



Environmental Threats of the Unrestrained Tourism and Ecotourism as a Tool against Myopic Wilding of the Natural Resources: Case Study of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: *Tourism was in the history, is in present, and will remain eternally in the future. This is a phenomenon that it will never stop growing. But with the growth of this industry, we have to focus on its side effects as well. Once cured properly, they can be managed easily in future. In this paper, negative relation between tourism and environment will be discussing. The treats to the environment by the tourism is somehow threat to tourism itself. Because in an environmentally degraded destination, no tourist would love to visit, this would further lead to the exhaustion of the tourism for that destination. Problems caused by tourism and need of planned tourism are discussed further. When the nature of the tourism was tending to create negative impact on the environment, and when with the growth of this sector it was getting worse, need of sustainable development of tourism has been felt. Gradually a new concept has emerged which was totally inclined toward the environmental protection and promotion of eco friendly tourism. Ecotourism came in the literature in seventies and it kept humming all the time. Because, that time tourism sector and its negative impacts on the environment were considered not so important than other issues present in the world, but gradually tourism grew enormous and simultaneously the negative impacts too. Then, the term, ecotourism started buzzing everywhere and it has become the most important approach to develop the tourism industry.*

Key Words: - *Ecotourism, environmental degradation, sustainable development, pollution, environmental management,*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is, unquestionably, rapidly growing and never stopping phenomenon in the world. It has a healthy past, present, as we are experiencing now and the future may be endless. Traveling is one of the favorite activities of people around the world for long back. It supports the economy of the place visited and provides mind soothing feeling to the visitor, but sometimes it can have a harmful effect on the environment. Tourism may positively impact one's country or city in terms of economic advantages, employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings, and growth in the service sector, but it may also put pressure on the environment, especially when there are a huge number of visitors in regions where the resources are already inadequate. In other words, no doubt, tourism provides considerable economic benefits to the regions, host community; on other hand its

rapid development and expansion bring adverse effects to the environment. Tourism activities in a particular destination sometimes cause serious problems to the environment.

In fact, unrestrained traditional tourism has possible threats to a lot of natural resources from across the globe. It can lead to a lot of major problems that could totally harm the environment, such as natural habitat loss, increased pollution, soil erosion, and more. It will never be a great idea to exceed limits when it comes to tourism, particularly if the natural resources are at stake. Pressure on environment and natural resources may cause natural resources depletion and environment degradation. Negative impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is greater than the environment's ability to cope with this use within acceptable limits of change. Uncontrolled conventional tourism poses potential threats to many natural areas around the world. It can put enormous pressure on an area and lead to impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, discharges into the sea, natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It often puts a strain on water resources, and it can force local populations to compete for the use of critical resources.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Managing tourism activities in an unplanned manner can cause harm to the tourism industry itself because it can exhaust any time, if it is planned properly, keeping eye upon every aspect, tourism sector will never face exhaustion and will support the economy of the host region and serve host and guest communities for endless period of time. But the tendency of rapid gaining and lack of experience in planning and managing the tourism activities is killing this sector in many high potential areas where if the activates managed in planned manner, result could be different.

Frederico Neto, (2002) opines that while tourism provides considerable economic benefits for many countries, regions, and communities, its rapid expansion can also be responsible for the adverse environmental impacts. Natural resources depletion and environmental degradation associated with tourism activities are sometimes serious problems



in tourism rich regions. The management of natural resources to reverse this trend is thus the most difficult challenges for the governments at different levels. The fact that the most tourists choose to maintain their relatively high patterns of consumption (and waste generation) when they reach their destinations can be a particularly serious problem for developing countries and regions without the appropriate means for protecting their natural resources and local ecosystems from the pressures of mass tourism.

Gosling, (1999) says that inadequate physical infrastructure and limited capacity to absorb mass tourism, the fragile land and ocean ecosystems of many developing countries can be literally overwhelmed by large numbers of tourists. It is increasingly recognized, therefore, that ecotourism activities can also cause adverse ecological impact, particularly if they are not properly managed or if they involve tourist numbers beyond the local carrying capacity.

Ashley, (2001) Believes that tourism tends to be heavily based upon the preservation of natural capital such as, wildlife and scenery and cultural heritage, which are often “assets that some of the poor have, even if they have no financial resources.

But the stakeholders from outside the local community are never concern about the environment and the natural resources, they only concern for the gain, whatever may be the cost. This kind of approach leads to unsustainable consumption of the resources unnecessary pressure on the resources and environment degradation.

UNWTO, (1995) mentions that cleaner production techniques can be important tools for planning and operating tourism facilities in a way that minimizes their environmental impacts. For example, green building (using energy-efficient and non-polluting construction materials, sewage systems and energy sources) is an increasingly important way for the tourism industry to decrease its impact on the environment. And because waste treatment and disposal are often major, long-term environmental problems in the tourism industry, pollution prevention and waste minimization techniques are especially important for the tourism industry (UNEP, 1995, 1997, 1998; WTO, 1995).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following are the objectives of the study:-

1. To understand the relation between environment and tourism.
2. To highlight the threats of unrestrained tourism on the natural resources and environment.

3. To highlight the efforts of international organization for the development of sustainable tourism.
4. To give suggestion how tourism industry can help in conservation of the environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary sources of data and personal observations. I have concerned books on tourism, planning of tourism and ecotourism, also concerned the research papers regarding environmental threats of tourism. To highlight the exact cause of the negative impact of tourism and pressure on the natural resources and the facilities provided at host destination I visited the destination time to time in season and off season and observed and analyzed the circumstances. I have concerned websites of international organizations and government of Himachal too to complete this research paper

ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS AND TOURISM

Across the globe the mountain regions have fragile ecological system and these regions, with many kinds of attractions and alluring scenic beauty attracts a large number of visitors throughout the world. In chances of the negative impact of tourism is higher always if it not in eco friendly way. It hurts environment and the ultimate result comes as the loss of tourism industry. Excessive exploitation of resources never gives long term benefits to any industry. In other words, we are not in the position to compromise with the environmental and ecological system of the region for the short term gains. The negative impact of intensive tourism activities on the environmental quality of mountains, rivers, forests and other ecosystems also compromise the viability of the tourism industry in these places. In Himachal, Cities like Shimla, Dharamshala and Kullu town are the examples where earlier tourism was developed at enormous pace and to exploit it people from surrounding areas and even outside of the state came to these destinations and started planting the jungle of concrete. Today these places are developed with multy layers of cement and concrete over the surface of the ground. Dharamshala and Kullu cities are used only for transit, because these places are now overdeveloped and have very less attractions left there to lure tourists. Shimla has still some historical monuments and building to see otherwise more or less Shimla city is going to face the same as Kullu and Dharamshala are now facing. Only one thing is in favor of Dharamshala is that the international cricket ground is there which hosts cricket matches now and then. In many developing countries, whenever a place with the potential of



tourism gets discovered, people start migrating toward the destination and unplanned construction and illegal commercial activities start mushrooming everywhere. Soon tourism destinations become overdeveloped up to the point where it starts degrading the environment and eventually loses the interest of tourists resulting collapse in tourism arrivals which becomes irreversible later on. Such unplanned growth cause many problems like water, power, and most important for a tourism destination, sanitation problem. Larger the population, heavier the waste, and if the disposal of waste is not planned properly it can be disaster for the destination. A small fishing village in Kerala which had experienced its tourist sector collapse after two decades of fast growth, because of inadequate disposal of solid waste. Tourism in Himalayan Region is maximum based on cool climate, picturesque sceneries of lush green forests and far in background, snow clad mountains in the summers and for winters most of the tourists visit the hill station across the Himalayan region to experience snow fall but tourism in many destination could be threatened by external jolts. Global warming is the most notable threat for the tourism industry. Environmental pollution and urban sprawl are also the greater causes of undermine tourist development in urban areas in India. Global warming is also expected to increase climate variability and to provoke changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme climate events such as tropical windstorms and associated storm surges and coastal flooding that may threaten tourism activities at certain destinations (UN, 2001).

PROBLEM CAUSED BY TOURISM

Development of tourism can put pressure on natural resources of the destination. With the tourism grow rapidly in an unplanned destination problems always occur. Problem related to water is the most critical because as the tourism industry grows the consumption of water also increases proportionately for hotels, swimming pools, golf courses and many other types of usages. This can result in water shortages, as well as generating a greater volume of waste water. The area where the problem of water is faced most of the time; there the wastage of the water and over consumption of the water cannot be easily wearable. In Himachal, Shimla, Solan, Dharampur, Badog are the areas where the supply of adequate amount of water is always a huge problem. Tourism can create great pressure on other local resources like energy, food, and other raw materials that may already be in short supply. Because of the seasonal character of the industry, many destinations have ten times more inhabitants in the high season than in the low season. Local businessmen order bulk of goods in

expectation of the higher number of the visitors, but it goes in vain when tourists don't turn up and vice-versa. Kinnaur district and Spiti division of district Lahaul and Spiti in Himachal face this problem every year.

To meet up with the increased demand of the tourism sector, increased construction of tourism and recreational facilities gets the pace, and it increases pressure on resources and on scenic landscapes. Wildlife and forests is often the subject of negative impacts of tourism in the form of deforestation caused by fuel wood collection and land clearing for constructing the accommodation and other facilities for the tourists to earn more. For example, one trekking tourist in Nepal and area already suffering the effects of deforestation can use four to five kilograms of wood a day (UNEP, 1999).

Tourism is tending to cause the pollutions like air pollution, noise pollution, most importantly land pollution. Solid Waste and Littering In areas with high concentrations of tourist activities and appealing natural attractions, waste disposal is a serious problem and improper disposal can be a major despoiler of the natural environment, rivers, scenic areas, and roadsides for example, Rohtang Pass in district Kullu in Himachal, was one of the most polluted hill station till few years back. Tourists used to litter plastic bottles, rappers, beer cans etc. while visiting there. It had converted more or less in a garbage dumping yard. But thanks to the authorities and the local community, both worked in direction of cleaning of the whole Rohtang Pass and the adjacent areas, hand in hand. Trekking tourists generate a huge amount of waste. Tourists on expedition leave behind their garbage, oxygen cylinders and even camping equipment. Such practices degrade the environment and cause damage to flora and fauna.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Although tourism contributes very less in India's GDP till now, but there are few factors which can play key role for the development of the tourism industry. First, the nation has enormous possibilities of developing deferent types of tourism according to the regions and products connected to the particular areas. For example hill stations in Himalayan and other mountain regions can be explored for recreation and mental relaxation, cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi, Chandigarh, Dehradun, Lucknow etc. for education and medical tourism, Kerala region for ayurvedic therapies, so on and so forth. For domestic tourists apart from all these spiritual and religious tourism circuits can be developed which can be throughout the nation. Though there are number destinations already, but the facilities do not meet up to the



exact demands. Second, unemployment is increasing and a large no of educated youth is wandering here and there seeking job. If they can able to earn around there environment, pressure of unemployment will automatically release. Tourism is the only sector where all kind of people, whether they are skilled, semi skilled or unskilled, can work and get better paid. Thirdly, the nation has developed the web of high ways, railways, somewhere waterways also and now air ways also on the phase massive change because the government has announced the scheme UDAN recently, which are sufficient for the present demand of the tourism industry. Tourism should be developed but the condition is that it must be in sustainable manor that the impact on the environment of the host destination be minimum and overall socio-economic benefits be maximized. The concept of sustainable tourism, as developed by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in the context of the United Nations sustainable development process, refers to tourist activities “leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems” (UN, 2001)

STEPS TAKEN BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism development was never discussed directly focusing on the tourism sector. It was first discussion of an overall sustainable development and framing an agenda for that. When the Agenda 21 was framed, it was an international action plan framed for sustainable development which was agreed in the year 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Popularly known as Rio summit. It was focused on the economic development, planned and sustainable use of resources, and conservation of environment, which was ultimately known as sustainable development plan. Although tourism was not specifically addressed in Agenda 21, one of the first concrete sectoral action plans arising from the increasing cooperation between the tourism industry and inter-governmental agencies was ‘Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry,’ an action plan for sustainable tourism development launched by the WTO, in cooperation with two business associations in 1996 (WTO, 2001). In 1997, the United Nations General Assembly, at its special session to review the five-year implementation of Agenda 21, decided that there was a need to consider the importance of tourism in the context of Agenda 21 and to “develop an action-oriented international programme of work on sustainable tourism” (UN, 1998). This request was followed up during the

seventh annual session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), held in New York in 1999. Drafting of international guidelines for sustainable tourism and stressing upon the carrying capacity were the important directions given by CSD. It says that the tourism should be managed within the carrying capacity and limits of each ecosystem and site (UNEP, 2002). The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in 2001. World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg (South Africa) in 2002, identified further measures to promote sustainable tourism development, with a view to increasing “the benefits from tourism resources for the population in host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages” (UN, 2002 chap.12).

THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF ECOTOURISM

Although in 1960s people started getting concerned about peace, humanity, human rights socio-cultural dimensions and environmental and landscape destructions so on and so forth. But eco friendly tourism movement evolved in 1970s as the reaction of many illegal activities done under the veil of tourism. Then a new type of tourism evolved which has facilitated international integrations, helped the formation of local organizations, active participation of local communities, and profit sharing etc. Exploring wilderness and biological physical landscape had started in late 1980s. since then the term ecotourism was continuously buzzing but it got importance and stable recognition when UNWTO declared year 2002 as United Nations International Year of Ecotourism. The International Year of Ecotourism offered an ideal opportunity not only to review ecotourism experiences around the world, but also to promote worldwide recognition of the important role of sustainable tourism in the broader international sustainable development agenda. Here is the crucial distinction between ecotourism and sustainable tourism; while the former can be broadly defined as an alternative, nature-based type of tourism, sustainable tourism calls for adherence to the abovementioned sustainability principles in all types of tourism activities and by all segments of the tourism industry. Ecotourism is still a relatively small segment of the overall tourism sector. At the same time, it is one of the fastest growing tourism segments and further it will grow with more pace. World Ecotourism Summit held in Quebec City (Canada) in May 2002. The Quebec declaration stresses that, if carried out responsibly, ecotourism can be a valuable means for promoting the socio-



economic development of host communities while generating resources for the preservation of natural and cultural assets. In this way, ecologically fragile areas can be protected with the financial returns of ecotourism activities. Whenever we talk about the example related to ecotourism, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Malaysia and South Africa come in mind automatically. Ecotourism has been particularly successful in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Malaysia and South Africa with the help of private investors.

Tourism is widely believed to be the most rapidly growing global industry and the UN world tourism organization (UNWTO) predicts that international tourism will grow approximately 4% per year through the year 2020 and it will grow with constant speed till 2030. The forecast report which was published in 2011 says that the emerging economy destinations will surpass the advanced destinations and Asia and Pacific will gain most tourist arrivals.

Until the late nineties of the 20th century, tourism was seen as a profitable sector and has been going through its Klondike (a region in northwestern Canada where gold was discovered in 1896 but exhausted by 1910) phase, in which the opportunities for minting maximum coins from exploiting natural resources dazzled the eyes of government and businessmen, as well as many local residents.

This myopic wilding has created a huge imbalance in the ecology which had led to the ecological and environmental degradation in a larger scale. With the surfacing of many environment related problems; thinkers came to the conclusion that the course of tourism; which was uncontrolled and only profit-gain centric in nature, should be altered before it alters the whole environment. Thereafter the focus was shifted to the nature based and environment friendly tourism.

Although the term Ecotourism was first mentioned in the literature by Kenton Miller in 1978, in India it came around millennium year or may be later. Because till the end of previous century, India had lot of other sectors to be taken care of. At that time tourism industry was mostly in the hands of private players and these private organizations has exploited the resources and used the governmental facilities to fill their pockets. They did not even think of a little development of the destination from where they extracted almost each and every thing. In Himachal most of the people from local community were engaged in agriculture and horticultural activities and were less interested towards tourism and also less aware of the benefits of this industry. But now the situation has changed. Government as well as local authorities is hand in hand for the development of tourism and promotion

of the cultural heritage to the world. Tourism has been changing its face and is now more environmentally responsible and nature based than orthodox tourism where it was uncontrolled in nature. As mentioned above that ecotourism found its place in the tourism literature in seventy's, but seen historically old as the environmental pilgrimage to the Himalayas. Simply we can define ecotourism as an environment friendly tourism, but in broad sense ecotourism is venturing in to and enjoying nature in such a way as to assure that the negative impacts on the culture and nature are minimized. It is, there for responsible tourism that, besides being ecologically and culturally sensitive, helps the local community in realizing the social and economic benefits. It was initially used to describe the nature and nature based tourism and travel. However the concept has developed in a scientific manor to approach the planning management and development of sustainable tourism, products and activities.

We can define ecotourism in other words as travelling in the lap of nature enjoy the attractions and simultaneously contributes to the conservation, respect the integrity of local communities, enhances the relation between tourists and indigenous people and understanding of the nature attraction, and its conservation. It should have a minimum impact on the ecological system such as soil, water, air, flora, fauna etc; cause little pollution; educate the tourist; and contribute to the welfare of local and indigenous population. Basically, eco-tourism means linking environment and ecological awareness with the minds and thought process of people so that they would act according to their position (one may be visitor or host) and circumstances. Whether the aim is to travelling into the natural beauty or simply to be on the mountains, awareness of the environment will aid a new dimension to any holiday.

CONTRIBUTION BY TOURISM DEPARTMENT IN CONSERVING ENVIRONMENT

When we enjoy visiting new places, or we enjoy the revenue earned from the visitors who visited us, we have extracted something in both case from the nature and environment. It's our duty as well as necessity to protect and conserve the nature in such a way that it can be used by the future generations also. The authorities and agencies can contribute to conservation through financial contributions. They can contribute directly to the conservation of sensitive areas and habitat. Park entrance fees, Green Tax and similar sources can be allocated for the protection and management of environmentally sensitive areas. Sometimes governments collect taxes indirectly such as income taxes, taxes on sales or rental of recreation equipment, and license fees





for activities such as rafting, paragliding and fishing and angling etc. can provide governments with the funds needed to manage natural resources. Such funds can be used for overall conservation programs and activities.

Environmental management of tourism facilities and infrastructure like hotels can increase benefits to natural areas. But here few conditions apply that it requires careful planning for controlled development, based on analysis of the environmental resources of the area. If the development of the destination is planned expensive mistakes and damage to the environment can be prevented. Development should be in such a way that the negative impact to the environment be minimum. For example, green building (using energy-efficient and non-polluting construction materials, sewage systems and energy sources) is an increasingly important way for the tourism industry to decrease its impact on the environment. Solid waste management has to be adopted in more environment friendly way that the impact has to be minimized. For that environmental awareness has to be given to the host and guest communities. Sustainable use of the resource and sustainable consumption are also important factor and for that awareness and the information about the environment has to be spread among the visitors. The tourism industry can play a key role in providing environmental information and raising awareness among tourists of the environmental consequences of their actions.

Tourism has had a positive effect on wildlife preservation and protection efforts across the globe notably in Africa but also in South America, Asia, Australia, and the South Pacific. A large number of floral and faunal species have already become extinct and some may become extinct soon. Therefore many countries have enacted strict laws to protect these wildlife species and made rules

for tourists to visit the areas. These conservative and sometimes preventive steps have resulted in thriving again of several endangered species. Forest department of Himachal Pradesh is doing incredible work in this field. Great Himalayan National Park and Pin Valley National Park are the two parks which are associated with the endangered species, Western Tragopan and Himalayan Snow Leopard respectively.

CONCLUSION

As stressed at the beginning of this paper, tourism is expected to resume its rapid growth in the future. This growth can be harnessed not only for the enjoyment of tourists themselves but, more importantly, for maximizing economic benefits and thus increasing the living standards of host communities and countries. At the same time, unless corrective measures are taken, it is bound to have negative environmental and socio-cultural impact on those communities. Ecotourism and other sustainable tourism strategies have gone a long way towards minimizing these negative impacts and ensuring that the ecology and environment be protected from such impacts.

A new approach to sustainable tourism development can help to minimize the negative impact of the tourism, and maximizing the economic benefits of tourism which can contribute to environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources. But while environmental sustainability must remain a key component of sustainable tourism strategies, another challenge for the international community is to devise ways and means to place poverty reduction at the centre of tourism planning, development and management. This will require the serious efforts from the government and concerned agencies. Community's genuine and active participation is also the key requirement for the success of any planning made to develop the host destination.

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