration of field work, it was evident that there are multiple intersecting factors that shape villagers' decision making and engagement with (eco)tourism. Villagers would explain their livelihoods, tourism-based work, and aspirations as being shaped through many structural issues such as: mismanaged (eco)tourism; insufficient infrastructure and development initiatives such as education, water, electricity; societal expectations defined by patriarchy; unequal access to land; and crop damage from wildlife incursion on fields. With a combination of these factors, villagers also aspire to different lifestyles reflecting urban or modern influences. The people living around CTR are aware of the precarity of (eco)tourism and its dominance in the landscape of their homes. The longstanding presence of ecotourism at CTR (since the early 1990s) has shaped work and entrepreneurial ventures for many. My empirical research consistently showed the complexity of villagers' decision making regarding (eco)tourism-based work, particularly when accounting for their own positionality shaped by their particular gender, class and caste status. It was thus important to capture this complexity and the intersecting positionalities that shaped actors' lives in relation to (eco)tourism. In this sense, it was important for this thesis to combine a poststructuralist lens that holds space for examining agential perspectives from intersecting positionalities in relation to structural influences such as from CTR management, (eco)tourism promotion and Uttarakhand state governance.

In addressing the research objectives and questions, the following four main outcomes emerged from the thesis:

- 1) The ongoing land use change in villages around CTR has now includes not just outsiders but local villagers who are shifting or diversifying their land use from agriculture towards (eco)tourism-based entrepreneurship. This is possible only for villagers who have enough capital (shaped by their class and caste) to be able to invest in setting up tourism enterprises. This process further alienates them from their land, but land ownership is retained. With tourism enterprises on villagers' land, their market dependencies deepen. Ecotourism thus not only commodifies nature, but the rural landscape more broadly.

Conceptually, I draw from agrarian change research to frame land use and livelihood diversification (Hall, et al 2015; Scoones, et al 2012; Gardner 2012). This research outcome thereby contributes to both (eco)tourism and agrarian research. It brings agrarian studies insights into conversation with (eco)tourism research. In doing so, it contributes to both fields by emphasising the importance of (eco)tourism in agrarian change and of land use change in ecotourism studies to understand how rural people

negotiate and navigate tourism in relation to land use, and why tourism entrepreneurship is deepening in the landscape.

- 2) Women's work in (eco)tourism is most often hidden, and shaped by their intersecting identities of gender, class and caste positioning. Women have been directly or indirectly involved in tourism around CTR for many years, despite structural and social hurdles defined by patriarchy. The kind of work they do, and their motivations in this work, are also influenced by their caste and class. Women's interactions with the tourism market in villages around CTR illustrates the complex and situational nature of their participation in these market spaces, which are not defined strictly by tradition nor by capitalist values alone. Instead, it is the synergy among culture, market and women's social positions that contributes to their involvement in tourism, and the implications of that involvement for their lives. Their involvement in the tourism market has more meaning than simply being subject to conservation governance.

Conceptually, intersectional feminist political ecology (FPE) proved vital to foreground women's positionality and motivations and implications of this on their lives as they navigate tourism work. It is the complex intersection among these factors that motivates their engagement with tourism rather than simply their constitution as eco-friendly subjects as generally understood in neoliberal environmentality research. This thesis outcome thus builds on previous work by Gutiérrez-Zamora (2021) to help fill the gap in understanding of gender perspectives in neoliberal environmentality research. An intersectional FPE lens in this thesis offers an understanding of which villagers engage with tourism, in what way, and implications of that in their lives. This examination showed that women are not necessarily eco-subjects of conservation incentivised through monetary benefits, rather their identities and related positioning shape their involvement with ecotourism.

- 3) Homestays are one of the many ecotourism initiatives set up in rural areas and reflect a marketisation of nature-based lifestyles and culture. In the case of CTR, homestays have been on the rise- influenced through subsidies for homestays offered by the Uttarakhand government. By focusing on entrepreneurship, the study also brings local peoples' lives and aspirations in discussion about ecotourism particularly in direct connection to local ownership- based models of ecotourism. The analysis of local entrepreneurship also reveals how people navigate a particular set of ideals about nature, culture and the relationship between these. I also draw from and develop Airbnb research that looks at dimensions of entrepreneurship of one's own home. While there are comparisons between homestays and Airbnbs, this study offers a contextual understanding of home entrepreneurship and what it means for villagers who undertake such initiatives in historically unequal tourism contexts and how they shape rural life in alignment of their aspirations. My analysis demonstrates that homestays represent neoliberal conservation wherein development aspirations of individuals find expression (Silva, et al 2015), particularly in shaping what rural life means to village entrepreneurs in contemporary

times in a landscape that has been deeply influenced by Corbett Tiger Reserve governance.

- 4) The final outcome entails conceptualising what a vision of equitable and just conservation would look like in CTR. Here, I engaged with the Convivial Conservation vision (Büscher and Fletcher 2019; 2020) and illustrate through an examination of community dynamics, the need for an explicit focus on micro-politics that include intersectional FPE lens. The aim of integrating such a lens is to ensure attention to the marginalised even when progressive policies are introduced as these may not necessarily be accessible to women and men of lower caste or class. Concluding this analysis, and drawing from Convivial Conservation vision, I suggest that land rights for the landless and women and the Forest Rights Act, particularly considering Scheduled Castes and women, are potential pathways towards more equitable conservation.

These research outcomes have made it evident that villagers' engagement with and responses to (eco)tourism are shaped by intersecting identities, and processes of State governance and agrarian land-use. This emphasises the importance of a focus on the micro-politics in relation to structural influences, and opens pathways to future research which may investigate questions such as: How can resource governance practices and discourses assimilate an intersectional feminist political ecology lens? What are the conditions necessary for supporting agrarian livelihoods in a landscape dominated by (eco)tourism? Another important direction of future research related to land and intersectional feminism: What are the implications of land use and land diversification in cases where women have full land ownership? Lastly, it will be important to conduct research and monitor the trends of (eco)tourism entrepreneurship for villagers who continue to own land. An overarching research design that can add value to future research in neoliberal conservation is participatory action research so that empirical research can be more reciprocal and productive for the many participants of such research projects.

Drawing from the current thesis, in the next section, I offer five recommendations that have the potential to contribute to equity and shift certain power dynamics in the CTR landscape. While this thesis has focused on the examining local engagement with (eco)tourism, the motivations for this and the activity's implications on their lives, I also offer deliberations and ideas as pathways towards equity and justice in CTR conservation, in continuation to my engagement with the Convivial Conservation vision (Chapter 8). This is with the recognition that any such change must be multi-pronged and maintain an intersectional feminist lens.

- i) Implement the Forest Rights Act (FRA):

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, (FRA) was notified to recognise and undo the historical injustice to forest dwellers and Scheduled Tribes of India. The FRA empowers rights holders for conservation and sustainable resource use while maintaining livelihood and food security. It also recognises the tenurial insecurity of forest dependent communities who, over the years, have been forced to relocate due to State led initiatives (FRA 2006). Implementing the FRA ensures that forest access

remains an option for future generations, and despite aspirations towards urban lifestyles, it remains important to repair pathways of traditional and multi-generational resource use practices.

ii) Increase and solidify spaces for women's voices and work:

Women's representation and recognition of their work in tourism needs to be facilitated and sustained through initiatives like training as safari guides, and in other tourism based, agriculture and household work. This will require collaboration with both civil society and government. There should be also sustained support for women in gram sabhas and any village development initiatives, recognising class and caste differences. Community meetings in every village must engage with matters of women's interest to make visible and vocal women's perspectives. Shifting patriarchal mindsets and dismantling patriarchal governance systems needs a multi-pronged approach that consistently involves conversation and work with men as well.

iii) Provide tenurial security through land ownership, equitable access to basic human needs and support for agriculture:

Landless forest villagers and revenue villagers should have their rights to land legally recognised. With this, access to basic facilities such as electricity, water and education can and must follow. Addressing such basic tenurial security is not only crucial but long overdue. Agriculture cultivation has been under threat from wildlife incursion in fields, and as one short term measure, efficient systems should be instituted for compensation of crop damage. The nature of compensation could be monetary or food grains, based on the preference of villagers. Securing such basic livelihood and land-based needs has the potential to shift power dynamics in a landscape where landlessness has resulted in over a generation of insecurity and limited life choices.

iv) Redistribution of (eco)tourism incomes:

Currently, the (eco)tourism income is accessible to villagers who are either employed or work as daily wage labour. Access to such work is defined by gender, caste, class and relatedly education levels. The CTR management gains from safari fees, and the private hotel entrepreneurs benefit from tourists whether or not they go on safaris inside CTR. The economic inequity shaped by (eco)tourism is significant. One potential pathway to counter this is redistributing (eco)tourism incomes from safaris and large private outsider owned tourism establishments, to villagers living around CTR, with an equity lens considering variations in gender, caste and class are taken into account. Conservation Basic Income (CBI) could be one way ensuring that communities living in conservation areas be compensated for the impact interventions have on their lives (Fletcher and Büscher 2020). The implementation of CBI would be context specific with collaboration from the recipients of the income (ibid).

These deliberations are potential avenues towards equity and justice in the CTR landscape and invite more interdisciplinary discussion where it is possible to engage productively with learnings from disciplines and research foci of feminism, ecology, social justice and agrarian change. This could take place through grassroots symposiums and participatory action research projects in local contexts. The invitation to forming collaborative ideas towards developing an equitable and just CTR conservation landscape is influenced by a feminist lens that I have employed in this research. As Sundberg explains, “Working at the nexus of nature, power, and knowledge production, FPE promises to continue supporting broader feminist political objectives for more equitable and ecologically viable futures” (2016:17). Questions about production of knowledge and its legitimisation are not necessarily new in political ecology, but feminist political ecology and gender research have provided a lens that is explicit in foregrounding *who* it is affected by conservation, *how* and *why*. What this means is using an intersectional analysis to examine how power emerges in specific places and times (Pan 2019; Sundberg 2016). Through this, life experiences and its relation to power dynamics are foregrounded in intersectional feminist political ecology. This lens continues to draw out conceptual connections with structural power in political ecology while talking about lives and everyday experience of navigating power structures. These perspectives are important to maintain as they account for the range of power dynamics emerging from gender, class or caste positions. Consequently, knowledge about the range of such differential impact, benefits or loss can hold governance institutions, research bodies or non-governmental organisations accountable. This thesis has focused on such intersecting dynamics in the CTR landscape that is dominated by the powerful narratives of tiger and biodiversity conservation and ecotourism. By engaging with an intersectional feminist political ecology lens, the goal with this thesis is also to move away from dominant framing of conservation governance related to protected area management or ecotourism discourses globally, onto people’s engagement with and responses to these conservation management regimes. It is high time that discussions about conservation and social justice engage with intersectional feminism not as a marginal area of work, but rather as the core element.

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