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A Review on Impact of Ecotourism in India

Abstract

Ecotourism is a sound environmental tourism. Ecotourism has become an important sector that has an impact on development of Indian economy. It is a responsible tourism to the natural areas, which conserve the ecology and promote the welfare of the people. It primarily means marketing the serene natural habitats as tourism product with an inherent element of nature education. It focuses tourism to the destination where flora-fauna, cultural and historical heritage are the prime importance. It creates a wide variety of quality tourism products that are environmentally or ecologically sustainable, economically viable, socially and psychologically acceptable. The ecotourism in India requires to be developed by amending laws for attaining the objectives of sustainability. This paper is an attempt to study the challenges, opportunities and potential of ecotourism in India.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Flora, Fauna, Opportunities, Challenges And Ecologically Sustainable

Introduction

India, a country situated in South Asia, is of sub continental dimension with a population of over one billion people. In the global scenario, India has a prime position in the field of tourism among world's Top 50 tourist destination countries. In India, tourism sector is the second largest net foreign exchange earner. This is a country with second largest human resources of the world. The country has a large treasure of natural beauty, archaeological and architectural monuments. Considering the significance of tourism, 27th September is being observed as the World Tourism Day every year. Tourism in developing countries mainly depends upon its biodiversity.

The significant development that took place was setting up of the Indian Tourism Development Corporation in 1966 to promote India as a tourist destination and the Tourism Finance Corporation in 1989 to finance tourism projects. The Ministry of Tourism is the nodal agency for the development and promotion of tourism in India and catering. In the year 1986, Tourism has been declared as 'Tourism Industry' by the government of India. On March 4, 1993, the United Nations Statistical Commission adopted WTO's (World Tourism Organization's) recommendations on tourism.

Definition of Ecotourism:

Ecotourism in simple terms means management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to maintain a fine balance between the requirements of tourism and ecology on the one hand and needs of the local communities for jobs, new skills, income generating employment and a better status for women on the other. Tourism policy provides the guidelines, goals and objectives and tourism planning is the process of identifying objectives and defining evaluations. Sustainable tourism and nature tourism are umbrella concepts that include ecotourism.

Aim of the Study

The paper reviews the progress made in the field of ecotourism in India through its origin and its implications for the future. Many contributions in this field has been the work of Prateek(1991), Bhatia(1995), Puneet(2005), Singhal and Meera (1985), Richard *et al* (2000), Devesh(2010), Bharadwaj and Kandari (1999), Niranjana and Syiemlieh(2004), Rao and Sikha (2005), Kailash (1995), Kohli (2002), Shelly(1995), Selvam(1998), Rao(2007), Motiram(2007), Annmalai (2007), Rajuvedi (2002), Seth and Gupta (1996), Singh(2000), Santhi *et al* (2011).The literature was also collected from various tourism websites.



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Review of Literature

The literature on various aspects of ecotourism is quite extensive. In order to find out major developments that took place in ecotourism, Poya Moli (2007) in his paper on 'Eco-Cultural Tourism in Indian Islands: Some Implications' attempted to focus on paradigm shifts in tourism and environment management with particular reference to Indian Island eco systems. Rao (2002) after analyzing the relationship between tourism and foreign exchange concluded that tourism is a revenue earner and the most significant source of foreign exchange in several countries.

In the book, 'Tourism Management- A Global Perspective', Batra and Chawla (1994) hold the view that "ecotourism is perceived as a viable alternative route by which a measure of economic benefit can be reaped from tourism, with minimal damage to the environment and society. Rathandeep Singh (2003) in his book 'Indian Ecotourism: Environmental Rules and Regulations', explains the Indian environmental regime in detail. Jagmohan (1999) conducts a study about ecotourism planning. Santhosh Yadav (2010) emphasises the importance of ecotourism for long term conservation and bio-diversity. Aditya Singh (2008) described the tourism conundrum. Annmalai Murugan (2007) discussed the Challenges and Changes in Indian Tourism. Devesh Chaturvedi (2010) elaborated the Tourism in India through ensuring buoyancy and sustainability. R.M. Pati (2010) briefly described the tourism and economic development of India.

It is revealed from the empirical literature review that most of the studies deal with social, economic and environmental aspects of ecotourism and its importance. Tourism research has typically centered on topics related to the social and economic impacts of the tourism industry. Ecotourism is undoubtedly one of the most significant areas of research in tourism studies today. The literature survey shows that studies have been conducted on the impact of ecotourism.

Concept of Sustainable Tourism

The WTO and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) recognize five key challenges for sustainable tourism and they are: -

1. Managing dynamic growth, in the light of a forecasted doubling of international tourist arrivals by 2020.
2. Climate change, not only recognizing the consequences for future tourism planning but also the contribution that tourism makes to global warming through pollution from transport emissions.
3. Poverty alleviation, notably in rural areas where tourism can provide only a small number of development options.
4. Support for conservation from tourism spending given that protected areas in developing countries receive under 30% of their funding

needs and many governments are cutting back on their support for them; and

5. Concerns about health, safety and security of travellers.

Importance of Ecotourism in India

India is one of the 12-mega bio-diverse countries of the world and has a rich cultural heritage too. It has a vast potential for ecotourism that needs to be tapped for healthy conservation and preservation of nature and bringing about economic benefits to the local communities. Ecotourism in India has developed recently, and the concept itself is a relatively new one. India has spectacularly attractive natural and cultural tourist attractions.

Ecotourism is an attempt for sustainable ecological development. India, the land of geographical diversities and wonders offers excellent options for ecotourism. No country in this world offers as much geographical varieties as India. India provides an unmatched range and diversity, justifying several ecotourism travel trips. Ecotourism industry is one of the leading employment generating sectors of India and it generates directly or indirectly approximately 3.8% employment out of the total employment generation every year in India.

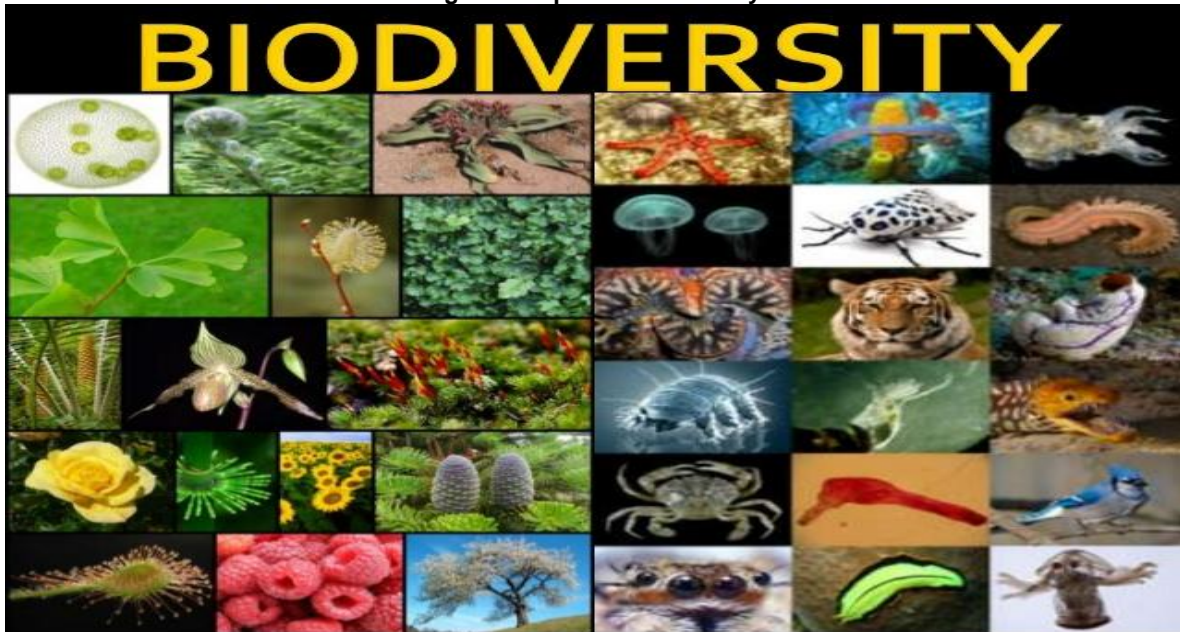
Potential of Ecotourism

The following factors may be considered for the potential of ecotourism industry in India:

1. To increase foreign exchange: - Ecotourism is one of the important industries that earn foreign exchange for a country without actually exporting any material goods. The income from ecotourism has tended to increase at a higher rate than merchandise export in a number of countries.
2. To help in the development of infrastructure facilities: - Development and improvement of infrastructure facilities are another important benefit offered by the ecotourism industry. A variety of secondary industries may be promoted which may not serve the needs of ecotourism. Thus, indirectly; tourist expenditure may be responsible for stimulating other economic activities of a country.
3. To help in balanced regional development: - Tourism development greatly benefits underdeveloped regions of a country. These economically backward regions mostly have places of high scenic beauty which if developed for the tourism industry, will help to bring a lot of prosperity to the local people.
4. To help in generating employment: - Tourism industry is highly labour intensive service industry that generates employment for highly skilled, semiskilled and unskilled labour in sectors like hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tourism offices, shops etc.
5. To help in maintaining peace and understanding- Tourism plays an important role in promoting international goodwill. It creates awareness and appreciation of other countries culture and nature.

Biodiversity in India

Fig. 1 -Glimpse of Biodiversity

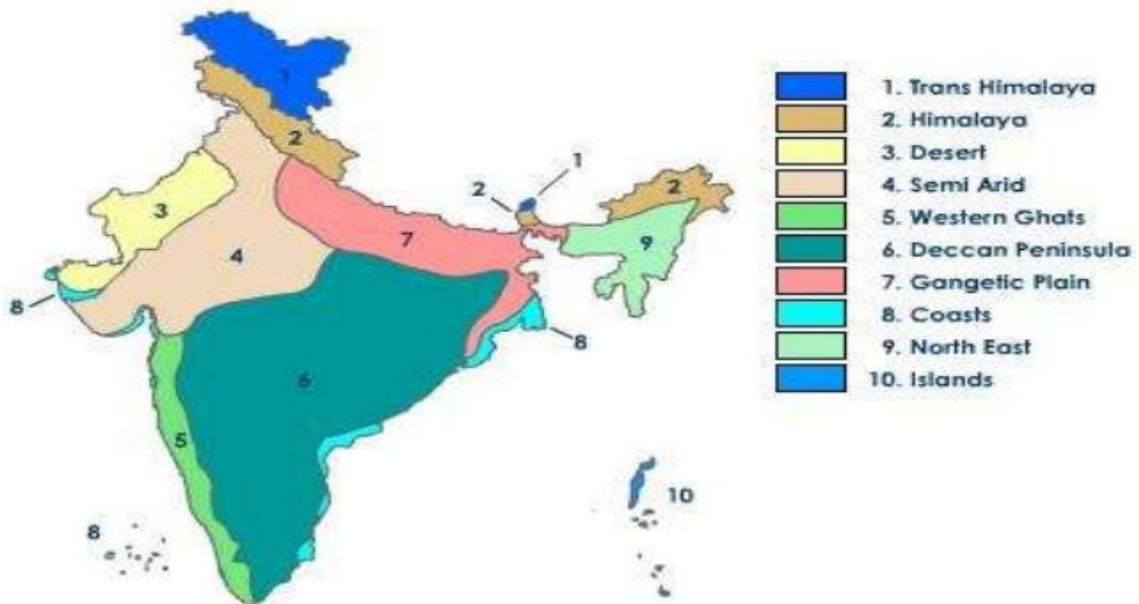


India contains a great wealth of biodiversity in its forests, wetlands and marine areas. The country has 7% of the mammals, 12.6% birds, 62% reptiles, 4.4% amphibians, 11.7% fishes and 6% plants of the world. The Western Ghats and Eastern Himalayas are biodiversity hotspots. The faunal species of India is estimated to be about 81,000, representing about 6.4% world's fauna. The number of animal species in

India is estimated to be over 45,000 representing about 7% of world's fauna including 1228 bird, 428 reptile, 372 mammal, 204 amphibian and 2546 fish species. India is home to 14 biosphere reserves, of which 3 are in the world network of biosphere reserve viz. Sundarbans, Gulf of Mannar and Nilgiri. The following figure illustrates it .

Fig 2 -Biodiversity of India

10 Biogeographic Zones of India



The following tables throw insight into the ecotourism of India.

Table 1 Indian Eco-System and Resources

1. Biosphere Reserves
2. Mangroves
3. Coral Reefs
4. Deserts
5. Mountains and Forests
6. Flora and Fauna
7. Seas, Lakes and Rivers
8. Caves Source

www.ecotourismindia.com

Table 2 Bio-Sphere Reserves in India

1. Nilgiri
2. Nanda Devi
3. Nokrek
4. Great Nicobar
5. Gulf of Mannar
6. Manas
7. Sunderbans

Source: www.ecotourismindia.com

Table 3 Mangroves in India

1. Northern Andaman and Nicobar Islands
2. Sunderbans (West Bengal)
3. Bhiturkania and Mahanadi Delta (Orissa)
4. Coringa, Godavari Delta and Krishna Estuary (Andra Pradesh)
5. Pichavaram and Point Calimere(Tamilnadu)
6. Goa
7. Gulf of Kutch (Gujarat)
8. Coonapur (Karnataka)
9. Achra/Ratnagiri(Maharashtra)
10. Vembanad (Kerala)

Source: www.ecotourismindia.com

Table 4 Coral Reef Eco-Systems in India

1. Gulf of Mannar
2. Andaman and Nicobar Islands
3. Lakshadweep Islands
4. Gulf of Kutch

Source: www.ecotourismindia.com

Promoting Ecotourism in India

The key players in the ecotourism business are Government, local authorities, developers and operators, visitors and local community. Each one of them has to be sensitive to the environment and local traditions and follow a set of guidelines for the successful development of ecotourism. In addition, governmental organisations and scientific and research institutions also have to play key role in development of ecotourism.

Forms of Ecotourism in India

Some of the most prominent forms include wildlife tourism, agro tourism, and village tourism and so on. Of this, wildlife tourism is emerging as one of the most popular forms of ecotourism in India. India has an unbelievable diversity with respect to flora and fauna and has some of the most renowned national parks and tiger reserves like Kanha, Ranthambore, Kaziranga, Corbett and Sunderbans. Apart from this, agro tourism is making its own mark and tourists are flocking to India to get a taste of the rustic rural life of the countryside. India is fortunate to have extensive mountain ranges and coastal areas in which ecotourism can play a significant role.

Recent Initiatives in Ecotourism in India

1. A project of ecotourism for development of Horsely Hill in Chittor district of Andra Pradesh has been sanctioned.
2. The project of development of Satkosi in Orissa (Rs.4.25 crore) has been sanctioned in which interpretation centre; landscaping, elephant camps, trekking park, watch towers and parking facilities etc. are proposed to be developed.
3. Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has sanctioned a project for development of ecotourism in Morni-Pinjore Hills and Sultanpur National Park in Haryana for which Rs 2.63 crore have been sanctioned.
4. The project of integrated development of tribal circuit with special focus on ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh has been approved for Rs.6.98 crore.
5. Development of Wayanad in Kerala for an amount of Rs.2.01 crore.
6. Development of Tourist Circuit (Western Assam Circuit) DhubariMahamaya-Barpeta-Hajo has been sanctioned for an amount of Rs.4.97 crore.
7. Development of Mechuka destination (Rs.4.41 crore in Arunachal Pradesh).
8. Development of tourist destination of Khensa at a cost of Rs 4.58 crore in Nagaland Circuit-Udhyamandalam-Madumalai-Anaimalai, Tamil Nadu.
9. Jungle Lodges and Resorts, Karnataka (provides experiences of living in the wilderness).
10. Private Initiative in Kerala-Casino Group of Hotels, Tours India Ltd (adopted 2 tribal villages in Periyar Tiger Reserve for growing indigenous pepper-used as USP and financial gains to communities).
11. GEF Project-Gulf of Mannar, Tamilnadu (ecotourism as an alternative method of livelihoods and preservation of the bio-diversity of the region).
12. Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism Project (developing collaboration between TAAS, local orgs, and communities for biodiversity, conservation and income generation).
13. Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala-India Eco development Project (promoting participation of local communities in biodiversity conservation through incentive based mechanisms).
14. Corbett-Binsar-Nainital Ecotourism Initiative, Uttarakhand (promoting participation of local communities in biodiversity conservation through incentive based mechanisms).
15. Great Himalayan National Park, HP-Eco Development Project (promoting participation of local communities in biodiversity conservation through incentive based mechanisms).

Tourism Trends and Policy in India

Both the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment and Forests have responded to the development in the field of ecotourism with policy initiatives. Department of Tourism issued policy and guidelines on Ecotourism in July 1998. The policy lays down the objectives for ecotourism and contains

operational guidelines for major stakeholders. During 2000, Ecotourism in Protected Areas and Territorial Forest Division was recognised as one of the fifteen thrust areas of the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The Indian chapter of the Pacific Asia Travel Association has formulated an action plan for National Ecotourism Policy, which has been forwarded by Ministry of Tourism to state governments to review. The Ministry of Tourism is developing India's first ecotourism model in the valley of flowers in Uttarkhand with the assistance of UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).

With the efforts of central and state governments, various problems such as poverty, unemployment, foreign exchange earnings, international peace, regional imbalances, industrial recession etc can be solved to a large extent if the existing ecotourism resources are fully explored

Ecotourism in India: Some Major Issues

There are number of issues relating to ecotourism in India, which contradict the very principle of the concept.

Environmental Issues

One of the most disturbing facts about ecotourism is that it is mainly promoting the expropriation of wilderness area, national parks, isolated tribal areas and even the areas having no trace of any permanent settlement. The use of natural resources subsequently leads to the transformation of ecological habitats and loss of flora and fauna.

Socio-Economic Issues

There is a breakdown of civil amenities during peak season when the influx of tourists is tremendous.

Impact over Locals

Ecotourism deceives the locals in two ways. First, their traditional economic and social structure undergoes a transformation towards tourism monoculture. Secondly, the promise made to them to provide perennial source of income and rational distribution of profit made is highly insincere. Those locals get jobs but only of low quality, low valued and seasonal in nature. Tax paid by the tourist in India is the highest in the world compared to the other Asian countries where the tax rate is between 3-6%. Indian hotels charge about 40% tax. Another important factor behind the limited exploitation of the tourism potential of the country is the deterioration of macro-economic central planning to the level of micro-planning.

Conclusion

Considering the wide geographical and biological diversity, the scope of ecotourism in India is very high. If these resources are tapped successfully we can transform the face of ecotourism industry in India

Looking at the tremendous potential the ecotourism industry offers in the field of its employment generation and foreign exchange earning capacity, it is the time that Government pays urgent attention to the needs of the ecotourism industry. It is believed that by 2020, tourism industry would be a single biggest industry in the world. In this way, the ecotourism in India requires to be developed by

amending laws for attaining the objectives of sustainability.

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