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# Scaling the Divide: Women's Embodied Agency and Spatial Resistance in Kashmir's Trekking Culture

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## ABSTRACT

Adventure tourism in Kashmir, particularly trekking, is emerging as a terrain of gender renegotiation. This study examines women's participation in trekking in the districts of Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag, investigating how female trekkers contest entrenched socio-cultural norms and access traditionally male-dominated outdoor spaces. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, the research includes face-to-face interviews with 200 trekkers which were selected by using snowball sampling technique. Statistical analysis used ANOVA and t-tests. Findings reveal significant demographic differences in women's motivations and challenges, with urban, unmarried, and younger women reporting greater participation and more positive experiences. Anchored in feminist geographic frameworks, specifically Massey's spatiality and Butler's performativity, the paper foregrounds how women's corporeal movement through mountainous terrains constitutes acts of spatial resistance. Participation in trekking offers both a reclaiming of public space and a reconfiguration of femininity in a geopolitically charged region. The study further discusses how leisure practices contribute to gendered subjectivities and socio-spatial transformation. By centring women's narratives of embodiment, constraint, and resilience, this research highlights the potential of adventure tourism not merely as leisure, but as a politically and culturally situated practice that reshapes gendered geographies in Kashmir.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the politically charged landscape of Kashmir, trekking has emerged not only as a leisure activity but as a site where gendered geographies are being actively contested and re-imagined. While adventure tourism in the region has expanded dramatically in recent years, buoyed by renewed interest in Kashmir's alpine terrains and cultural allure, the gendered dynamics of who moves through these spaces, and how, remain uneven. Historically relegated to the margins of outdoor recreation, women in Kashmir are increasingly making visible claims to the region's trekking culture, asserting their right to mobility, self-expression, and spatial autonomy.

This study explores the embodied experiences of women trekkers across Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag, foregrounding how their participation unsettles entrenched gender roles and recalibrates social imaginaries of place, risk, and femininity. Drawing from feminist geographic frameworks (Massey 1994; Valentine 1993) and informed by a mixed-methods approach, the research interrogates the spatial politics of women's mobility in terrains marked by cultural conservatism and security situa. It asks: how do women's trekking practices produce new gendered spatialities? And what barriers material, discursive, or institutional continue to circumscribe their movement? In unpacking these questions, the paper situates Kashmiri women's engagement with trekking as both a corporeal and political act one that challenges normative spatial orders and offers alternative cartographies of resistance and selfhood.

## THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is situated within feminist geographic thought, foregrounding the mutually constitutive relationship between gender, space, and power. Central to this framing is Doreen Massey's (1994) conceptualization of space as socially constructed and contested—an arena through which identities are negotiated and reshaped. In the context of Kashmir's trekking culture, the terrain itself becomes a gendered site, wherein women's movement both reflects and subverts dominant spatial regimes.

Building on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, women's engagement in trekking is understood as a repeated corporeal act that reconfigures femininity beyond conventional domestic and passive roles. Through the embodied act of walking through mountainous landscapes spaces historically coded as masculine women enact new scripts of identity that challenge the gendered spatial order.

The framework is further enriched by Gill Valentine's (1993) work on geographies of exclusion, which examines how gendered norms shape access to and experiences of public space. The trekking trails of Kashmir, though seemingly neutral, are layered with socio-cultural meanings that regulate female presence through notions of safety, propriety, and mobility. Women's participation becomes an act of spatial resistance, confronting not only patriarchal community structures but also institutional and infrastructural limitations.

By integrating these theoretical strands, the study views adventure tourism as a socially and politically embedded practice. Women's trekking is thus not simply leisure, but a site of gendered negotiation, contestation, and transformation a lived geography where space is re-imagined through the stride of the female body.

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## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To critically investigate the gendered participation of women in trekking within Kashmir's adventure tourism landscape, with particular emphasis on their embodied spatial practices across urban and rural terrains.
2. To explore the motivational drivers and subjective experiences that shape women's engagement with trekking, illuminating how aspirations, agency, and leisure practices intersect with gendered geographies.
3. To analyse the structural, cultural, and discursive barriers that constrain women's access to outdoor recreational spaces, focusing on familial expectations, socio-religious norms, and safety anxieties in the context of Kashmir.
4. To assess the extent to which women's presence and participation in trekking reconfigures prevailing gender norms, and contributes to the performative rearticulation of femininity in traditionally masculinized spaces.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

**H1:** Women's participation in trekking within Kashmir is significantly mediated by socio-cultural constraints, including familial regulation, normative gender expectations, and spatial discourses, which collectively shape patterns of access, motivation, and engagement across differing demographic contexts.

H2: Women's embodied presence in trekking practices contributes substantively to the contestation and re-articulation of traditional gender norms in Kashmir, fostering increased socio-cultural legitimacy of women's mobility and presence within masculinized leisure spaces.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive survey research design with a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine trekking participation in Kashmir from a gender perspective. The study was conducted among trekkers from three districts of Kashmir, namely Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag.

The quantitative component facilitates the examination of significant differences across demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, place of living, and district, using appropriate statistical techniques. It enables the measurement of key dimensions, including motivations and challenges in trekking, social and cultural barriers, and gender norm transformation.

The qualitative component is based on participant observation, which provides deeper insights into trekkers' lived experiences, behavioural patterns, social interactions, and gender dynamics within trekking spaces. This combination of methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of both measurable patterns and contextual realities associated with trekking participation.

### Sampling Technique

The study employed a snowball sampling technique (chain-referral sampling) for selecting respondents for both quantitative and qualitative components. This non-probability

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sampling method was considered appropriate due to the absence of a well-defined sampling frame for trekkers in Kashmir.

A total of 200 respondents were selected through this method, comprising 117 male and 83 female trekkers, enabling comparative gender-based analysis.

Justification for Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling was adopted due to the following reasons:

i. **Hidden Population**: Trekkers in Kashmir represent a dispersed and mobile group without any centralized registry, making probability sampling difficult.

ii. **Accessibility Constraints**: Trekking activities are often conducted in remote and mountainous regions, where participants are geographically scattered and not easily accessible through conventional methods.

iii. **Trust and Rapport**: Given the socio-cultural and security sensitivities in the region, personal referrals helped in building trust and increasing respondent participation.

iv. **Cost-Effectiveness**: The method enabled efficient data collection across different terrains without requiring extensive preliminary listing.

v. **Network-Based Reach**: Trekking communities often function through social networks, allowing respondents to identify and refer other eligible participants effectively.

**Process of Reaching Respondents**

The process of data collection was carried out in multiple stages:

i. **Initial Contact (Seeds)**: The first set of respondents was identified through trekking clubs, local adventure groups, trekking guides, tour operators, and social media communities related to trekking in Kashmir.

ii. **Chain Referral**: Each respondent was requested to refer other trekkers who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. This process continued in a chain-referral manner until the desired sample size was achieved.

iii. **District Representation**: Separate referral chains were initiated in **Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag** to ensure geographical representation. Efforts were made to include both **rural and urban respondents** within each district.

iv. **Sample Distribution**: The final sample consisted of **111 respondents from Srinagar, 52 from Baramulla, and 37 from Anantnag**, reflecting variations in trekking activity and accessibility across districts.

**Inclusion Criteria**

Respondents were included in the study based on the following criteria:

a. Must be **18 years of age or above**

b. Must be a **resident of the selected districts for at least one year**

c. Must have **participated in at least one trekking activity in Kashmir within the past two years**

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### Data Collection Methods

### Quantitative Method

A structured interview schedule was used to collect quantitative data. The instrument consisted of closed-ended questions with pre-coded response options, primarily based on a Likert scale. This allowed for systematic data collection and facilitated statistical analysis.

The interview schedule was administered through face-to-face interaction at convenient locations such as respondents' residences, trekking meeting points, and trailheads. This approach ensured clarity in responses and improved response rates.

### Qualitative Method

The qualitative component of the study was based on participant observation. The researcher actively engaged with trekking groups to observe behaviours, interactions, and experiences in natural settings.

The method provided insights into:

a. Gender-based participation and confidence levels
b. Social interactions among trekkers
c. Rural–urban differences in behaviour
d. Age-related physical and participation patterns
e. Real-time challenges faced during trekking activities

### Study Variables

The study includes the following variables below:

**Table 1.1:**

| Variable | Categories | Type |
|---|---|---|
| Age | 18–28, 29–39, 40–49, Above 49 | Independent |
| Place of Living | Rural, Urban | Independent |
| Marital Status | Married, Unmarried | Independent |
| Gender | Male, Female | Independent |
| Area/District | Srinagar, Baramulla, Anantnag | Independent |
| Motivations and Challenges in Trekking | Likert Scale | Dependent |
| Social and Cultural Barriers | Likert Scale | Dependent |
| Gender Norm Transformation | Likert Scale | Dependent |

### Statistical Techniques Used

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques based on the number of categories in the independent variables:

i. **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)** was applied to examine significant differences when the independent variable had more than two categories. Specifically, ANOVA was used for:
    a. **Age** (four categories)
    b. **District** (three categories)

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ii. **Independent Samples t-test** was used to examine significant differences when the independent variable had two categories. Specifically, t-test was applied for:

   a. **Place of Living (Rural vs. Urban)**

   b. **Marital Status (Married vs. Unmarried)**

   c. **Gender (Male vs. Female)**

All statistical analyses were conducted at the **0.05 level of significance** to determine the presence of meaningful differences between groups.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data reveal significant spatial and demographic differentials in women's trekking experiences across Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag. Women in Srinagar the region's most urbanized and infrastructurally developed district, reported the highest engagement, with a mean score of 4.21, while women in Anantnag had the lowest at 2.54. These results reflect how geographic unevenness intersects with social norms, producing differentiated access to leisure space. Following Valentine's (1993) insights into spatial exclusion, these findings suggest that patriarchal territorialities are less pervasive in urban terrains, enabling greater female mobility.

Age and marital status emerged as key determinants of participation. Women aged 29–39 and unmarried participants displayed the most active engagement in trekking, supporting Butler's (1990) notion of gender as a performance that can be ruptured through embodied acts. Their movement through the mountainous terrains resists domestic confinement, enacting a counter-narrative to traditional femininity. Married women, on the other hand, reported diminished participation often citing caregiving responsibilities and familial disapproval as limiting factors. These constraints exemplify how reproductive labor continues to mediate women's access to leisure and self-making. Notably, rural women reported greater perceived impact on gender norms through trekking than their urban counterparts, indicating that the same act acquires different political potency depending on its social terrain. Here, space is not only a backdrop but an active agent in the production of gendered experience. By venturing into landscapes historically coded as masculine, women are not merely trekking they are redrawing the social cartography of who belongs where.

**Table 1.2: Demographical Profile of the Respondents**

| Variable | Category | No. of Respondents | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | 18–28 | 55 | 27.50% |
| | 29–39 | 85 | 42.50% |
| | 40–49 | 39 | 19.50% |
| | Above 49 | 21 | 10.50% |
| | **Total** | **200** | **100%** |
| **Place of Living** | Rural | 96 | 48% |
| | Urban | 104 | 52% |
| | **Total** | **200** | **100%** |
| **Marital Status** | Married | 82 | 41% |
| | Unmarried | 118 | 59% |
| | **Total** | **200** | **100%** |
| **Gender** | Male | 117 | 58.50% |
| | Female | 83 | 41.50% |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Total** | **200** | **100%** |

As far as age is concerned, the distribution of women trekkers scaling the gender divide in Kashmir, particularly in the districts of Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag, is categorized by different age groups. The survey included a total of 200 respondents (n=200), revealing distinct trends in participation across different age brackets. The largest segment of respondents belongs to the 29-39 age groups, accounting for 85 individuals, which constitutes 42.5% of the total. This highlights the prominence of middle-aged women in trekking activities in the region. Following this, the 18-28 age group forms the second-largest category, comprising 55 respondents, or 27.5% of the total. Women aged 40-49 contribute to 19.5% of participants, with 39 respondents, showcasing a moderate yet significant involvement. Lastly, the above-49 age group has the lowest representation, with only 21 individuals making up 10.5% of the total sample. The data reflects that trekking activities in these districts are primarily dominated by younger and middle-aged women, indicating their increasing enthusiasm and breaking of traditional barriers in adventure sports within the region.

In terms of place of living, the distribution of women trekkers scaling the gender divide in Kashmir, focusing on their residence across the districts of Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag, shows that among the 200 respondents (n=200), a slightly higher proportion resides in urban areas, with 104 individuals, accounting for 52% of the total. This indicates a notable urban participation in trekking activities, reflecting better access to resources and awareness about such pursuits. Conversely, 96 respondents, or 48%, hail from rural areas, showcasing a significant interest in trekking among women from less urbanized settings. The nearly balanced representation between rural and urban participants underscores the growing inclusivity of adventure sports in the region, as women from diverse living environments increasingly engage in such activities. The distribution highlights the narrowing gap between urban and rural participation in trekking, reflecting a shift towards greater gender and geographical equity in outdoor adventure experiences in Kashmir.

Based on marital status, the distribution of women trekkers scaling the gender divide in Kashmir across the districts of Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag shows that out of the total 200 respondents (n=200), the majority are unmarried, comprising 118 individuals, which represents 59% of the total. This indicates a higher inclination among unmarried women to participate in trekking activities, possibly due to fewer familial responsibilities and greater personal freedom. In contrast, married women constitute 41% of the respondents, with 82 participants, showcasing a significant yet comparatively lower level of engagement. The data suggests that marital status may influence participation in trekking, with unmarried women taking the lead in breaking traditional norms and embracing adventure sports in the region. This distribution highlights the evolving role of women, as both married and unmarried individuals increasingly explore outdoor activities, reflecting a progressive shift in attitudes towards gender roles and recreational pursuits in Kashmir.

Based on gender, the distribution of trekkers in Kashmir sheds light on the participation of women in trekking compared to men. Among the 200 respondents, a majority, 58.5%, are male, while 41.5% are female. While men continue to dominate trekking activities in the region, the significant representation of women (41.5%) underscores a growing trend of female participation in adventure sports. This shift highlights women's increasing interest in breaking traditional barriers and engaging in activities often perceived as male-dominated. The findings

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resonate with the study's theme, "Bridging the Gender Gap: An Empirical Analysis of Women Trekkers in Kashmir." Despite the evident gender divide, the substantial participation of women signifies progress toward inclusivity and equality in trekking. It emphasizes the role of such activities in fostering empowerment and challenging gender stereotypes in outdoor recreation.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1.3: Mean difference through ANOVA for H1 Women trekkers in Kashmir experience distinct motivations and challenges that differ from their male counterparts, impacting their overall trekking experiences and participation rates**

| Variable | Area | N | Mean | SD | F | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Motivations and Challenges in Trekking | Srinagar | 111 | 4.2156 | 0.3128 | 4.857 | 0.0001 |
| | Baramulla | 52 | 3.1189 | 0.4562 | | |
| | Anantnag | 37 | 2.5474 | 0.5213 | | |
| | Total | 200 | 3.4413 | 0.4334 | | |

Table 1.3 presents the mean differences concerning the distinct motivations and challenges that women trekkers in Kashmir experience, which differ from their male counterparts, thereby influencing their overall trekking experiences and participation rates. The analysis compares trekking participation in the districts of Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag, with the data revealing significant variations across these areas. The results show that women in Srinagar (N = 111) have a mean score of 4.2156, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.3128. This is the highest mean score among the three districts, indicating greater participation and possibly more favorable conditions or a more supportive environment for women trekkers in Srinagar. In comparison, the women in Baramulla (N = 52) exhibit a mean score of 3.1189 with an SD of 0.4562, while women in Anantnag (N = 37) have the lowest mean score of 2.5474, accompanied by an SD of 0.5213. The overall mean score for the total sample (N = 200) is 3.4413 with a standard deviation of 0.4334. The F-value obtained from the analysis is 4.857, with a p-value of 0.0001, indicating a statistically significant difference between the groups, which leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that the motivations and challenges faced by women trekkers differ significantly across the three districts. The gender disparity observed in trekking participation, especially between Srinagar and the other two districts can be attributed to various social and cultural factors. Srinagar, being the capital and more urbanized region, may offer women greater access to trekking opportunities, infrastructure, and community support, thus reducing gender-based restrictions. Women in Srinagar may also experience relatively fewer cultural barriers and more encouragement to engage in outdoor activities like trekking. On the other hand, Baramulla and Anantnag, which are more rural and less developed in terms of recreational infrastructure, might impose stronger social and cultural barriers for women. These areas often have more traditional views on gender roles, which may hinder women's participation in activities like trekking. Family restrictions, societal perceptions of women's roles, and limited access to trekking facilities are likely contributing factors to the lower mean scores in these districts. The study highlights a significant difference in women's trekking experiences across the three districts, with Srinagar showing higher levels of participation due to more favorable conditions for women. The results underscore the importance of addressing gender disparities in trekking participation, especially

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in more rural areas like Baramulla and Anantnag, by providing better infrastructure, support systems, and shifting societal attitudes toward women in outdoor recreational activities.

**Table 1.4: Mean difference through ANOVA for H1 Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles with regard to Age**

| Variable | Age Group | N | Mean | SD | F | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles | 18–28 | 55 | 3.4000 | 0.41000 | 4.125 | 0.005 |
| | 29–39 | 85 | 3.5500 | 0.38050 | | |
| | 40–49 | 39 | 3.2000 | 0.45000 | | |
| | Above 49 | 21 | 3.1000 | 0.47000 | | |
| | Total | 200 | | | | |

Table 1.4 presents the mean difference through ANOVA for H1, which posits that women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles, with regard to age. The results show that the mean scores for women in different age groups vary significantly. The 18–28 age group (N = 55) has a mean score of 3.4000 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.41000, the 29–39 age group (N = 85) has a mean score of 3.5500 with an SD of 0.38050, the 40–49 age group (N = 39) has a mean score of 3.2000 with an SD of 0.45000, and the above 49 age group (N = 21) has a mean score of 3.1000 with an SD of 0.47000. The F-value of 4.125 and the p-value of 0.005 indicate a statistically significant difference between the age groups. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This suggests that social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles, significantly influence women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir. Younger women, particularly in the 29–39 age group, report a higher level of participation, which may reflect changing societal perceptions of gender roles and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor activities. In contrast, older women (40–49 and above 49) report lower levels of participation, possibly due to more entrenched cultural and familial restrictions. Younger women aged 18–28 and 29–39 in regions like Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag demonstrate higher participation in trekking due to factors like increased awareness of health and wellness, social media influence, and a growing trend for adventure tourism. This age group often seeks recreational activities that promote physical fitness and social interaction, while also benefiting from supportive community initiatives that encourage outdoor activities among women, leading to significant differences in participation levels.

**Table 1.5: Mean differences through T test for H 1 Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles with regard to place of Living**

| Variable | Place of Living | N | Mean | SD | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural | 96 | 3.3000 | 0.42000 | | |

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| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1: Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles. | Urban | 104 | 3.1500 | 0.39000 | 2.145 | 0.034 |

Table 1.5 presents the mean differences through a t-test for H1, which posits that women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles, with regard to place of living. The results show that the mean score for women in rural areas (N = 96) is 3.3000 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.42000, while women in urban areas (N = 104) have a slightly lower mean score of 3.1500 with an SD of 0.39000. The t-value of 2.145 and the p-value of 0.034 indicate a statistically significant difference between rural and urban women in terms of their participation in trekking activities. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that place of living significantly influences women's participation in trekking activities. Women in urban areas report a higher level of participation in trekking activities. Women in urban areas of Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag report higher participation in trekking activities due to several factors. Urban living offers better access to resources, such as transportation, information, and infrastructure for outdoor activities. Increased awareness of health and fitness in cities leads to a culture that encourages participation in such recreational activities. Urban women often benefit from supportive social networks that promote adventure tourism. The availability of trekking groups and events in urban areas further motivates women to engage in trekking, contrasting with rural regions where such opportunities may be limited.

**Table 1.6: Mean differences through T test for H 1 Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles with regard to Marital Status**

| Variable | Marital Status | N | Mean | SD | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1: Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles. | Married | 82 | 3.1000 | 0.45210 | 2.863 | 0.005 |
| | Unmarried | 118 | 3.4500 | 0.39845 | | |

Table 1.6: presents the mean differences through a t-test for H1, which posits that women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles, with regard to marital status. The results show that the mean score for married women (N = 82) is 3.1000 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.45210, while unmarried women (N = 118) have a higher mean score of 3.4500 with an SD of 0.39845. The t-value of 2.863 and the p-value of 0.005 indicate a statistically significant difference between married and unmarried women in terms of their participation in trekking activities. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null

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hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that marital status significantly influences women's participation in trekking activities. Unmarried women report a higher level of participation, Unmarried women in regions like Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag exhibit higher participation in trekking activities compared to their married counterparts. This difference can be attributed to several factors: social freedom unmarried women often face fewer societal constraints, allowing them to engage more freely in outdoor activities; financial independence, which is more prevalent among single women; and fewer domestic responsibilities, as married women typically bear greater care giving duties that limit their ability to participate in such activities. Studies indicate that marital status significantly influences women's physical activity levels, with unmarried women generally being more active than married ones.

**Table 1.7: Mean differences through T test for H 1 Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles with regard to Gender**

| Variable | Gender | N | Mean | SD | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1: Women's participation in trekking activities in Kashmir is significantly influenced by social and cultural barriers, including family restrictions and societal perceptions of gender roles. | Male | 117 | 3.6000 | 0.42450 | 2.514 | 0.013 |
| | Female | 83 | 3.1000 | 0.39845 | | |

Table 1.5: shows the comparison of participation in trekking activities in Kashmir based on gender. The mean score for male respondents (N = 117) is 3.6000 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.42450, while female respondents (N = 83) have a lower mean score of 3.1000 with an SD of 0.39845. The t-value of 2.514 and the p-value of 0.013 indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between male and female participation in trekking activities. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that gender significantly influences participation in trekking activities in Kashmir. The findings suggest that males are more likely to participate in trekking activities compared to females. Gender significantly influences participation in trekking activities in Kashmir, with males participating more frequently than females in Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag districts. This disparity can be attributed to societal norms and expectations that often position trekking as a male-dominated activity. Cultural perceptions may discourage women from engaging in outdoor adventures due to concerns about safety and familial responsibilities. Additionally, many women face restrictions from their families regarding participation in overnight treks, which limits their opportunities for involvement. Despite these challenges, some women are breaking barriers and advocating for greater female participation, highlighting the potential for change within the trekking community.

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**Table 1.8: Mean differences through T test for H 2 the involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities with regard to place of Living**

| Variable | Place of Living | N | Mean | SD | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H2: The involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities | Rural | 96 | 3.5000 | 0.42000 | 2.672 | 0.008 |
| | Urban | 104 | 3.2500 | 0.41000 | | |

Table 1.6: presents the mean differences through a t-test for H2, which suggests that the involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities, with regard to place of living. The results show that the mean score for women in rural areas (N = 96) is 3.5000 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.42000, while women in urban areas (N = 104) have a slightly higher mean score of 3.2500 with an SD of 0.41000. The t-value of 2.672 and the p-value of 0.008 indicate a statistically significant difference between rural and urban women in terms of their participation in trekking activities. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that place of living significantly influences the involvement of women in trekking activities and contributes to reshaping gender norms. Women in urban areas report a higher level of participation in trekking, which may be due to greater access to resources, exposure to modern recreational opportunities, and more progressive attitudes compared to rural areas, where cultural norms may be more restrictive. The place of living significantly influences women's involvement in trekking activities and reshapes gender norms, particularly in urban areas like Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag. Urban women often have greater access to resources, social networks, and opportunities for outdoor activities compared to their rural counterparts. Initiatives like the Hussaini Sports Club's "Trekking Ka Dose Har Sunday Roz" empower women by providing structured trekking experiences that promote confidence and camaraderie among participants. This urban engagement fosters a culture of adventure, challenging traditional gender roles and encouraging more women to participate in outdoor sports, thus contributing to a broader shift in societal perceptions of women's capabilities.

**Table 1.9: Mean differences through T test for H 2 the involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities with regard to Marital Status**

| Variable | Marital Status | N | Mean | SD | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H2: The involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing | Married | 82 | 3.1500 | 0.43500 | 2.309 | 0.022 |
| | Unmarried | 118 | 3.4000 | 0.39250 | | |

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| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities | | | | | | |

Table 1.9: presents the mean differences through a t-test for H2, which suggests that the involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities, with regard to marital status. The results show that the mean score for married women (N = 82) is 3.1500 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.43500, while unmarried women (N = 118) have a higher mean score of 3.4000 with an SD of 0.39250. The t-value of 2.309 and the p-value of 0.022 indicate a statistically significant difference between married and unmarried women in terms of their participation in trekking activities. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, suggesting that marital status significantly influences the involvement of women in trekking activities and their ability to reshape gender norms. Unmarried women typically enjoy greater social freedom, allowing them to engage more actively in outdoor activities compared to married women, who often face increased domestic responsibilities and societal expectations that limit their participation. Unmarried women report higher levels of physical activity, including trekking, as they are less burdened by family obligations. This increased participation not only enhances their physical fitness but also challenges traditional gender roles, promoting a shift in societal perceptions of women's capabilities and independence. As these women engage in trekking, they contribute to reshaping gender norms by demonstrating that outdoor activities are accessible and appropriate for women, fostering a more inclusive environment for future generations.

**Table 1.10: Mean differences through T test for H 2 the involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities with regard to Gender**

| Variable | Gender | N | Mean | SD | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H2: The involvement of women in trekking contributes to reshaping gender norms by challenging stereotypes and increasing acceptance of women in outdoor recreational activities. | Male | 117 | 4.2000 | 0.35000 | 3.226 | 0.001 |
| | Female | 83 | 3.6800 | 0.41210 | | |

Table 1.10 compares the involvement of women in trekking activities and its impact on reshaping gender norms based on gender. The mean score for male respondents (N = 117) is 4.2000 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.35000, while female respondents (N = 83) have a mean score of 3.6800 with an SD of 0.41210. The t-value of 3.226 and the p-value of 0.001 indicate a statistically significant difference between male and female involvement in trekking activities. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted, which suggests that gender significantly influences the involvement in trekking and its role in reshaping gender norms. There is a significant difference between male and female involvement in trekking activities in Kashmir, largely influenced by gender norms that shape participation in Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag districts. Males are more likely to engage in trekking due to societal perceptions that view outdoor activities as predominantly male domains, often leading to the exclusion of women from such experiences.

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Cultural barriers, including safety concerns and traditional expectations regarding women's roles, further limit female participation. However, initiatives promoting all-women trekking groups are emerging, helping to challenge these norms. Such groups provide safe environments for women to explore nature, fostering empowerment and gradually reshaping societal attitudes towards female participation in outdoor activities. As women increasingly participate in trekking, they contribute to changing perceptions about gender roles, demonstrating that adventure and exploration are not exclusive to men. The results emphasize the need for continued efforts to increase female participation in outdoor activities, which can challenge stereotypes and contribute to greater gender equality in trekking and similar recreational activities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data reveal significant spatial and demographic differentials in women's trekking experiences across Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag. Women in Srinagar, the region's most urbanized and infrastructurally developed district reported the highest engagement, with a mean score of 4.21, while women in Anantnag had the lowest at 2.54. These results reflect how geographic unevenness intersects with social norms, producing differentiated access to leisure space. Following Valentine's (1993) insights into spatial exclusion, these findings suggest that patriarchal territorialities are less pervasive in urban terrains, enabling greater female mobility.

Age and marital status emerged as key determinants of participation. Women aged 29–39 and unmarried participants displayed the most active engagement in trekking, supporting Butler's (1990) notion of gender as a performance that can be ruptured through embodied acts. Their movement through the mountainous terrains resists domestic confinement, enacting a counter-narrative to traditional femininity. Married women, on the other hand, reported diminished participation often citing caregiving responsibilities and familial disapproval as limiting factors. These constraints exemplify how reproductive labor continues to mediate women's access to leisure and self-making.

Notably, rural women reported greater perceived impact on gender norms through trekking than their urban counterparts indicating that the same act acquires different political potency depending on its social terrain. Here, space is not only a backdrop but an active agent in the production of gendered experience. By venturing into landscapes historically coded as masculine, women are not merely trekking—they are redrawing the social cartography of who belongs where.

## CONCLUSION

Women's participation in trekking in Kashmir exemplifies a gendered reoccupation of space that both contests and reconfigures patriarchal geographies. While participation rates differ across districts and demographic markers, the act of trekking becomes a performative resistance an embodied challenge to spatial exclusion and gendered surveillance. Women's movement through high-altitude terrains is not simply recreational; it enacts a transformative claim on place, identity, and visibility. In walking these trails, Kashmiri women are reshaping landscapes once coded masculine, and with them, social imaginaries of autonomy, mobility, and belonging. Yet, as the data show, barriers persist. Age, marital status, and rurality shape the uneven terrain of access and agency. This underscores the need to move beyond celebratory narratives toward a feminist praxis that addresses the material, discursive, and infrastructural inequalities limiting women's full spatial citizenship.

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## TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATIVE POLICY PRAXIS

To support women's right to adventure and mobility, interventions must operate across scales:

i. Cultural Interventions: Launch campaigns that reframe outdoor leisure as gender-inclusive and normalize women's visibility in public space.
ii. Infrastructural Development: Expand safe trekking infrastructure, sanitary facilities, shelters, and way finding in both urban and rural districts.
iii. Educational Integration: Embed trekking and outdoor literacy into school curricula, creating early interventions in gendered spatial socialization.
iv. Economic Incentives: Fund women-led trekking cooperatives, gear banks, and leadership training to transform participation into livelihood.
v. Network Building: Foster support systems mentorships, affinity groups, regional forums that cultivate collective confidence.

## CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study makes a substantive contribution to feminist geography and the sociology of leisure by interrogating how women in Kashmir are not only accessing but actively reconfiguring outdoor recreational spaces through their participation in trekking. By employing a mixed-methods approach and grounding the analysis in spatial and performative feminist theory, the research moves beyond descriptive accounts of gender disparity to foreground women's embodied agency and acts of spatial resistance. Empirically, the study documents significant intra-regional and demographic variation in women's trekking participation across Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag, thereby offering a nuanced portrait of how age, marital status, and rural-urban location mediate leisure access. It reveals how localized gender regimes interact with broader discourses of adventure, mobility, and empowerment. Theoretically, it extends the conversation on leisure as a site of gendered negotiation, illustrating how trekking operates as a transformative practice through which Kashmiri women challenge normative constructions of femininity and reassert claims to public space. This contributes to ongoing debates around gendered spatiality, bodily autonomy, and the politicization of outdoor practices in Kashmir like ecologies. Therefore, the research bridges critical gaps in interdisciplinary scholarship by connecting feminist geography, tourism studies, and South Asian gender politics, while also offering grounded insights to inform inclusive adventure tourism policy and practice in Kashmir and challenge isolation. By recognizing trekking as both a material and symbolic practice, policy can become a tool not only for tourism development but for feminist spatial justice in Kashmir.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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