

The Concept and Practices of Eco – Tourism in India: A Qualitative Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Tourism is not old. Humans for centuries have moved from place to place. Sometimes, in search of food, other times in search of work, while sometimes also for recreation. The branch of Tourism called Ecotourism has been the topic of discussion for about the last decade or so. It is branch of Tourism that deals with enjoying nature with the aim of conserving it. India is a country with rich culture and heritage. We have several places and scenic spots that are popular tourist destinations throughout the world. In the current scenario, Ecotourism has a lot of scope and opportunities. Implementation of strategies that involve government authorities, local communities and tourists is a great way to go about it. Aim of Ecotourism is to build the environment while conserving nature and natural resources. Ecotourism is important as it is dual aimed. Conversation of biodiversity and sustainable development are the two primary aims. The present study shall focus upon how Ecotourism is developing in India, the importance of Ecotourism, its advantages and disadvantages and its scope in India.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Sustainable Development, Biodiversity, Conservation.

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism refers to travelling for pleasure, leisure or even business. Tourism is an ever-growing industry with a lot of potential. It has a lot of scope for employment generation, revenue generation however, modern day tourism occurs at the stake of nature and natural resources. As the saying by Mr. Lester Brown goes ‘We have not inherited the earth from our forefathers, but we have borrowed it from our children’. Human beings are the greediest creatures of all kinds. We have consumed more resources than what was meant for us and are now consuming what does not belong to us. If our consumption is not checked now, there is no coming back, life would perish. Hence, the branch of Ecotourism emerged. This discipline of Tourism lets us enjoy nature while not compromising with it. Ecotourism can be defined as responsible tourism to natural areas with the aim of conserving the biodiversity, preserving the interests of local communities and fostering a positive relationship between humankind and nature. Ecotourism is about building a culture of respect towards fellow beings and natural resources.

Importance of Ecotourism in India: India has a large treasure of natural beauty. With huge number of beaches, mountains, beautiful hills and river valleys, temples and religious places. With the kind of diversity that we have in terms of language, clothes, customs, festivals, and music, it becomes even more appealing for people of one culture to interact and know people of different culture and for International people to gain insight into our culture. India does so much to promote tourism be it running campaigns, making celebrities ambassadors for state tourism, celebrating World Tourism Day etc. Ecotourism has gained popularity in the recent years. Ecotourism policies are aimed at laying down policies and guidelines, planning to generate a smooth relationship between nature and

people. According to a research by Central Statistical Organisation Enterprise, Ministry of Tourism by the Government of India, Tourism contributes about 47.5 per cent to the Employment. Our motto of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' equating 'Atithi' to god is an effective and successful campaign to attract Tourists in India. Ecotourism has a lot of scope in India because of our rich biodiversity. If proper implementation of policies is done, Ecotourism can preserve our nature, our cultural heritage as well as increase our revenue generation.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Ecotourism: Tourism has been one of the largest generators of revenue for centuries in India. However, it always comes at the expense of the nature and interests of local communities. Ecotourism is an attempt to undo the damage done to nature and natural resources and to the local communities. It is a responsible sustainable means of travel aimed at conserving the biodiversity. Using the revenue obtained, to conserve the endangered species, maintaining biodiversity park, National parks etc to preserve the important species, and to restrict human interaction in hotspots of biodiversity are some of the advantages. Increased opportunities for employment is also important especially for developing country like India. The locals are trained in order to serve the tourists benefit from this and the tourists also gain a wonderful experience. Cultural exchange is another added benefit. However, the biggest advantage of all is the increased consciousness of humankind towards nature and other living beings. The concept of Sustainable development is the biggest takeaway from this. However, there are certain disadvantages of Ecotourism also. Threat to indigenous culture, degradation of Ecosystem, relocation of the local communities and exploitation of tourists, especially the International tourists are the most obvious expected disadvantages.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The paper by Laxman (2015) talks about development of Ecotourism in India. In his research he talks about how ecotourism is a blooming industry which requires certain sustainable development measures and strategic planning. Tourism is not restricted to sight seeing and vacationing, but it is about developing a relationship with nature. Ecotourism is the necessity of today's times because of ecological instability caused due to human activities. According to the author, the only difference between tourism and ecotourism is that ecotourism is responsible travel while taking care of the environment and its components. Ecosystem is not yet a rage in India because of poor infrastructure, lack of strategic planning and awareness.

Research by Tiwari and Abrol (2015) showed that Tourism is one of the most important sectors for generating revenue and employment in India. Our rich heritage, culture and scenic spots make it all the more preferred Tourist destination. The concept of Ecotourism is not a very old concept and has recently taken the light. Touring while being sensitive towards the local communities and responsible towards environment and other animals is generally the idea. Ecotourism is great as it preserves the culture of local communities and promotes their cultural integrity. It provides employment opportunities and ensures conservation of nature. However, it opposes the developmental programs and poor planning may have reverse effects too. Sustainable results are possible only if local communities, authorities and tourists are in an agreement together and are aware about everything.

In a research by Chougule on The development of ecotourism, they define Ecotourism as Responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and sustains the well being of the people. It generally means observing nature and learning about it more so developmental activities can be pursued and promoted without compromising with the nature. Carrying Capacity refers to the number of people that can be supported by a particular natural area. With environmental degradation, this number reduces. This concept of carrying capacity is imperative to develop and manage strategies for Ecotourism. The research was aimed at increasing the understanding of the concept of carrying capacity so efficient Ecotourism strategies can be developed. Studies like this ensure that successful ecotourism strategies can be established.

The research by Goodwin and Chaudhary (2017) contemplated the concept of Ecotourism first established in the 1970s. It is intended to develop and promote tourism while preserving environment and local communities. Responsible travel to natural areas that conserve environment and improves the well being of local people is what Ecotourism stands for. India has several scenic spots that are popular for their beauty. Some of the popular Ecosystem destinations of India are Backwaters of Kerala, Eravikulam National Park of Kerala, Sunderbans of West Bengal etc. Tangible sustainability refers to Ecotourism attractions fulfilling the needs of tourists and Sustainable practices refer to the eco-friendly activities. The success of EcoTourism depends upon conservation of natural habitats combined with development of local communities.

According to a research by Nag (2013) poverty and environmental problem are probably two of the most serious challenges of the twenty first century. People have been exploiting nature and natural resources and there is a stark rise in poverty. The reasons of both these is overpopulation, which in turn is a result of lack of education due to poverty. This cycle seems never ending. To make a living, people cut trees and to build settlements for the

growing population the demand for wood is always increasing. Therefore, more and more damage is being caused to the nature. Tourism worsens the situation as when people visit ecologically important places for the purpose of recreation, they knowingly or unknowingly damage the ecological balance of that place. This is why Ecotourism is gaining prominence in the world today. It is a means of preserving natural resources and biodiversity. Sustainable development and employment generation are the added benefits. The present study is aimed at understanding the major ecological and environmental situations in Himachal Pradesh and to analyse the developmental needs of ecotourism in the state of Himachal Pradesh in India. The study concludes by suggesting methods to develop ecotourism and removing all the constraints that prevent it from succeeding.

The research by Kala (2013) was aimed at understanding the importance of Ecotourism in creating opportunities for sustainable development. Uttarakhand is one of the most popular tourist destinations of India. It is known for its rich biodiversity and scenic beauty. Uttarakhand has promoted Ecotourism in the form of National Parks, sanctuaries and in forest areas. The aim of this study was to study was to understand the developmental model of Dhanolti Ecopark in Uttarakhand. The park was made by consulting by state forest department, and the local villagers. The number of problems of the villagers were identified and therefore policies were formulated to better the strategy. The Dhanolti Ecopark provided employment to the local communities and preserved the forest ecosystem. This park emerged as the tool for sustainable development and as a tool for conservation of nature and natural resources.

Devi (2012) conducted a research on Ecotourism in Assam and how it is a promising opportunity for Development in India. According to a research, Ecotourism is a new form of Tourism based on Sustainability. Ecotourism emerged as a strategy for development and conservation. Ecotourism comprises about 15-20 per cent of International Tourism. Assam is one of India's prominent state and is a tourist spot because of its scenic beauty. Kaziranga National Park, Manas National Park, Nameri National Park, Orang National Park, Majuli are some important Eco tourist spots in India. However, Assam lacks to utilise its full potential because of lack of sufficient transport, communication facilities, accommodation, natural calamities, and problems of insurgency in India. It is therefore undisputed that Assam is a great Eco tourist spot with a lot of potential. It just needs proper developmental measures and cooperation between government and local authorities.

The research by Picard (2015) was aimed at how making ecotourism sustainable. The research aimed at strategically assessing the current achievements and development of recommendations. The article demonstrates the importance of sustainable ecotourism development. The research concludes that ecotourism has a lot of potential to generate income and generate livelihood. Sustainability can be achieved by engagement of public policy-makers with minority populations.

The research by Das (2011), defines Ecotourism as the responsible mode of travel to natural areas aimed at conserving the environment and improving the welfare of local people. The article undertakes a critical analysis of ecotourism policies and programmes of the Indian government. According to the National Ecotourism Policy 1998, the guidelines of government policies are in order to ensure and achieve sustainability in development of Tourism. The goals of ecotourism as described by the current policies is economic growth, ecological sustainability and community participation. However, research has showed that the current practices are often contradictory to the expected goals.

The research by Arunmozhi and Paneerselvam (2013) was analysing the various forms of Tourism in our country. It generate a lot of revenue and is always growing. India ranks fifth among the other countries with fastest growing tourism industry. The authors describes various forms of tourism like adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, pilgrimage tourism, cultural tourism, wellness tourism, business tourism, heritage tourism, leisure tourism, cruise tourism, sports tourism, educational tourism and last but not the least ecotourism. Ecotourism is among the latest disciplines of tourism and it involves travelling to places known for their beauty and culture while keeping the environment and resources insured. It is a conscious and responsible tourism in India. The government of India, has set up Ministry of Tourism and culture to promote ecotourism in India.

The research by Bama and Rani (2013) demonstrated the impact of ecotourism in sustainable economic development. It is of no doubt that tourism in India is one of the largest service industry in India. It contributes massively to the GDP of the nation. India is experiencing a strong period of growth. The research had objectives to understand the socio-economic and environmental impact of ecotourism, it was also aimed at suggesting measures that could strengthen tourism. The research concluded that sustainable tourism development minimises the depletion of non renewable resources, promotes economic development, and conserve the natural diversity. It also stimulates local industries like hotels, restaurants, transport systems, souvenirs etc. it generate foreign exchange. However, there are certain negative impact also. Ecotourism disturbs flora and fauna of a place, it causes degradation of habitat and cause pollution.

The research by Singh and Munjal (2015) was aimed at understanding sustainable ecotourism in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Sustainable ecotourism involves making optimal use of environmental resources, respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, ensuring long term economic development. Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing industries in India. It enhances cultural diversity, protects biodiversity and promote the interests of local communities. Ecotourism has gained popular support from several International organisations. Even the Andhra Pradesh authorities have developed new eco-tourism initiatives to promote ecotourism here. They have identified the important ecotourism destinations in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The ecotourism projects involved jungle stays and wildlife tourism to encourage understanding among the tourists of the diversity of these places so that they can understand different ways to protect these places and not cause any harm to them, even unknowingly.

CONCLUSION:

As Mark Twain said, “India is a fabulous world of splendour and rags, the one country under the sun with an imperishable interest, the one land that all men desire to see”. The biodiversity of India is among the richest in the world. It therefore improves the scope of Ecotourism in India. With great diversity, comes greater responsibility. Our Ecotourism policies must be formulated keeping in mind the necessity of the times. The nature is a gift of god to humankind. It is our duty to preserve the Ecological diversity of our country. Ecotourism is an attempt at Sustainable development. Awareness and education is important for success of Ecotourism. The tourists must be sensitized towards the local communities and the biodiversity so that they can pursue tourism and not compromise with nature. Government must lay down stricter policies and run programs aimed to further the Ecotourism practices. Local communities must be trained and tourists must be made conscious of the environment and its requirements. If we, human being keep our actions in check, Ecotourism could be a success. However, there are certain implications associated with Ecotourism too. Since, exploring the natural wilderness with the aim of Sustainable development, the interests of local communities may be affected. Hence, to avoid such issues, a careful planning and a target oriented approach is needed.

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