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Community-Led Sustainable Tourism in the New Normal: Case Study from Purulia, India

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Introduction

Travel and tourism can be truly considered as the only expenditure, which makes one richer. Tourism acquaints one with the natural and cultural assets of different places and contributes in experience enhancement. Travel and tourism industry also contributes immensely to the national and global economy. Tourism is responsible for 9% of global GDP and accounts for 29% of export in services worldwide (UNWTO, 2013). In developing countries, tourism often acts as a significant source of foreign exchange earnings. Given the importance of tourism in social and economic context, it is important to make the industry resilient and responsible so that holistic development can be facilitated through tourism. United Nations has identified tourism as one of the major sectors to drive change towards a green economy and was included in the Rio+ 20 Outcome Document as one of the sectors capable of making

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contributions in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and can create jobs and trade opportunities.

The tourism industry has been one of the majorly hit sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic. International tourism decreased by 80% in post-pandemic times (OECD, 2020). According to UNWTO estimates, the impact of COVID-19 crisis on tourism led to a reduction in global GDP by 1.5% to 2.8%, putting 100 million direct tourism jobs at risk (UNWTO, n.d.); 54% of tourism workforce comprising of women and youth workers are among the most at-risk categories. Small businesses accounting to around 80% of global tourism became particularly vulnerable, striving to survive in the new normal. While the pandemic impacted the tourism industry in insurmountable amount, it also offers innovative avenues to revive tourism. The COVID-19 crisis has provided a watershed moment to align efforts and make tourism more resilient, inclusive, carbon-neutral and resource efficient. Given the unprecedented impact of the pandemic on tourism, new and disruptive adaptations and innovations may find a very fertile ground in this crisis.

This chapter is dedicated to demystify how sustainable tourism made its way in India in the new normal. By citing the instance of Purulia district in the state of West Bengal in India, the chapter highlights the efficacy of community-led cultural tourism in changing the fate of the district and bringing grass-root development in post-pandemic times. This chapter is divided into two sections: the first section talks about the shift in tourism landscape and the opportunities post-pandemic times offer in reorienting the sector towards a sustainable future. The latter section of the chapter validates this theoretical proposition by highlighting the case study of Purulia in juxtaposition. Development of community-led cultural tourism in Purulia has not only altered the fate of the district but has served as a major backbone to support the local economy and bringing socio-economic prospects for the inhabitants. Following a qualitative methodology, the research paradigm provides a redeeming pathway as to how community-led cultural tourism has the potential in making tourism resilient and equipped to cater to the changing demands of tourism in the new normal.

Tourism Landscape in Post-Pandemic Times— The Urgency to Shift Towards Responsible and Sustainable Tourism

The COVID-19 crisis has completely altered the tourism landscape globally. Several reports suggest that while international tourism suffered a major hit, domestic tourism is significantly contributing in softening the blow. Preferences for coastal, regional and rural areas are increasing as opposed to city and congested destinations in post-pandemic tourism (OECD, 2020). Kock et al., 2020 identified that only those destinations and services that understand the new equilibrium at which tourism will possibly settle will be able to position themselves well in the post-COVID-19 era, thereby paving the way for competitiveness and further growth. The COVID-19 pandemic has radically transformed the way socio-economic operations take place. Given the drastic change, it becomes mandatory for the tourism industry to align itself in ways suited to adjust and prosper in the new normal.

Assaf et al. (2021) identifies COVID-19 crisis to be catalytic in providing an opportunity to launch new endeavours that can have a transformative impact on tourism research and practice. In terms of consumer behaviour, post-pandemic tourism witnesses growing importance for safety, risk reduction, cleanliness, reliability, threat anticipation, and changing travel patterns with increased liking for less congested destinations. There is also added focus on coming up with innovative ways to develop resilient destinations and the need to develop trust-based relations among the host and guest communities. The transformed expectations of tourism include within its purview optimal usage of digital media and aspects of e-tourism in shaping holiday experience and larger adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to enhance interaction with consumers and facilitate virtual touristic experiences. Finally, quality of life and ensuring sustainability feature to be some of the crucial agendas, which become mandatory for post-pandemic tourism to cater to. Importance of creating safe destinations for both host and guest communities needs to balance the interests of holiday makers, tourists and local communities, and promoting sustainable and climate-friendly

tourism products can rightly be understood as the need of the hour in the new normal.

UNWTO (n.d.) advocates for cultivating purposive networking, coordination and cooperation among different tourism stakeholders to make the sector resilient in post-pandemic times. Only collective action has the potential to transform tourism, advance the sector's contribution to 2030 agenda and make a shift towards an inclusive, carbon-neutral tourism industry that has the ability to harness innovation, embrace local and communitarian values and create jobs for all. Fostering sustainability has been identified as crucial by the organization to promote green growth and pave the path for a resilient, competitive, resource efficient and carbon-neutral tourism sector. Green investments on protected areas, local community, smart buildings and circular economy along with advance innovation and digitization of tourism have been identified as mandatory prerequisites in transforming the fate of tourism in post-pandemic times.

Following these theoretical advocacies, several practical initiatives have been undertaken globally post-COVID-19 to reignite the tourism sector. Costa Rica has moved its national holidays to Mondays to boost domestic tourism by extending weekends (Babii & Nadeem, 2021). Barbados has introduced 'Welcome Stamp' visa—a one-year residency permit that allows remote employees to live and work from the country. Fiji launched its Blue Lane initiative that allows yachts to berth in its marinas after meeting strict quarantine measures. To woo foreign tourists, the Indian government announced that the first 500,000 e-visas issued until March 2022 will be free of cost, with the e-visa facility extended to 169 countries (Philip, 2021). In general, the global tourism scenario has seen a major shift towards eco-tourism in post-pandemic times. However, these initiatives will fall insufficient in bringing positive impact if the changed ethos of tourism fails to recognize and acknowledge local values in transforming the fate of the sector in the new normal. UNWTO (n.d.) rightly identified making people the nucleus of tourism development, instead of bystanders, as one of the major critical factors contributing in making tourism resilient in post-pandemic times. Community-led responsible tourism is the primary factor in making tourism sustainable in the changed times.

G20 tourism ministers in Diriyah Communiqué (G20 Research Group, 2020) recognized the pandemic to cause a major shift in the tourism sector, which requires a jump towards responsible and sustainable tourism to counter the crisis. Rio+20 Outcome Document 'The Future We Want' includes sustainable tourism as contributing to green growth (UNWTO, 2013). UNWTO and UNEP (2005) define sustainable tourism as the tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of the visitors, the industry, the environment and the host communities. The organizations have identified 12 aims for sustainable tourism, which include: (1) economic viability, (2) local prosperity, (3) employment quality by creating local jobs, (4) promoting social equity, (5) visitor fulfilment, (6) facilitating local control by endowing in local communities' decision-making abilities, (7) community well-being, (8) promoting cultural richness and pluralism, (9) physical integrity, (10) biological diversity, (11) resource efficiency and (12) environmental purity.

Elaboration of sustainable tourism by UNWTO refers to the need for it to: firstly, make optimal use of environmental resources, that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity. Secondly, promoting respect for socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving their tangible and intangible heritage and traditional values and practices and contributing to cultural pluralism by facilitating inter-cultural understanding and tolerance. Thirdly, ensuring long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation by making the host community the nucleus of tourism development. UNWTO's conceptualization of sustainable tourism is premised on the three pillars of promoting social, economic and environmental sustainability and makes tourism directly a contributing sector in furthering the agenda of SDGs. It is only this responsible and sustainable tourism that has the potential to make tourism resilient in the new normal.

The next section of the chapter is dedicated to demystify how the ethos of sustainable tourism by making community the nucleus has been implemented in the Purulia district of West Bengal, India. The case study

highlights how the prosper of community-led cultural tourism in Purulia has boosted responsible tourism in the post-pandemic times and positively transformed the socio-economic fate of the local residents. The next section also bears reference to how responsible and sustainable tourism development in Purulia has altered the fate of the district and contributed in making a progress towards attaining several SDGs.

Community-Led Cultural Tourism Development at Charida Village in Purulia Serving as the Backbone in Pandemic and Post-pandemic Times: A Case Study

Purulia is a district in the western-most part of West Bengal in India. The district presents a classic confluence of natural and cultural assets. A scenic district with several dams, Purulia is rich in its cultural offerings. Chau dance, Jhumur folk song and dance, and basketry weaving tradition are some of the traditional cultural practices innate to the district.

Chau is an acrobatic mask dance form. Colourful masks, rhythmic drum beats, powerful acrobatic movements and somersaults (locally known as *ulfa*) are characteristics of Chau dance as practised in the Purulia district of West Bengal. Apart from Purulia's Chau, there are two other variants found in India—Seraikella Chau and Mayurbhanj Chau, which are practised in the states of Jharkhand and Odisha respectively.

Purulia's Chau dancers enact stories from the epics of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranic texts and others. In addition, the dance is being used to disseminate social messages on burning social issues and promoting public schemes. The dancers wear ornate costumes and elaborately crafted masks that portray the character of the dancer. The masks are made by a community of rural mask makers living in Charida village in Baghmundi block of Purulia, who make masks of deities, epic and also of tribal characters. The masks are of different sizes starting from small to large ones. The tradition of making Chau masks started in Charida around 150 years back during the rule of King Madan Mohan Singh Deo of Baghmundi. Chau dance is inscribed in the UNESCO Representative

List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity in 2010 and Chau mask has been certified with Geographical Indication (GI) in 2018.

Even a decade back, the district was popularly identified as a politically disturbed area infused with Maoist insurgencies. Even Chau as a folk tradition was not as vibrant as its current form. During those days, the master dancers formed a team of Chau dancers and while the script of the Chau act was known to the leading dancers, the remaining members of the troupes were ignorant of the storyline to which they were performing. The traditional steps emulating nature were also gradually getting lost and being replaced by acrobatic movements. To revive the folk tradition of Chau, senior dancers organized several workshops and skill transmission sessions to disseminate knowledge to young practitioners on traditional Chau steps. Workshops were also organized to document traditional Chau steps and to fix a uniform terminology for the steps. Chau dance now occupies a central position as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) not just of the state of West Bengal but of overall India.

Enhanced prospects from practising Chau dance have attracted the youths in the folk tradition, thereby enriching the folk heritage and curbing out migration from the district. Purulia, once a hotspot for Maoist insurgency, has now transformed into a vibrant cultural tourism destination. Providing a conducive learning ecosystem has not only rejuvenated the folk tradition and the practiced locale but has also steered the fate of Chau in unimaginable ways. Once a majorly male-dominated art form, Purulia's Chau in today's times has also attracted female performers. There are around 13 female Chau dance troupes in Purulia, who are competing with their male counterparts and performing all-round the year in different locales.

Methodology

This study is based on cultural tourism development at Charida, the Chau mask makers' village and how the same served as the backbone of the socio-economy in pandemic and post-pandemic times. Instances of cultural tourism development in the village and its impact on local socio-economic conditions have been captured through qualitative

interactions. Unstructured qualitative interviews have been conducted with both senior mask makers and their younger counterparts. The interviews have been conducted individually, as well as through Focused Group Discussions. Every respondent was asked to trace the evolution of Chau dance and the art of mask making with time and the impact of cultural tourism development on the same and vice versa. They were also asked to reflect on the impact of COVID-19 and their surviving strategies to overcome the tough times. After conducting the interviews, the experiences of the respondents have been analysed keeping in mind their local context and the findings have been documented descriptively in the essay.

Developing Community-Led Cultural Tourism in Charida: Changing the Tourism Landscape in the New Normal

Our organization, Contact Base, is a social enterprise having special consultative status with UN ECOSOC, advisory status to UNESCO's 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee and a global partner of UNWTO for promoting responsible tourism. Our flagship initiative, Art For Life (AFL) (<https://youtu.be/4GgNhQ77pO4>), is a culture-based development model focusing on holistic development of marginalized cultural practitioners by making their traditional cultural practices the premise for inclusion and poverty alleviation, as well as strengthening art form and the process of heritage transmission to the next generation. AFL promotes village, artist, and art together, both individually and collectively, so that each when strengthened can work towards accrediting pride, recognition and visibility to the others. Thus, adhering to AFL methodology not only improves prospects of cultural practitioners and their aesthetic pursuits by enabling safeguarding and transmission of otherwise dying heritage components, but also develops village or the in-situ space as cultural destinations, so that local community members can serve to be the nucleus of local tourism development (Fig. 17.1). This tripartite focus makes AFL a catalytic methodology in paving the path for

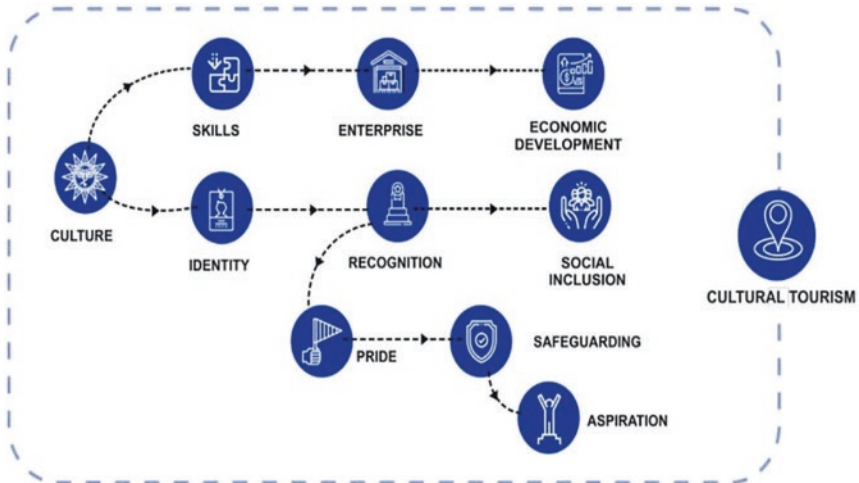


Fig. 17.1 AFL model: Strengthening art, artists and village (The model and the diagrammatic representation have been created by the organization, Contact Base (trading style: banglanatak dot com) (www.banglanatak.com))

inclusive tourism, which makes local communities active stakeholders in the process of tourism development.

Cultural tourism development at Charida has adhered to the AFL methodology. In recent times, the village has grown to be a tourist destination, popularly known as ‘the mask makers’ village’. The GI tag accredited to Charida’s Chau mask has been optimally used in the branding of the destination, keeping its unique cultural offering integral to its tourism offerings. While traditionally the mask makers used to make the masks as crucially supporting props to Chau dance, particularly supplying to the Chau dancers, now the Chau mask has been identified as an independent aesthetic offering and has gained a market value in itself, centring which cultural tourism has prospered over the last decade at Charida. Open shops, adorned with Chau masks of various sizes and characters, line Charida’s alleys, which has now grown to be a favoured destination for tourists to witness traditional cultural practices and take back something of authentic handcrafted value.

In pandemic and post-pandemic times, as the literature review above suggests, tourism has taken a different turn. The new normal has

witnessed enhanced tourist preferences for rural areas. Charida thus served as the perfect serene setting, which has unique offerings in terms of culture. Our organizations' commitment to develop community-led cultural tourism at Charida premised on the following aspects:

- Safeguarding the heritage of Chau mask making by enabling skill transmission sessions from experienced artists to young practitioners. Coupled with the same, establishing direct market linkage for the mask makers increased the socio-economic prospects associated to mask making. This inspired the youth to pursue the tradition professionally, thereby curbing vulnerable out-migration from the village.
- Capacity building of mask makers to diversify their products by retaining the heritage components of their traditional craft practices. This has enabled them to come up with products of high market value, without compromising on their traditional aesthetic intricacies.
- Conducting exchange and collaboration so that the rural mask makers derive the privilege to travel to different places to present their creative offerings and to interact and co-create with other creative producers. The objective is to provide exposure opportunities to these mask makers so that they can meaningfully contribute in promoting and safeguarding their cultural heritage.
- Developing the village as an in-situ cultural destination. Thus, the intervention strategy has not only focused on directly connecting the mask makers with the market but also bringing the market to their village. Annual village festivals get organized to promote the destination, and celebrate the local cultural heritage. Organizing festivals to celebrate local cultural traditions not only made the art of Chau mask making and Charida visible, it also contributed in initiating a dialogue between folk practices, practitioners and the practiced region and provided exposure opportunities to the inhabitants. It also changed the perception of the neighbouring communities and local governing bodies, who have now started identifying Charida in terms of the practiced handcrafted tradition of mask making.

Community-led cultural tourism development centring traditional practices have immense potential in changing mainstream tourism

landscape. Stories of traditional practices, the intricacies of the process and history of these tradition conveyed by the practitioners to the guests have the ability to facilitate experiential tourism in the true sense. Furthermore, community being at the nucleus of tourism development promotes the ethics of responsible tourism and is catalytic in attracting socio-economic benefits for grass-root community members.

It is this community-led cultural tourism that sustained Charida and her inhabitants during pandemic and post-pandemic times. In the new normal, Charida has witnessed significant footfalls, where visitors have come to experience the cultural heritage of the place. Chau mask making has grown to be the central attraction of the tourism offerings. More and more members from the community are showing enhanced enthusiasm to pursue the tradition. While traditionally, women of the household were majorly involved in adorning the masks with beads and jewelleryes, now many women are directly related to the art of mask making, where they do everything from moulding the clay, to shaping and designing the mask. During the pandemic, while the entire world was striving to make ends meet, Charida and her residents were welcoming tourists, albeit in small numbers and sustaining itself through community-led cultural tourism. The growth of responsible and experiential tourism is not only catalytic in changing the tenets of mainstream tourism and improving prospects of local community but also significant in addressing several SDGs, thus making an important mark in the larger developmental frame.

Addressing SDGs

Agenda 2030, adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, identifies 17 interconnected SDGs and 169 associated targets to address the most pressing challenges of our times, ranging from the fight against poverty, hunger and climate change to the reduction of inequalities. Inclusive and ambitious, these goals are intended to leave no one behind. Heritage is directly mentioned in only one of the 169 targets (Target 11.4), which aims to 'strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage', which is part of Goal 11: to 'make cities and human

settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'. While some see this brief mention of culture and heritage in the SDGs as a major victory compared to the complete absence of the topics in earlier international developmental frameworks, it needs to be remembered that the focus mainly lies in safeguarding heritage components. The topics in practical agenda have seldom been linked to addressing broader concerns like how protection of culture and heritage can facilitate poverty alleviation, gender and environmental justice (Labadi, 2022).

Our intervention attempts to further a praxis (theory + practice) based charter showcasing how practical roadmap to safeguard heritage components and community-led cultural tourism development centring on the same can have a positive spillover effect in addressing broader concerns of poverty, gender discrimination, and economic inequality, thereby enhancing community resilience to cope up with tough times. This section discusses at length how community-led cultural tourism development at Charida has not only served as the backbone in sustaining local socio-economy in pandemic and post-pandemic times but has also served as the premise in addressing five major SDG agendas, namely SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption and Production).

SDG 1: No Poverty

Poverty alleviation requires a holistic focus and is not simply restricted to ensuring economic betterment. It includes within its broad purview attributes necessary for bringing overall enhancement of quality of life. While our intervention to facilitate community-led cultural tourism development at Charida has explicitly contributed in income enhancement of the Chau mask makers, it has also paved the path for better living standards within the community. Now, the village is 100% electrified with improved hygiene and sanitation facilities. Education level has also improved, where majority of the community members are now convinced of the importance of education and are sending their children to schools. Health parameters and preventive health awareness have also

seen a drastic rise. While initially, over 40% of the community suffered from lingering illness, their general health and awareness has significantly improved now, thereby equipping local communitarian members to cope up in pandemic and post-pandemic times. Our intervention has also been successful in addressing other social maladies like child marriage and drug abuse. Networking and social capital of ICH communities have also significantly contributed in building their resilience and developing coping up mechanisms in them to survive in the new normal.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

Gender equality, fifth agenda of the SDGs, has been addressed and achieved through our intervention. While traditionally, Chau mask making was primarily a male dominated art form, at present, many women from Charida are involved in the art of mask making. They are also breaking gender restrictions and travelling to locales far and wide to promote and exhibit their creative offerings. The women also serve to be the nucleus of local tourism development, which in turn has enhanced their decision-making abilities, freedom and agency.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Community-led cultural tourism development at Charida has significantly contributed in ensuring decent work and economic growth of overall village community members, not only previously but also in the new normal. Local tourism development has contributed in enhancing visibility and accrediting recognition to the traditional craft practice, their practitioners and the in-situ village locales. Growth of local tourism has also brought economic benefits to the overall village community. The community members, who are not artists, have derived several opportunities to provide tourism services and make it a source of livelihood. Treating creative pursuits as cultural enterprise and the practitioners as cultural entrepreneurs has also enhanced avenues of local employment generation in the new normal premised on the cultural offerings. This

highlights the efficacy of our intervention in addressing the major concern of economic inequality, enlisted as the eighth agenda of the SDGs.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

The impact of community-led cultural tourism development at Charida has significantly contributed to enhancing community resilience in the pandemic and post-pandemic times. The community has devised mechanism to collectively work towards practising and promoting their cultural heritage and village locale. In the new normal, they have also started purposive usage of digital and social media to promote and propagate about their creative offerings to a pool of global audience. Enhancement of both physical and virtual purposive exchange within and outside the community of tradition bearers has improved inter- and intra-communitarian linkage and contributed in cultivating and enhancing bridging and bonding social capital, an important parameter to achieve sustainability and resilience (Putnam, 2000). While community-led cultural tourism development has its positives, the commercialization of the otherwise virgin rural locale has also significant risk factors associated to it. Developing communication strategy and training community members on pros and cons of tourism and hospitality and building their awareness on the changed landscape and expectations of tourism in post-pandemic times have equipped them in coming up with strategies to handle the negatives of tourism development and prosper even in tough times.

SDG 12—Sustainable Consumption and Production

Community-led tourism development at Charida has upheld the motto of responsible and sustainable tourism. Optimal usage of local resources by local community to further the cause of experiential tourism has barred undue investments for tourism growth. Charida's tourism is premised on people and experiences and developing strategies to package local cultural offerings in a way that it suits changed tourism needs in the

new normal. Usage of local resources to further the cause of tourism and keeping local community as the nucleus of tourism growth is destined to promote the ethics of sustainable consumption and production, enlisted as the twelfth agenda of the SDGs.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The chapter highlights the efficacy of developing community-led cultural tourism in altering the socio-economic fate of the destination as well as the inhabitants. Local tourism development, making community and their creative offerings the nucleus, has the potential to develop collective resilience, endowing coping up mechanisms to deal with difficult times. The research paradigm presented above suggests how local tourism development at Charida served as the backbone of the socio-economy in pandemic and post-pandemic times. It also contributed immensely in changing the landscape of conventional tourism and reflects a shift towards sustainable and responsible tourism. However, it needs to be remembered that while cultural tourism development at Charida has immense positive effects, it is not free from vices. Community resilience through tourism development can only be sustained if the intervention takes into regard certain crucial elements. Firstly, the uniqueness of Charida as a destination lies in its practiced cultural heritage that is Chau mask. Thus, it needs to be remembered that Charida will only cater to a specialized market, not any general market. Hence, to sustain this specialized market, it becomes crucial to safeguard the traditional practice of Chau mask making. Chau is a living heritage and dynamically changes with time. Thus, the art of mask making should not be seen as an aggregate of the past and its safeguarding measures must allow room for diversification and innovation in the creative produce by retaining the heritage components.

Secondly, conducting capacity building training for the hospitality stakeholders in and around Charida like the hoteliers to make them understand the need to shift towards sustainable tourism practices like waste management, optimal utilization of space and hard infrastructure and avoiding unnecessary constructions, which have adverse

environmental effects, can be identified as the need of the hour. Thirdly, promoting green transportation and facilitating green investment for tourism development is crucial. Fourthly, to generate sustainable impact, there is immense need to develop entrepreneurial capacities of local community members so that the cause of tourism can get furthered through local self-sustaining ventures. Finally, the GI accreditation of Charida's Chau mask needs to be included in the destination branding strategy so that cultural tourism development is premised on the unique offerings of the destination. Community-led cultural tourism development by keeping into account the above-mentioned aspects has the potential to build community resilience and endow in them coping up abilities to deal with difficult times. The above research material thus shows practical evidence as to how tourist behaviour shifted in the new normal and gave birth to cultural tourism destinations like Charida, both of which symbiotically nurtured each other and how in the background safeguarding of community cultural practices acted as a catalytic force in achieving collective resilience through tourism practices.

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