Problematizing tourism for conservation: An eco-cultural critique on sustainability

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Nature conservation has often been depicted as an effective policy measure to redress the ongoing environmental problems across the globe. The need to ensure sustainability for people's secured subsistence has rendered nature conservation an indispensable scheme in the tourism development policy. It is evident that during the last couple of decades, the notion of "conservation" has become less established whilst tourism development has been prioritised as a profit making venture by both the national and international agencies. Numerous solutions have been prescribed by international organisations adopting tourism as an "immense potentiality" which mostly represented a sustainability effort for the local development and environment. South Asia in general and Bangladesh, in particular, are no different, since policy for nature conservation has been misplaced and misread to reach sustainability goals, as it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda. From a systematic literature review, it was found that the use of natural resources by local people was exemplified as a threat to sustainability where the relations between conservation and tourism became a policy issue. The paper intends to problematise the mechanism of tourism policies for nature conservation or conservation policies for tourism development that overlooks the local eco-cultural management practice for sustainability. Along with the environmental discourses, an eco-cultural critique on sustainability was employed.

KEYWORDS

tourism, conservation, sustainability, eco-cultural critique, problematization

Introduction

From time immemorial, nature has been transformed into a resource for the livelihoods of human-beings. The growing transformation of nature for needs and development has generally overlooked "the fundamental principles of environment that is widely responsible for the environmental cost" (Duffy, 2013, 605-626). Crises, for instance global warming, climate change, food scarcity and increasing levels of poverty, in South Asia have been presented as grounds for environmental ruin. It is now evident that these challenges have gradually been increasing as a result of human-led actions. The use of resources for the local subsistence in developing countries who are only dependent on the local ecology has often put pressure on the remaining natural resources

(Adams, 2004). This has made it necessary to employ various approaches and interventions from a number of global and local interest groups and alliances from regional and international conservation authorities at different levels. Redressing human-made environmental challenges through biodiversity conservation is now reckoned as a prime global concern (Takacs, 1996). Over the last few years in South Asia, conservation goals have been redesigned in order to improve human wellbeing in general, which is collectively pronounced to be "development." The term "conservation" is currently a leading term in the global environmental discourse that increasingly impacts tourism development as a policy issue. The contextualisation of natural resource for human use, the effects of its degradation and the methods proposed by conservancy groups to counteract this have a profound effect not only on the ecology but also on the livelihoods and wellbeing of local communities in poverty-stricken countries of South Asia (Wood, 1996; Dubey, 2007; Banik et al., 2008). Nevertheless, applications of the solutions of the degraded environmental issue are problematic for resource conservation. Perhaps, this context has facilitated conservation to take "a relevant public policy issue where concern for other environmental issues has been subject to the 'issue-attention cycle'" (Kusmanoff et al., 2017, 160-165; Hannigan, 2006, 39).

During the last couple of decades, the global development and conservation actors have paid attention on trying to come together to promote tourism as one of the major policies to approach the dual challenges of retaining sustainability and sponsoring community wellbeing in the resourceful ecological zone (Liu, 2003; Hall, 2011). Ensuring sustainability for people's secured subsistence rendered nature conservation an indispensable scheme in the tourism development policy. It is evident that during the last couple of decades, the notion of "conservation" has become less established whilst tourism development has been prioritised as a profit-making venture by both the national and international agencies. Numerous solutions have been prescribed by the international organisations adopting tourism as an 'immense potentiality' which mostly represented by a sustainability effort for the local development and environment. South Asia in general and Bangladesh, in particular, are no different since policy for nature conservation has been misplaced and misread to reach sustainability goals, as it has always been connected with the tourism development agenda. It is conventionally asserted that the use of natural resources by local people was exemplified as a threat to sustainability where the relations between conservation and tourism became a policy issue. The plan and process are commonly taken for granted as a solution to the conservation and development questions since they demand financing from the global actors where counteracting opinions and aspirations are almost absent. Additionally, tourism became a potential contributor to the issues that are significantly driving the environmental loss, for instance, overexploitation, change in

habitat, climate change, pollution and extra-terrestrial species (Hall, 2010, 253-266; GFANC, 1997). The corporate actors appreciate that it is essential to evaluate how nature-based tourism validates its importance to connect the people with nature in an ecosystem. Thus, tourism became a favorable market-led mechanism in conservation practices. In the policy and practice of conservancy agencies, [eco]tourism is viewed as "one of the supportive frontiers of biodiversity for utilization of the bio-ecological resources of an area" (Bashar, 2018, 1-10). On the other hand, the politics of conservation treating tourism as an another possible action to discourage local communities from uninterrupted access to natural resources weakens the local capacity and position. This paper attempted to problematise the normative tourism policy for conservation or *vice versa* through an eco-cultural critique as the indigenous people in South Asia in particular are dependent on the natural resources of their surroundings, nurture forestlands as the part of their lives, and connect their non-material aspects such as customs, rituals, traditions and social actions with the hill ecological system. Soini and Dessein (2016) proposed a framework of "culture as sustainability," and in this study we suggest an eco-cultural perspective for connecting tourism with culture and sustainability. We delineated the intertwined relations between tourism and conservation and the challenges of cultural sustainability. Tourism policies, which are disseminated by development actors to establish sustainability, help to understand the neo-liberal practice that construct subjective discourses to devalue the local wisdom and capacity about environmental resource management with a nature-culture nexus.

Research methodology

The research methodology is based on the critical and systematic literature review of a broader framework of sustainability discourses in the context of tourism and conservation practices in a cultural setting. A substantial number of scientific articles, books, national and international policies, reports, speeches and international meeting protocols were reviewed and reevaluated by a systematic analysis on tourism and its politics. As sustainability discourses deconstruct a culture-specific way of development, culture becomes instrumental in raising questions about the politics of tourism when conservation policy devalues the eco-cultural practice of natural resource management that reflect a sense of local identity (Soini and Dessein, 2016). We introduced local "cultural practices" as a methodological tool to analyze the potentials and problems of tourism through conservation policy and to understand the sustainability paradox. An eco-cultural critique was theoretically applied to the issues concerning the concepts and notions of tourism and conservation.

Culture as a channel for sustainability

Notions of "tourism sustainability" and "sustainable tourism development" became vague and contested terms since the word "sustainability" was first pronounced in Brundtland's report (Soini and Dessein, 2016, 1-12). Culture and sustainability have different meanings and contextual connotations. How culture influences sustainability is still an unexplored issue. Understanding how culture can be a channel for promoting sustainability rather than a hurdle is crucial to the development of "cultural sustainability." Few studies have conceptualised the concepts together as "cultural sustainability" to evaluate it as part of social sustainability (Chiu, 2004; Cuthill, 2009; Vallace et al., 2011; Soini and Dessein, 2016). It is instrumental to incorporate 'culture' in sustainability discourse, as most of the sustainable development goals are embedded with culture-induced human actions and behaviours. In fact, sustainability is not only a process, system or strategy, but a state of mind of the people who are within it. According to post-modern critiques, as culture is viewed as prerequisite for local development, culture-embedded experiences and aspirations of locals need to be accounted for environmental or social sustainability (Vallace et al., 2011). This leads to an eco-culturally resourceful and sustainable society. For instance, eco-cultural sustainability was initiated in the 'Tourism National Policy-2010' to strengthen the local economy for national contribution in Bangladesh (MoCAT, 2010) "while also ensuring and enhancing traditional cultural values and protecting the integrity of the natural environment" (Pickel-Chevalier and Ketut, 2016; cited in Nogués-Pedregal et al., 2017, 88-108). However, Hof and Blazquez-Salom (2015, 770-796; cited in Bianchi, 2018, 88-102) challenged the state's tourism policy that signified that the nature-culture based tourism model has progressively been restructured towards sustainability through better planning and projects. Rather, the mechanism of tourism development constitutes a "sustainability fix" masking the interest of capital by eco-culture friendly tourism and thereby the intensified use of scarce natural resources (Bianchi, 2018, 88-102). In principle, "nature-culture basis tourism allows neoliberalism to turn the very crises it has created into new sources of accumulation that conceals the contradictions between economic growth and environmental sustainability" (Duffy, 2015, 529-543; Büscher et al., 2012). One of the core justifications for nature-culture based tourism is that nature and culture can be conserved or saved because of their "market value," and hence they can be commodified (Büscher et al., 2012, 4-30; cited in Duffy, 2015, 529-543). For instance, when tourism is well established, cultural values and customs are in danger, because of market competition. It grows an individuality which is not the local communal behavior for South Asian indigenous communities. Collectivisation is broken up and class divisions increase as is evident in the empirical study of South Asian scholars (Shiva, 1993; Shiva,

1997; Dubey, 2007; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009; Ahmed, 2017; Hettiarachchi, 2019; Rahman, 2019). The development of unplanned tourism in South Asia has had an impact on the sense of belongingness attached to the places, and the reciprocal relations between nature and indigenous communities (Sajib, 2022, 273-285). Tourism is mostly a driving force of transformation that sometimes engenders in local cultural wellbeing, and the commodification of culture and nature contributes to vanish the real cultural behaviours of indigenous communities (cited in Sajib, 2022, 273-285; Bunten, 2008; King and Stewart, 1996; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004). For instance, Escobar (2008, 169) illustrates that "such development policies and resource management tendencies of economic gain not only create challenges for the local people and their traditional knowledge of management but wreak havoc on local practices and have serious negative consequences for local sustainable food sources, sustainable development and environmental practices, and local ecosystems" (cited in Datta, 2015). Several scholars from Bangladesh (Chakma, 2008; Ahmed, 2017; Roy, 2020) showed how public and private agencies validate state forest conservation policies over indigenous communities. National and regional agencies sensitise that the resource use patterns of indigenous people in Bangladesh affect the sustainability of livelihoods as well as environmental degradation. Thus, tourism became the best alternative solution to distract from the people's dependency on forest resources and for local development.

Branding tourism for conservation

Nowadays, tourism is defined as a "developmentalizable" entity and it becomes the largest global industry based on its contribution to global GDP, the increase of employment rate, and the offerings of its profitable services (Cole, 2008; Dalcher, 2017). Biodiversity-enriched countries, for instance, are coming across a very fast tourism development: "23 of them record over 100 percent growth in the last 10 years, and more than 50 percent of these receive over 1 million international tourists per year; 13 percent of biodiversity hotspot countries receive over 5 million international tourists per year" (Christ et al., 2003, vi; UNEP and CI, 2003). Through the tourism, the conservation of nature is mostly reckoned as a sustainable practice for the global and local actors in the context of mitigating global environmental loss and improving local livelihoods. Moreover, shaping "environment," "nature," "wilderness" or "biodiversity" as a "common good" and placing a value on "natural capital" has come to be gradually more noticeable in global political debates since the 1980s (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Costanza et al., 1997, 253-260; Van Koppen, 2000, 300-318). There is a long-lasting argument about how to associate nature conservation with poverty reduction and tourism development in local communities (Adams et al., 2004,

1146-1149; Scuttari et al., 2021; Wells and McShane, 2004, 513-519). The community conservation policies and actions are frequently shaped as "win–win" prospects with environmental and socio-economic gains (Chaigneau and Brown, 2016, 36). Conservation and tourism development are mostly slowed down by contested notions of sustainability in a local community (Streimikiene et al., 2021; Keep, 2008, 311-321). However, the notion of tourism sustainability is by no means refuted, as if its significance is spontaneous or recognizable, although the idea of sustainable tourism is adopted with blurred meaning (Hunter, 1997; Ponton and Asero, 2018). In fact, sustainable tourism now "represents an unstable paradigm, its meaning contested between interested social actors such as the tourist companies, advertisers, environmental pressure groups, local communities and, last but not least, consumers" (Ponton and Asero, 2018, 45-62). In an increasing number of cases, it is observed that tourism provides an insufficient supply of capital for conservation and supports local communities as well as an economic stimulation to take care of natural resource (Scuttari et al., 2021; Streimikiene et al., 2021). The connection between tourism and biodiversity is not always optimistic, especially while tourism development takes place with a lack of proper management structures and policies in order to foster nature conservation and distribute visible profits to local communities. Conservation and tourism sometimes do not succeed while the local concerns and their inherent capabilities and experiences for the sustainable prospect are not considered as valuable (Bologna and Spierenburg, 2015, 119-138). It is believed that "biodiversity conservation associated with community and nature-based tourism stimulates many other nature-friendly businesses" (Donlan, 2005, 913-914).

Critiques of the development models prescribed by international donors stated that foreign aid and structural adjustment schemes to stimulate tourism and development have mostly not succeeded in dealing with environmental crises (Shiva, 1993; Oliver-Smith, 2010). The concept of the tourism development overlooks the necessity of nature conservation, whereas economic development is given urgent importance. Generally, the two notions of "sustainability" and "development" have, to some extent, conflicting connotations: 'Sustainability' indicates stability and coexistence, but "development" denotes progress and transformation (Robinson and Picard, 2006; Giddens, 2009). Therefore, environmentalists are captivated by the "sustainability" approach, whereas public and private enterprises emphasise "development," typically indicating GDP growth (Giddens, 2009). It is evident that conservation and development with tourism are not only unsuccessful in their plans and actions but also not characteristically relevant and have, in fact, sustained poverty in many cases (Harrison, 2008, 851-868). However, another paradigmatic shift in development currently focuses on nature-friendly pro-local tourism strategies. The shift along with "nature" demanding to "repay its way" and for local people

to be deliberately engaged in conservation policies has directed to materialise "ecotourism" as an added liable practice of nature-friendly tourism in South Asia. It endorses biodiversity conservation and also generates economic value for local people living in poverty. In the seventh assembly of the UNCSD in 1999, UNEP stressed that "the involvement of local communities in tourism development and operation appears to be one important condition for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity" (Christ et al., 2003, 4). Commitments of global and governmental actors in accordance with the CBD guidelines have been endorsed to strengthen the movement on "Sustainable Tourism in Vulnerable Ecosystems by creating tourism and biodiversity more cooperative to each other, involving local or indigenous communities, and developing infrastructure and resolving land disputes" (UNEP and CI, 2003, 27). They are critically important for the sustainability of tourism, "influencing not only tourism development itself but also controlling other forms of development that might be detrimental to the economic sustainability of tourism in the short or long term" (Mowforth and Munt 2015, 1-476; Fennel, 2008, 9; Christ et al., 2003).

There is a long-standing debate on whether tourism is a stable means of conservation or not, whether it takes care of the plants and animals in their natural habitats, whether it is likely to bring together conservation with the expansion of corporate values and income, and whether tourism can decrease regional migration and other concerns that locals are currently encountering. One specific issue is that tourism is overvalued and can serve as a further means for developing social, economic or environmental scenarios but it cannot be the best one. Adams (2003, 108), for instance, claims that "on the one hand, if it can be shown even on economic grounds the case for conservation makes sense, all to the good. On the other hand, it might not often be so good if conservation-economists suddenly asking the rules to be changed back so that the game can be replayed on stronger grounds." Assessing the effects of tourism on nature and culture, however, is notably multifaceted and contested. Tourism is portrayed as benign to some extent, and often as the "only potential" or the only sustainable substitute for a nature-protective and resource-inclusive development approach in South Asia. In practice, it often appears that tourism is branded as an economic "ladder" in the discourse of those who highlight the issue of the sustainability of any conservation policy. On the contrary, there is an argument that extreme dependency on measurable values of nature conservation through tourism is a "slippery slope" (Adams, 2003, 108). However, alternative tourism (such as community-based tourism, nature-based tourism, pro-poor tourism, responsible tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism) for instance, is largely believed to mutually develop the livelihoods of local people and environmental sustainability. It is proposed that "returns to nature encourage people to disinvest in other means of livelihood, particularly livestock and cultivation, thereby

reducing the 'degrading' effects of these forms of land-use while sustaining incomes" (Powell, 1998, 121). However, if the earnings from tourism remain marginal, and even without culture-specific needs connecting to livelihoods and means of earnings, it is implausible that local people will perceive nature as an alternative way of living. In fact, such beliefs might eventually lead to the "individualizing and profit-maximizing ideology of neoliberalism" (Sullivan, 2006, 105-135). Following Sullivan (2006), Fletcher (2011, 443-461) depicts with a neo-liberal critique that "sustainable tourism practices are accessible mainly for a 'transnational capitalist class' and serve to sustain capitalism more broadly" (cited in Hanna et al., 2015).

Discourses conducted in the public domain have a strong impact on how local people are involved in policy issues, and adjustments surrounded by the conservation and sustainable tourism discourse also have effects for public commitment in conservation policy. How conservation is valued, measured and meant to policy makers and local people as well, is often influenced by the tourism policy discourses with which it interacts (Gustafsson, 2013, 39–54; Coffey, 2015, 1-20). Public environmental policy for conservation, for example, sustainability and ecotourism, is usually a liability of governments as signatories to the CBD-1992, even though it is largely assigned to local governments or local authorities that may have separate priorities and goals (CBD, 1992). This makes tourism policy for conservation characteristically political in nature. It is important to conservation NGOs as well; few of them have visible involvement in conservation plans and actions, but the majority are engaged in conservation advocacy. However, the manifestations of nature and culture is a form of the political approaches along with tourism and conservation policy. Therefore, it is taken for granted that tourism will protect nature, produce profit or support people, supply basic materials, and promote an aesthetic or moral way of thinking about nature conservation. Though particular attention is currently devoted to local wisdom in conservation discussions, specifically in article 8j of the CBD, this is not enough and "mostly misleading that ground reality is hardly valued in its own languages or it is defunctionalized to support the western conservation policy" (Shiva, 1997, 1-148). For example, Escobar (1998, 53-82) doubted that "biodiversity does not exist in an absolute sense. Rather, it anchors a discourse that articulates a new relation between nature and society in global contexts of science, cultures, and economies." However, the development, through conservation and sustainable tourism, is never problematised, albeit critics have increasingly drawn attention to the impracticality of balancing the preconditions of economy and environment in the current policy structures (Escobar, 1999, 1-30).

South Asian context

South Asia consists of five regions: 1) India 2) southern islands of Sri Lanka and the Maldives 3) northern mountain area from Kashmir to Nepal and Bhutan 4) the east, Bangladesh 5) the west, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 2). The world's best marine resources (coral reefs of Maldives), seashores (Cox's Bazar) and mangrove zones (Sundarbans) are situated in the territory. Rasul and Manandhar (2009, 187–207) asserted that "its centuries old civilizations, rich and unique cultural and biological diversity, diverse and vast array of geographic features, attractive oceans and beaches, mangrove forests, mountain ranges including the great Himalayas, the Karakorum and the HinduKush mountains and, above all, very hospitable people, make the region a very attractive place for intra-regional as well as international tourists." Ohmae (1995) termed the territory a "natural economic zone." For example, with the Annapurna Tourism Development Project and the Bhakthipur Conservation Project in Nepal, it initiated an effective tourism model, tendering its unique nature and heritage conservation, community benefit, and sustainable funding features (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 4). Through its 'Tourism Earth Lung' initiative, Sri Lanka developed its conservative position towards becoming a decarbonised tourism destination by 2018 (Hettiarachchi, 2019, 5).

Tourism became an area of cooperative interest for SAARC in the late 1980s (Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187–207; Timothy, 2003; Dubey, 2007). With the backing of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), it designed a comprehensive Tourism Development Plan (TDP) to develop tourism. The major goals of the TDP are: "to promote eco-tourism in order to reduce poverty, and to facilitate private sector investment in tourism" (Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187–207). Nevertheless, tourism has not contributed to the wellbeing of locals or nature conservation as expected in South Asia. Poverty remains a major problem, often affecting marginalised rural populations that depend on some of the most biodiverse landscapes for their livelihoods (Regional Report, 2018, 210-291). The challenges facing nature conservation are, therefore, rapid economic growth and rising consumption, as well as poverty and marginalisation. In addition, tourism has a particular impact on the underprivileged indigenous locals in South Asia. Hill and forest areas are widely accepted places for tourism, but these places are especially vulnerable because local wisdom relating to natural resource management is ignored. For instance, tourism gradually instigates dislocation, heightens living expenses, prevents access to resources, creates socio-cultural disorder, and ultimately marginalises local people. The highly environment-sensitive countries in South Asia, such as the Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan, developed the nature-based tourism industry. A crucial issue is that if these countries are successfully developing tourism to generate an income source for local people and are mitigating these needs with natural resources, why are people in these countries poverty-stricken even now?

Natural resources in Bangladesh have significantly contributed to the national economy in the context of livestock, agriculture, forestry, fishery and nature-based

tourism. Bashar (2018, 1-10) reported that "the largest mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, provides livelihood and employment for half a million households and more than 60 million people depend on aquatic resources every day, and 60 percent of the country's protein requirement is met through fish consumption." However, its natural resources are vulnerable due to a transformation from local subsistence to a national cash economy. Forest land-grabbing in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) for tourism development is a good example of this. The development and promotion of tourism has not been responsive enough to the potential implications for the natural and cultural heritage of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is currently pursuing new schemes under the national environmental policies in order to balance sustainable resource use. Moreover, Bangladesh has signed conservation-related "Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)and the obligations of CBD Bangladesh has made 1st National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in 2006 and 2nd NBSAP (2016–2021) in 2015 to steer biodiversity conservation endeavors" (Faisal, 2018). It has also framed guidelines, policies and legal charters connected to biodiversity and tourism. These are: National Conservation Strategy (2016–2031), Bangladesh Biodiversity Act 2017, National Tourism Policy 2010, The Tourism Vision 2020, National Forest Policy 2016 and Ecologically Critical Areas (ECA) Rules 2017 (Faisal, 2018). The National Sustainable Development Strategy and the Seventh Five-Year Plan of the country have unambiguously highlighted the biodiversity conservation concerns posed by nature-based tourism (Faisal, 2018; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009, 187–207). Many biodiversity-rich areas have been made into Botanical Gardens, Safari Parks, Eco-Parks, Fish Sanctuaries, Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks to promote conservation and the sustainable use of resources for economy (Faisal, 2018). In Bangladesh, alarming threats to biodiversity include "rapid and unplanned urbanization, conversion of forests and wetlands into tourism spot, unsustainable use and over exploitation of natural resources in tourism destination, uncontrolled tourism" (Faisal, 2018) in the landscape of environmentally sensitive, ecologically valuable and biologically diverse protected areas (e.g., in CHT, Cox's Bazar and St. Martin Island) (Sajib et al., 2022, 89-103). It is evident that this conservation-through-tourism policy has not only contributed to environmental loss, but has fuelled socio-environmental crisis, in which locals have become double victims as they have been widely represented as solely responsible for local environmental damage (Sajib et al., 2022, 89-103).

Blaming the victims

There is a growing tendency to generalise and blame local people for socio-environmental crises in all spheres due to their visible interactions with environmental resources (Sajib et al., 2022, 273-285). Local people are deliberately characterised as a threat to biodiversity, as a challenge to be controlled, rather than as local actors to be involved and measured. Local people, for instance, the indigenous communities of CHT in Bangladesh, in the context of identity recognition are redefined in terms of ownership and participation. Locals should be involved in conservation plans and policies as influential actors who are able to perceive and value the economic significance of nature and who can hence conserve it for their own interest. This viewpoint is often overlooked and underestimated in the current projections of measuring and interacting with nature. It furthermore displaces local communities, which are disregarded as stakeholders as meticulously characterised by market-induced actors. Thus, locals become less able to perform the significant role of being valuable "eco-cultural subjects" (Goldman, 2007) as designed by conservation benefits. It has been suggested that indigenous people serve as "para-biologists" and can save the wildlife by employing their traditional knowledge, and support conservation efforts by conducting their own observations and measurements (Escobar, 1998). Nevertheless, local communities are often excluded from the dialogue about conservation and development policy. It appears that local culture and knowledge are not considered to have any value added power, and are characterised as a barrier to conservation and development. As stated by Brown (2002, 6) "the conservation-orientated literature traditionally viewed local community welfare and development as directly conflicting with the objectives and practice of biodiversity conservation." There is no attention paid to local livelihoods in poorly protected regions and the indigenous people of CHT, for instance, are often forced to leave their land in the name of conservation. Locals are persuaded that "fortress conservation" or the "fences and fines" policy is the best way to protect biodiversity (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000, 1421-1438). For example, the indigenous people in CHT have lived in a certain area for a long period of time but have been obliged to depart their locality because it has been closed off by the government as an extremely restricted zone that is in danger and needs immediate action. It would seem that since poverty and conservation are considered to be different policy areas, the connection between locals and their locality is neglected. Action against these oversights new policy is installed with the target "to increase benefits from alternative livelihood activities as a way to reduce the threat to conservation from local people" (Berkes, 2007, 15188-15193). One of the most powerful and convincing strategies is the application of a buffer zone near to a core zone, with the consequence that the core zone meets high-level safeguards so as to conserve the ecosystem (Ramus and Montiel, 2005, 377-414). To ensure conservation entrance into this zone is restricted, and to provide economic alternatives, such as tourism, local people can access the buffer zone for their subsistence. Nevertheless, the ground reality of access to resources for subsistence contests this discourse. One of the

flaws of this model is that it is not clearly associated with changing the behaviour of local people, since they are not responsive to the value of nature conservation (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000). However, both the environment and local culture is impacted by tourism since they are often projected as commodities for tourists; for example, following the introduction of tourism in CHT, Mowfurth and Munt (2015, 1-476) described the "zooification" of indigenous culture. The ethnic groups in South Asia and other indigenous communities around the world have been subjected to "zooification." People and their cultures are projected as "untouched" or even "primitive" describing to originality which is a trading spot for tourism agencies (Mowforth & Munt, 2015). With the discourse of "living in harmony with nature" (Ulloa, 2005), the tourism market has succeeded in allowing tourists to ignore the poverty of indigenous people. The tourism business advertises culture as a commodity to tempt tourists to experience another world, for example, as an "exotic," "sensualised" and "naturalised" "other." Indigenous cultures and people characterise the way to sustainability through "living in harmony with nature" (Ulloa, 2005). In indigenous terrains of South Asia, nature conservation policy, with tourism as the preferred method, has habitually been formed on totalitarian approaches, which on the whole has not contributed to producing long-lasting livelihoods for locals, creating a sense of marginalisation and inequality, which is hardly ever an effective ground for nature conservation plan and policy (Timothy, 2003; Rasul and Manandhar, 2009). Therefore, it could be argued that tourism has failed to connect the distance between nature and culture and has reproduced the "othering" of nature, presenting nature as separate from society.

Conclusion

This study made an attempt not only to provide an eco-cultural critique of contemporary approaches to conservation within the tourism and development framework, but also to problematise the market-induced policy discourses on sustainability, where environmental values were explicitly measured in economic solutions. In this paper, conservation has been problematised as a policy issue signifying a dominant connection between nature and culture, and constituting a linkage of actors through which tourism and conservation are articulated and negotiated. This study suggested that conservation and tourism policies are not as impartial as they are designed to be, and the challenges need to be identified in respect to applying these policy structures to sustain conservation and development. Conservation and tourism are aimed at money-making projects for seeing and using nature. Regardless of its uncertainty, the formulation of a nexus between nature and culture represents an alternative policy context for tourism and conservation. Categorising

natural diversity as an environmentally distinct phenomenon and problematising the conceptualisations, views, principles and politics of various policy actors, the paper contributed to identifying the drawbacks of orthodox conservation policy. Many critics (Philipp, et al., 2022; Fennel, 2008; Sullivan, 2006; Wells, 1995, 319-333) argued that approaches towards interconnected "conservation and tourism policies tend to misplace the 'conservation' vision, with misreading over whether conservation or tourism is the way or the end." The relationship between conservation and tourism has more commonly been revealed to be biased in support of the policy actors, and in contrast to the local communities. Moreover, cultural issues of sustainability in tourism development are connected to the impact of local community wellbeing. The contribution of tourism to the nature-culture nexus still needs to be reviewed through empirical and theoretical observation. Finally, it can be argued that eco-cultural behaviour, rituals and practices are customarily influential in redressing the challenges of the three pillars of sustainability which lead to sustainable development if properly addressed by the culturally embedded tourism policy.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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