



# Reviving Intangible Cultural Heritage through Sustainable Tourism: The Case of the Kholey Dai Festival

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## Abstract

The Kholey Dai Festival, celebrated annually in Parengtar village, Kalimpong district, West Bengal, India, demonstrates how community-driven cultural initiatives can align with sustainable tourism principles while preserving intangible cultural heritage. This study critically examines the festival's contributions to cultural preservation, community-based tourism (CBT) development, and environmental sustainability. Using a mixed-methods approach including qualitative interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and quantitative surveys of visitors, vendors, and homestay providers. The findings reveal that the festival revitalises traditional music, dances, and agrarian rituals, while strengthening community pride and generating livelihood opportunities. Economically, the festival generated revenues that directly benefited households through homestays, food, and handicraft sales. Environmentally, the festival enforces a zero-waste policy. Nonetheless, challenges include infrastructure strain, carrying capacity limits, commercialisation risks, and uneven distribution of benefits. This paper situates Kholey Dai as a model of grassroots sustainable tourism with implications for rural festivals globally.

**Keywords:** Community-Based Tourism; Sustainable Tourism; Cultural Heritage; Rural Festival; Visitor Satisfaction

## 1. Introduction

Festivals are cultural celebrations deeply rooted in community traditions and heritage. Within tourism research, festivals and special events have drawn considerable attention as attractions that not only increase visitor numbers but also facilitate cultural exchange. The phenomenon of travelling to attend festivals, known as festival tourism, highlights the intersection of cultural events and travel (Getz, 2005; Quinn, 2006). Festivals enhance

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a destination's appeal by offering authentic local traditions and enriching visitor experiences. They are platforms for cultural expression through music, dance, rituals, and art, which both entertain tourists and reinforce community pride and identity (Getz, 2008; Quinn, 2006). As Getz (1997) observed, festivals are integral to cultural identities and can strengthen the social fabric of host communities. Many festivals also become signature events shaping the global image of destinations, such as Munich's Oktoberfest or Rio de Janeiro's Carnival (Smith & Forest, 2006). Increasingly, scholars emphasise the sustainability of festivals and how they can be designed to protect the environment, safeguard heritage, and benefit local people. A sustainable festival balances economic gains with sociocultural well-being and environmental responsibility, echoing the broader concept of sustainable tourism (Mowforth & Munt, 2015). Key principles include minimising negative environmental impacts, ensuring equitable community participation, and safeguarding cultural practices for future generations. Organisations such as UNESCO (2018) recognise festivals as intangible cultural heritage that must be preserved for sustainable development. Thus, when designed beyond entertainment, festivals can act as vehicles for cultural preservation, community empowerment, and sustainable tourism.

The Kholey Dai Festival in Parengtar, a rural Himalayan village in Kalimpong district, West Bengal, offers a compelling case. Held annually, Kholey Dai (originally *Khala Dhai*) has its roots in agriculture. The term "dai" means rice grain in Nepali, reflecting its origins as a post-harvest thanksgiving ritual. Traditionally, it marked the completion of the rice harvest, blending reverence for nature with community celebration. It has evolved into a larger cultural festival, and it retains its symbolic role of promoting harmony between humans and nature. Preserving rituals, dances, and oral histories creates a living link between generations, ensuring continuity of cultural practices. Kholey Dai sets itself apart with a strong emphasis on sustainable community involvement. The festival is entirely organised by the villagers, led by the Parengtar Nawlo Umang Welfare Society in collaboration with initiatives like Muhaan and Café Kalimpong. Every household contributes some by hosting visitors in homestays, others by cooking traditional meals, performing, or assisting with logistics. This collective participation ensures authenticity and prevents outside control over the event. Additionally, Kholey Dai adopts a zero-waste policy: organisers use biodegradable decorations and utensils, banana leaves, bamboo cups, clay pots, discourage plastics, and promote recycling. The festival thus becomes a platform for environmental awareness, training villagers in sustainable practices, and demonstrating responsible rural tourism management. For Parengtar, the festival has become a catalyst for alternative livelihoods, reducing dependence on subsistence farming and discouraging outmigration. Local pride and youth engagement have

increased, with many embracing cultural entrepreneurship. In essence, Kholey Dai represents a community-driven tourism model where culture and environment are treated as primary assets, and tourism functions as a means to sustain them.

However, growing popularity also presents challenges. Parengtar's remote location means infrastructure is basic: roads are poor, transport is limited, and sanitation facilities are inadequate. The sudden influx of visitors strains these systems, raising risks of litter, water shortages, and overcrowding. Without careful planning, the festival could face environmental degradation and visitor dissatisfaction. Equally pressing is the threat of commercialisation. As tourist demand rises, pressure to adapt performances or seek external sponsorship could dilute cultural authenticity (Getz, 2008). Additionally, benefit distribution must remain equitable. If only a few households capture most tourism income, social divisions could undermine community cohesion. These issues underscore the delicate balance between development and preservation. Despite such risks, Kholey Dai provides valuable insights into how grassroots festivals can embody sustainable tourism principles. Its environmental initiatives align with global calls for eco-friendly practices. Its community ownership model demonstrates how festivals can empower residents by keeping control local, preventing exploitation by external stakeholders. Most importantly, it contributes to intangible cultural heritage preservation, ensuring rituals and traditions remain vibrant while adapting to contemporary contexts (UNESCO, 2018). This study sets out to critically assess the contribution of the Kholey Dai Festival to sustainable tourism in Parengtar with two main objectives: To evaluate the contribution of the Kholey Dai Festival to sustainable tourism.

- To examine its role in preserving intangible cultural heritage and fostering community development amid growing tourism.
- By analysing Kholey Dai as a case study, we gain insights into how small-scale, community-led cultural festivals can serve as “cultural doorways” for visitors while catalysing sustainable rural development. Lessons from Parengtar highlight the importance of balancing authenticity, community ownership, and responsible tourism management. Festivals like Kholey Dai show that cultural tourism, when rooted in local agency and sustainability, can become a powerful strategy for rural empowerment and heritage preservation in a globalised world.

## 2. Literature Review

Tourism has long been recognised as a powerful force for economic growth, cultural exchange, and community development, particularly in destinations endowed with cultural heritage (Girard & Nijkamp, 2009). Within this

sector, festival tourism, a niche form of event tourism, has gained attention since the 1980s. Festivals provide opportunities to showcase arts, crafts, performances, and lifestyles, acting as concentrated cultural expressions for visitors while reaffirming identity and pride for local communities. Research suggests festivals not only attract tourists but also stimulate economies, strengthen community bonds, and shape destination image (Getz & Frisby, 1988; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Raj, 2004). Iconic events such as Munich's Oktoberfest or Rio's Carnival demonstrate how festivals intertwine with cultural narratives and tourism branding (Smith & Forest, 2006).

### ***2.1. Festivals as Cultural and Social Platforms***

Beyond economic benefits, festivals foster cultural meaning and social cohesion. Getz (1997) argued that festivals are integral to community identity, reinforcing a sense of place. Chwe's (1998) idea of "social incentives" highlights how festivals motivate locals to engage in collective life, from volunteering to entrepreneurship. Businesses often sponsor events, seeing them as occasions for visibility and interaction. Moreover, festivals can catalyse infrastructure improvements, such as better roads and services (Visser, 2005), enhancing long-term community development.

Festivals are also sites of social inclusion. Research shows they bridge intergenerational gaps by encouraging the transfer of traditional songs, dances, and stories from elders to youth. They bring together diverse groups across ethnicity, class, and age, thereby strengthening social capital (Derrett, 2003; Finkel, 2010). Yolal et al. (2016) observed that participation can raise morale, subjective well-being, and quality of life, while inspiring residents to develop new skills in event management, arts, and hospitality. Such empowerment not only benefits festivals but also sustains wider community resilience and long-term support for tourism.

Despite benefits, festival tourism presents challenges. Growing visitor numbers often lead to congestion, noise, litter, and strain on local services (Kim & Uysal, 2003; Gursoy et al., 2004). Blanco et al. (2009) noted that poorly managed events cause environmental degradation, including damage to parks and pollution of waterways. Seasonality exacerbates problems: intense short-term surges of tourists can overwhelm communities, leaving infrastructure underutilised for the rest of the year.

Cultural impacts are equally concerning. Scholars like Duffy (2015) and Greenwood (1989) warn against commodification: festivals may alter performances to suit tourist expectations, turning rituals into staged spectacles. This "festivalization" risks eroding authenticity, undermining both heritage value and the very qualities attracting cultural tourists. Thus, unbalanced commercialisation can destabilise cultural integrity while creating dependency on external sponsorship or tourism demand.

## 2.2. Festival Sustainability and Theoretical Frameworks

In response to such mixed impacts, sustainability has become central in festival research. Getz and Page (2016) emphasise a balanced approach, where economic benefits are pursued without sacrificing environmental integrity or sociocultural equity. This framework draws from Butler's (1999) three-pillar model of sustainable tourism: Environmental integrity, minimising waste, pollution, and ecological harm while promoting conservation. Sociocultural equity, respecting local traditions, enhances cultural vitality and ensures inclusive participation. Economic viability, securing revenue and jobs that benefit local communities without creating inequalities.

Sustainable management, according to Weaver (2006) and Hall (2011), requires long-term planning, community involvement, and continuous monitoring. Closely linked is the concept of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), where communities retain ownership, agency, and fair distribution of benefits (Murphy, 1988; Zhao & Ritchie, 2007). Festivals naturally align with CBT because they stem from community traditions. Khalid et al. (2019) found that empowerment and participation lead to stronger support and sustainability. In CBT-oriented festivals, locals take on roles as planners, organisers, and beneficiaries, reinvesting profits into collective needs while building skills in hospitality, guiding, and artisan production. Conversely, dominance by external actors risks benefit leakage and misalignment with local values. To guide sustainable practice, scholars employ theoretical frameworks: Carrying Capacity Theory examines the limits of physical, ecological, and social tolerance for tourism. Festivals that exceed these thresholds risk environmental degradation and resident dissatisfaction. The refined concept of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) shifts focus from numbers to conditions, identifying thresholds (e.g., water quality, resident attitudes) and adapting management accordingly (McCool & Lime, 2001). Triple Bottom Line (TBL) (Elkington, 1997) evaluates festivals across three domains: *People* (social well-being and cultural vitality), *Planet* (environmental stewardship), and *Profit* (economic sustainability). A profitable but socially divisive or ecologically damaging event is not truly sustainable. Conversely, modestly profitable festivals that enhance community pride and conservation can be worthwhile. UNESCO's perspective reinforces this view, framing heritage festivals as potential drivers of social, economic, and environmental sustainability when responsibly managed.

Empirical assessment of festivals requires mixed methods to capture economic, social, and environmental impacts (Getz, 2010). Economic evaluation commonly uses visitor expenditure surveys, input-output models, or tools like IMPLAN to calculate direct, indirect, and induced impacts (Dwyer et al., 2000; Reid, 2011). Socio-cultural evaluation relies on resident and visitor surveys, often using Likert scales to measure

perceptions, satisfaction, authenticity, and loyalty intentions (Lee et al., 2008). Structural equation modelling has been applied to analyse determinants of community support (Gursoy et al., 2004). Studies such as Cole & Illidge (2009) regress visitor satisfaction on predictors like performance quality, crowd management, and facilities to identify key experience drivers. Environmental evaluation increasingly uses audits and monitoring. Waste audits quantify materials generated, while carbon footprint estimates emissions from energy and travel (Laing & Frost, 2010). Standards such as ISO 20121 provide checklists for sustainable event auditing (Mair & Jago, 2010). Multi-criteria frameworks, like that of Zou et al. (2021), evaluate sustainability across environmental, resource, and demand factors.

Most research on festivals focuses on large urban or global events with strong infrastructure and investment, while small rural or community-based festivals in developing regions remain underexplored. Yet, these grassroots events are vital for cultural preservation, identity, and local development despite limited resources. Liburd and Edwards (2010) stress the need to study how such festivals contribute to sustainable tourism and how they can be supported. This study, therefore, addresses a critical gap by analysing the Kholey Dai Festival as a model of grassroots sustainable tourism in the Eastern Himalayas.

### **3. Methodology**

This research employed a case study approach to investigate the Kholey Dai Festival as a bounded instance of rural sustainable tourism. Case study methodology is suitable for examining complex social phenomena in real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). By focusing on a single village and festival, the study captures the cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions holistically. A mixed-methods design was adopted to triangulate data and enhance validity. Qualitative approaches provided depth of understanding, while quantitative data offered measurable evidence of impacts. Semi-structured interviews: Conducted with 10 residents (elders, youth, homestay hosts), 8 tourists, and 5 stakeholders (officials, NGO members). Interviews explored cultural meanings, sustainability practices, and perceived benefits and challenges. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Two FGDs with community organisers and general villagers enabled collective reflection and highlighted group dynamics in decision-making. Participant observation: Researchers attended the 2022 and 2023 festivals, observing cultural performances, sustainability practices, and visitor-host interactions. Visitor Survey: A structured survey (n=150) captured demographics, motivations, expenditures, and satisfaction. Closed and open-ended questions allowed both statistical and narrative insights. Vendor and Homestay Surveys: Surveys of 30 vendors and 25 homestay providers gathered revenue data, best-selling products, and challenges. Environmental Audit: A waste audit

recorded amounts of organic, recyclable, and residual waste. Infrastructure (toilets, water, energy) was assessed for adequacy during peak visitation.

Qualitative data were transcribed and analysed through thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes such as cultural revival, empowerment, and sustainability practices were grouped into themes. Divergent views were noted to reflect equity issues and tensions. Quantitative data were analysed with descriptive statistics. Regression analysis was applied with visitor satisfaction as the dependent variable and predictors including homestay experience, cultural motivations, and awareness of sustainability practices. This identified key drivers of positive experiences. Triangulation across data sources enhanced reliability. Member checking with local informants ensured interpretations were accurate. Ethical protocols included informed consent, anonymity, and cultural sensitivity in fieldwork.

#### 4. Findings

**Table 1:** Visitor Profile (2024)

Metric	Value
Total visitors (3 days)	+3,000
Origin	90% domestic, 10% international
First-time vs Repeat	72% first-time; 28% repeat
Avg. group size	4 persons
Avg. stay length	2 days
Stayed in homestays/camps	65% of visitors
Overall satisfaction	9.2/10

Table 1 outlines key characteristics of visitors who attended the Kholey Dai Festival in 2024. The festival attracted more than 3,000 visitors during its three-day duration, which is a significant number for a small rural village like Parengtar. It shows the festival's growing popularity and its ability to draw crowds despite limited infrastructure. Most attendees came from within India, reflecting strong domestic interest. The 10% international visitors, though small, are important, as they indicate the festival's potential to emerge as a niche cultural tourism attraction beyond national borders. A majority of visitors were attending for the first time, suggesting that word-of-mouth and promotion are expanding awareness. The 28% repeat visitors demonstrate loyalty and satisfaction; people are willing to come back, which is a sign of strong cultural appeal. Visitors tended to come in small groups (families, friends, or peer travellers). This aligns with community-based tourism models where intimate, shared experiences are preferred over mass group tours. Most visitors stayed for two days, long enough to participate in the festival and engage in cultural activities. This indicates that the festival

is not just a one-day attraction but encourages overnight stays, which is crucial for economic benefits to the village. Nearly two-thirds chose local accommodations, a strong success for community-based tourism. It means revenue stays in the village rather than going to external hotels, and visitors directly experience rural life. Very high satisfaction levels show that visitors found the festival authentic, enjoyable, and worth the trip. Such high scores also suggest that sustainability, cultural depth, and hospitality resonate positively with tourists.

**Table 2: Revenue Breakdown (2024)**

Revenue Source	Amount (INR)	Share
Homestays and Camping	₹420,000	45%
Food & craft stalls	₹500,000	55%
Total	₹920,000	100%

Table 2 highlights the festival's economic impact, showing that nearly half of the revenue came from accommodations. This figure is significant because it directly benefits local households running homestays and campsites. It also indicates tourists' willingness to pay for immersive experiences. The majority of income came from food and handicraft stalls. This suggests visitors are highly engaged with local cuisine and artisanal products, making the festival not just a cultural event but a marketplace for showcasing traditional craftsmanship and gastronomy. Generating nearly ₹1 million in just three days is a remarkable achievement for a small village. Importantly, this revenue is locally distributed, strengthening household incomes and creating an incentive for cultural preservation.

**Table 3: Regression Output (Visitor Satisfaction)**

Dependent Variable: Overall Satisfaction (5-point scale)

Variable	$\beta$ Coefficient	Significance (p-value)	Remarks
Stayed in Homestay	+1.2	$p < 0.05$	Statistically significant positive effect
Motivated by Culture	+0.8	$p < 0.05$	Statistically significant positive effect
Noticed Sustainability	+0.6	$p < 0.05$	Statistically significant positive effect
Model Fit ( $R^2$ )	0.47	-	Explains 47% of variance in satisfaction

Table 3 examines the factors that most influenced visitor satisfaction, measured on a 5-point scale. Stayed in Homestay ( $\beta = +1.2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ): Visitors who stayed in homestays reported significantly higher satisfaction. This shows that immersive, community-based accommodation is central to the visitor experience. It validates the importance of promoting homestays as a key festival component. Motivated by Culture ( $\beta = +0.8$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ): Visitors motivated by cultural experiences, such as music, dance, rituals, and traditions, also reported higher satisfaction. This underscores that authenticity and cultural richness are primary draws, not just entertainment or sightseeing. Additionally, observed Sustainability ( $\beta = +0.6$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ): Tourists who observed the festival's eco-friendly practices, zero-waste policies, biodegradable materials, and recycling rated their satisfaction higher. This suggests that sustainability enhances visitor perceptions and adds value to their experience.  $R^2 = 0.47$ . The model explains 47% of the variance in visitor satisfaction, which is pretty strong for social science research. This means that nearly half of what shapes satisfaction can be traced back to these three variables: homestay experience, cultural motivation, and sustainability.

#### ***4.1. Promotion of Sustainable Practices***

Kholey Dai Festival was conceived not only as a cultural celebration but also explicitly as an eco-friendly, sustainable event. In practice, the festival has made noteworthy strides in promoting sustainable tourism principles, particularly in environmental conservation and responsible resource use. According to the organisers, one core objective from the outset was to create a model of a "zero-waste event based on local natural resources". Our observations and interviews confirm that this is not just rhetoric; concrete measures were in place and largely adhered to, making Kholey Dai a standout example of a green festival.

Firstly, the festival enforces a strict waste management policy aimed at minimising waste generation. Single-use plastics are effectively banned on the festival grounds. The food and drinks were served in eco-friendly materials: plates made of *sal* leaves or broad banana leaves, cups made of bamboo or clay, and spoons carved from wood. All these are biodegradable or reusable, drastically cutting down on plastic waste. In two years of observation, it was seen that virtually no plastic water bottles or Styrofoam plates were used, a stark contrast to many other events. Instead, water refill stations were provided where visitors could fill their own bottles or use metal cups provided on a deposit-return system. The organisers clearly communicated the policy to vendors and visitors to ensure compliance. Local volunteers managed waste bins, diligently separating organic waste from recyclables like paper or glass. It was evident that the community took pride in keeping the event clean; if a stray piece of litter was spotted,

someone promptly picked it up. Visitors, too, respected the ethos, likely influenced by the visible commitment and perhaps a bit of peer pressure in the pristine village environment. The results were remarkable: even with more than 3,000 visitors, the entire 3-day event generated only about 3.2 kg of non-recyclable waste. Essentially, all organic waste was composted, and recyclables were collected, leaving just a few kilograms of miscellaneous trash that had to go to the landfill. By demonstrating that a large gathering can be held without heaps of garbage, Kholey Dai is raising awareness about waste issues and setting an example for sustainable event management.

Another key aspect is the emphasis on local and organic resources, aligning with principles of reducing carbon footprint and supporting local economies. All food ingredients used in the communal kitchen and food stalls are sourced from the village or nearby areas. Farmers provided organic vegetables, rice, and dairy products to the festival kitchens, as donations or at subsidised cost to support the event. This farm-to-table approach not only guarantees fresh, chemical-free food for attendees but also cuts down on transportation emissions that would come from sourcing food far away. Additionally, it gives farmers a stake in the festival's success. Similarly, materials for constructing temporary pavilions or décor are locally sourced: bamboo, cane, jute, and dried grasses form the structure of stages and booths, avoiding the need for synthetics. After the festival, these natural materials can be returned to the earth or repurposed easily. Organisers mentioned an interesting point: they intentionally avoided extravagant lighting and electrical setups; most of the festival uses minimal electricity, with some areas lit by solar lanterns or traditional oil lamps. This not only adds rustic charm but conserves energy; in fact, in a region where power outages are common, relying less on grid electricity is practical.

The festival actively promotes sustainable practices among visitors through education and engagement. One segment of activities is dedicated to workshops and demonstrations highlighting sustainable living. For example, in 2022, there was a demonstration of traditional organic farming techniques, showing how manure and compost are used instead of chemical fertilisers, and how mixed cropping helps with pest control. Visitors were even invited to try their hand at planting rice saplings in a prepared paddy, a messy but fun activity for urban folks that imparted a lesson on the effort behind food production and the importance of soil health. Another workshop focused on crafting useful items from waste: an NGO collaborated to show villagers and tourists how waste fabric could be woven into doormats, or glass bottles could become planters. These interactive sessions sensitise everyone that sustainability is a shared responsibility. Notably, local children participated too, learning alongside outsiders. The cross-learning was evident when a local teenager, after attending a session on waste upcycling, started a project at school to make Eco bricks to use in construction. This indicates the

festival's influence extends into year-round community-led environmental initiatives.

From an economic sustainability viewpoint, the festival's promotion of a "cyclic economy" is evident. The term was used by an organiser to describe how the festival is designed so that resources and money circulate within the community. Money spent by tourists stays in the village via homestays and local vendors. The festival's needs are fulfilled locally rather than being imported from outside, ensuring local suppliers' benefit. Even infrastructure like stages or tents is often borrowed or rented from local sources, such as community hall benches, tents from a nearby town, rather than expensive new setups. Consequently, the festival's ecological and economic footprints are localised and circular, supporting community resilience. One direct sustainable outcome is that the cost of organising the festival is kept relatively low, which in turn means less financial risk and dependence. Organisers shared that by using mostly local resources and volunteer labour, Kholey Dai's budget is a fraction of what similar-sized events might cost elsewhere. Any surplus from donations or sponsorship is invested in community projects like improving village waste management systems or marketing the next festival.

Finally, the presence of the festival and its ethos has sparked a general environmental consciousness in the community. Villagers noted that since adopting the zero-waste festival, they have also made efforts to keep their village clean throughout the year. There is now a ban on plastic bags in local shops; people use cloth bags or baskets, a practice reinforced by the festival norms. The Gram Panchayat was inspired to install garbage bins in the village and organise monthly clean-up drives and initiatives that did not exist before. Thus, the festival's influence has permeated everyday life regarding sustainability. This mirrors findings in sustainable tourism literature that environmentally oriented tourism can encourage host communities to adopt greener practices themselves, through both awareness and the practical need to maintain an attractive environment for visitors (Mihalic, 2000). In this case, tourism acted as a catalyst for local environmental action, an outcome where, typically, tourism is seen as causing environmental strain; here, it actually improved local environmental behaviour.

#### ***4.2. Environmental and Infrastructure Challenges***

While Kholey Dai has largely been a success story for community and sustainability, the rapid increase in tourist interest has brought to light several environmental and infrastructure challenges that need addressing to ensure the event's long-term sustainability and the well-being of Parengtar. These challenges are cautionary findings highlighting areas where improvements are needed and where the limits of the local system are being tested.

One primary concern is infrastructure strain due to the influx of tourists. Parengtar, being a small village, has very basic infrastructure. There are limited roads, mostly narrow, unpaved or semi-paved paths, and a few formal accommodations aside from homestays. During the festival, the population of the village swells dramatically on peak days. They estimated 400-500 visitors present at once, a significant number considering the resident population is only a few hundred. This sudden influx puts pressure on everything from water supply to sanitation. The village's water comes from a couple of spring-fed community taps and individual wells; with so many guests, water demand skyrockets. In 2023, there were moments when certain homestays ran out of stored water and had to request an emergency supply from neighbours. Communal sharing helped avert a crisis, but it underscored that the water system is not robust enough for high tourist volumes. Similarly, waste generation, despite the zero-waste measures, did increase. For instance, the sheer volume of organic waste food leftovers, compostables, was large, and the increased use of toilets led to more sewage.

Another challenge is transportation and accessibility. The road to Parengtar is limited in capacity; it can handle only a certain number of vehicles. During Kholey Dai, many visitors drive in or hire jeeps. There's essentially one main road into the village, leading to congestion. Parking space is makeshift in 2023. They used a terraced field as a parking lot, which was innovative but not entirely convenient or safe. It became muddy and slippery. Some travellers reported difficulty reaching the site due to traffic bottlenecks on the narrow approach and had to hike the last stretch. This raises concerns about emergency access: if someone needed medical attention or if an accident occurred, getting an ambulance through the crowd and up the narrow lane could be problematic. The nearest hospital is over an hour's drive in normal conditions.

The risk of commercialisation and cultural dilution is another challenge, and it has environmental implications, too. If the festival attracts large commercial sponsors or shifts toward a more commercial mindset, it might bring requirements for more infrastructure, which could increase the environmental footprint and alter the village aesthetic. One organiser gave an example: a corporate entity offered to sponsor the festival in exchange for prominent branding and bringing in a celebrity performer, but the committee declined, fearing it would set a precedent for an entertainment-focused event rather than a cultural one. While this protects authenticity, it also means financial constraints, which loop back to infrastructure, since improvements need funds. They have relied on small government grants and community crowdfunding, but scaling up infrastructure without compromising values is a delicate path. Additionally, unequal distribution of benefits, if not addressed, could create social tensions affecting sustainability. As mentioned, some villagers feel they benefit less; if those sentiments grow,

participation might wane, or there could be less enthusiasm for bearing tourism's inconveniences. Community-wide support is vital for tasks like cleanup and volunteering; if any faction grows resentful, the collective effort could suffer, and sustainability practices might slip. The findings suggest the need for proactive measures to keep benefit-sharing fair, like formal rotation systems or a community fund. It also involves maintaining the festival's original ethos in the face of external interest, essentially safeguarding it as a community asset and not letting it become purely a commercial commodity.

The community is aware of these issues; indeed, at the 2023 post-festival debrief meeting, which was observed, the discussion revolved around these challenges. They floated ideas like building a permanent eco-toilet block through community contributions or seeking an environmental NGO partnership to help with waste. Such steps, if implemented, would directly address some concerns. In sustainable tourism theory terms, this situation exemplifies the need to respect Limits of Acceptable Change and plan for the long term. Parengtar's charm lies in its small scale and unspoilt nature; overtourism could undermine what makes Kholey Dai unique. Thus, acknowledging and acting on these challenges is crucial. Findings suggest that with thoughtful interventions and possibly more external support, financial or advisory focused on infrastructure, the festival's benefits can continue to outweigh the challenges. If not carefully managed, however, there is a risk the festival could fall victim to its success, an outcome the community is keen to avoid.

### ***4.3. Thematic Study***

Kholey Dai has revitalised endangered cultural forms such as the Maruni dance, Tamang Selo music, and the Rai community's Sakela Silli rituals. Youth are learning traditional instruments and performances, while oral histories are being documented (e.g., the origin of *Khala Dhai*). The festival acts as an intergenerational bridge and fosters pride in cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2018). The festival is entirely community-managed, with households contributing through homestays, food stalls, and performances. Skills gained include hospitality, event management, and entrepreneurship, with youth and women playing significant roles. The festival enforces a zero-waste policy: biodegradable plates and bamboo cups replace plastics. Organic, locally sourced food reduces transport emissions. Educational workshops on sustainable farming and upcycling reinforce environmental awareness. Waste generation was limited to 3.2 kg of non-recyclables over three days.

The rapid growth of the Kholey Dai Festival has also brought several challenges to the fore. Infrastructure in Parengtar is limited, with narrow roads, inadequate sanitation, and modest water supply systems. During

peak visitation, these facilities come under strain, making it difficult for residents and tourists alike. In terms of carrying capacity, the community struggles to comfortably accommodate more than about 3,000 visitors, and going beyond this threshold risks overcrowding and deterioration of the visitor experience. A further challenge lies in the risk of commercialisation; as outside sponsors express interest, the potential exists for cultural dilution and a shift away from the authentic, community-driven ethos. Finally, the distribution of benefits is not always even, with some households receiving higher income through homestays and stalls while others remain less involved, raising concerns over equity and inclusivity.

## 5. Discussion & Conclusion

The findings from Kholey Dai align closely with theoretical frameworks of sustainable tourism and community-based tourism. The revival of cultural practices such as Maruni and Tamang Selo directly illustrates the cultural preservation function of festivals noted by Getz (2005) and Quinn (2006). By embedding traditions in an annual event, the festival resists cultural erosion and fosters intergenerational knowledge transfer. Simultaneously, the strong economic impact, including revenues of over nine lakh rupees, demonstrates the capacity of festivals to diversify local livelihoods and empower residents, reinforcing Murphy's (1988) argument that community control is essential to tourism success. The strong role of women and youth reflects the empowerment dimensions of CBT as emphasised by Scheyvens (1999) and Khalid et al. (2019). Sustainability practices at Kholey Dai also resonate with literature on festival management. The adoption of zero-waste policies, use of biodegradable serving ware, and sourcing of local organic produce illustrate practical applications of the Triple Bottom Line framework (Elkington, 1997). By minimising environmental impacts and promoting a circular economy within the village, the festival showcases how rural events can achieve higher sustainability standards than many larger commercial festivals. The regression findings indicating that homestay participation, cultural motivations, and recognition of sustainability initiatives predict visitor satisfaction are consistent with theories that authentic cultural engagement and visible environmental responsibility enhance tourism experiences (Cole, 2007).

The challenges identified, limited infrastructure, capacity constraints, risks of commercialisation, and uneven benefit distribution mirror global concerns around overtourism and cultural commodification (Koens et al., 2018; Duffy, 2015). These results highlight the importance of applying carrying capacity concepts (McCool & Lime, 2001) and Limits of Acceptable Change approaches to small-scale rural contexts. Comparisons with Hernandez and Ruiz's (2018) study of Andean village festivals and Najiyati et al. (2024) on Indonesian farmers' festivals suggest similar trajectories: festivals serve

as engines of rural development but require careful management to avoid undermining community values and environmental assets. The Kholey Dai Festival thus contributes to broader theory by exemplifying the idea of festivals as “cultural doorways,” points of entry for tourists to engage meaningfully with heritage while catalysing sustainable local development. Kholey Dai demonstrates the potential for replicable models where communities retain agency and cultural identity is preserved.

This research highlights the Kholey Dai Festival as both a cultural celebration and a prototype for community-driven sustainable tourism in the Eastern Himalayas. The evidence demonstrates how the event has safeguarded intangible heritage, empowered residents economically and socially, and implemented environmentally responsible practices that rival many larger festivals. Revenues generated through homestays, food stalls, and handicrafts have diversified village incomes and enhanced livelihoods, while high visitor satisfaction scores reflect the appeal of authentic cultural engagement and eco-conscious management. The festival also illustrates the risks inherent in rapid growth: limited infrastructure, social carrying capacity, and potential commercialisation threaten to undermine the very strengths that make it unique.

Recommendations for ensuring long-term sustainability are grounded in these findings. The introduction of visitor caps and a pre-registration system would allow the community to align guest numbers with its ecological and social capacities, avoiding the pitfalls of overtourism. Rotational homestay allocation would ensure that benefits are distributed equitably, reducing potential resentment among households. Investments in eco-friendly infrastructure, such as bio-toilets, waste processing units, and improved water systems, are essential to support increased tourist numbers without jeopardising local resources. A formal festival charter should also be developed to codify the community’s guiding principles, emphasising cultural authenticity, equitable benefit-sharing, and environmental stewardship as non-negotiable commitments.

The broader significance of the Kholey Dai Festival lies in its ability to act as a cultural doorway: a point where outsiders experience living traditions while insiders reaffirm cultural pride and resilience. For the Himalayan tourism policy, supporting such grassroots initiatives provides an alternative pathway to mass tourism. By backing small-scale festivals with infrastructure investment, training programs, and careful promotion, policymakers can foster sustainable rural tourism that empowers communities, safeguards fragile ecologies, and strengthens cultural identity.

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