

Analysis of Ecotourism - an economy based mechanism to environmental protection and sustainability in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT:

Ecotourism is tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with specified objectives of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural aspects found in these areas. In business of tourism natural resources are intensively explored and consumed and it has major impact on environment, ecosystems, economy, societies and culture. Ecotourism is major business sector across the globe. It has been identified one of the key sectors propelling the country's economic growth. Karnataka has been ranked as 4th preferred destination among domestic tourists and 3rd preferred destination for investment in the tourism sector. It is estimated that the fresh employment possibilities at 4.3 million and the investments of Rs.73000 crores with 50% government funding (infrastructure, destination and mobility) is needed for providing a fillip to Tourism in the State by 2024. This research article attempts to bring to the light the emergence of Ecotourism as one of green entrepreneurship, exhibiting the discussion on positive impact on biodiversity conservation, waste management, cultural heritage of local communities and its impact on socioeconomic status. It also explain how ecotourism as sustainable business creating new opportunities in various domains. Ecotourism provides space to create environmental value through innovative eco designs thereby reducing the negative impact on environment. This research work exploring the government policies, green skill development in youth which gives balanced and inclusive growth with special reference to Karnataka.

Key Words: *Ecotourism, Protection, Sustainability*

I. Introduction:

Eco tourism is a management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to maintain a balance between the requirements of tourism and ecology. Focusing on needs of the local communities for jobs, new skills, and income generating employment and inclusive of women in all activities. India is rich in cultural diversity and biodiversity as well. Human being is an explorer by nature. People love to go places and explore not only for physical health but also mental peace and health being one with nature. In many parts of the world to be in nature and to be one with nature is used as therapeutic procedure, patients get cure from many illness. Adventure activities such as hiking, river rafting and snorkeling are increasingly becoming part of the experience that attract visitors to natural areas and destinations in general. India is fortunate to have extensive biodiversity rich geographical areas. India has with 86 national parks, 448 wildlife reserves, more than 2.4 million temples, mosques and churches, magnificent forts and palaces, the towering Himalayas, a large coastline and infinite other attractions. India is among the top five destinations for individual travellers among 134 countries. Moreover, the geographical diversity of India is its wealth of ecosystems, which are well protected and preserved. These ecosystems have become the major resource for ecotourism in India. They are popularly known as Biosphere Reserves, Mangroves, Coral Reefs, Deserts, Mountains and Forests, Flora and Fauna, Seas, Lakes, Rivers and Caves. An attempt has been made by the following research paper to present a synoptic view of these ecotourism resources of India.

The website of Department of Ecology and Environment (DEE) mentioned that "The state of Karnataka is a part of the highly biodiversity rich regions of India. The state is endowed with great diversity of climate, topography and soils. It spans the seacoast with rich aquatic biodiversity and mangrove swamps at the mouths of estuaries. It harbours verdant tropical evergreen forests, paddy fields, coconut and arecanut orchards on the narrow coast flanked by the hills of Western Ghats. It bears deciduous woods, scrub jungles, fields of sugarcane, cotton, groundnut, ragi and jowar in the Deccan plateau. The different environmental regimes support their own characteristic set of vegetation and animals. Karnataka supports 10% of total tiger population and 25% of elephant population of the country". Karnataka has 3 regions as – Western ghats or Sahyadri hills, Coastal area and eastern plains. The state has around 4500 species of flowering plants, 600 species of birds, 160

species of mammals, 160 species of reptiles (turtles, snakes, lizards and crocodiles), 70 species of frogs, and 800 species of fish. These figures give a good account of the floral and faunal diversity of the state. Mountain ranges and coastal areas in which eco-tourism can play a significant role. The information on web page of Wikipedia describes "The state of Karnataka in South India has a rich diversity of flora and fauna. It has a recorded forest area of 38720 km² which constitutes 20.19% of the total geographical area of the state. These forests support 25% of the elephant population and 20% of the tiger population of India. Many regions of Karnataka are still unexplored and new species of flora and fauna are still found. The Western Ghats mountains in the western region of Karnataka are a biodiversity hotspot. Two sub-clusters of the Western Ghats, Talacauvery and Kudremukh in Karnataka, are in a tentative list of sites that could be designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. The Bandipur and Nagarhole national parks which fall outside these subclusters were included in the Nilgiri biosphere reserve in 1986, a UNESCO designation. Biligiriranga Hills in Karnataka is a place where Eastern Ghats meets Western Ghats. Karnataka is home to 406+ tigers (around 12% of tigers in world)". Even though Karnataka has all required characteristics for successful ecotourism but not been able to attain that success, in this research paper author has tried to explain and analyse the possible causes and solutions.

II. Methodology:

This is an exploratory research thus methodology was based on Primary data, literature review and secondary data. The Drafts of policies, Acts, Rules and Regulations from Government bodies were considered as Primary data. Extensive literature study has been carried out on Ecotourism that identified the potentials and problems of the Ecotourism concept and strategy. The scientific journals, Magazines, web pages, books and information from other resources considered as secondary data.

Objectives of the study:

1. To analyze Ecotourism potentialities for biodiversity conservation
2. To analyze Government policies of Ecotourism for sustainability
3. To analyze of impact of Ecotourism on local communities.

Impact of Ecotourism on conservation of biodiversity and local communities:

Ecotourism is seen by developing countries as a means not only to ensure conservation, but also to improve the living conditions of adjacent inhabitants with respect to health, education and levels of personal income (Honey, 2002). Citing a comprehensive and multidimensional definition provided by Higham (2007), ecotourism is seen as a form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of the area including its indigenous cultures; the ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity, practices a non consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic welfare of local residents.

According to the definition and principles of ecotourism established by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 1990, ecotourism is "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." (TIES, 1990). Martha Honey expands on the TIES definition by describing the seven characteristics of ecotourism, which are: Involves travel to natural destinations; Minimizes impact and Builds environmental awareness; Provides direct financial benefits for conservation; Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people; Respects local culture; Supports human rights and democratic movements. Ecotourism should satisfy several criteria, such as:

- ❖ Conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection.
- ❖ Promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations.
- ❖ Sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous peoples by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises.
- ❖ Tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern.
- ❖ Minimization of tourism's own environmental impact
- ❖ Affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury
- ❖ Local culture, flora and fauna being the main attractions.

The travel industry defines ecotourism as: "purposeful travel that creates an understanding of cultural and natural history, while safeguarding the integrity of the ecosystem and producing economic benefits that encourage conservation. The long-term survival of this special type of travel is inextricably linked to the existence of the natural resources that support it". The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people".

Sustainable tourism is integrated management of land, water and living resources for promoting conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in an equitable manner. This approach recognizes that human being and their cultural diversity are integral components of ecosystems. Sustainable tourism can provide solutions to the issues of inclusive growth. Besides, the 'return to roots' focus, in tourism, is interlinked with increased access to information, enlarged interest in heritage and culture, improved accessibility and climate change concerns. Now a day's consumerism concept has become focal point of ecotourism, it means more importance to the comfort of ecotourism consumer even at the cost of damage to biodiversity and less importance to conservation, hence the ineffectiveness in conservation of biodiversity. The people, who directly depending on forest and forest resources for their daily living are local communities and tribes or indigenous people of that particular geographical area. These communities have their unique way of living. Their culture and traditional knowledge in various fields (Ethno-biological) are transferred from generation to generation depends on the territory they are living in. Their life is well balanced with nature. Ecotourism can be flourished business if these local communities become part of government plan and action of ecotourism. So the involvement of local people, Government and NGOs in conservation and development activities in this field is important. The study of Indigenous Knowledge of local people in conservation practices and delineating how tribal exploit the natural resources in sustainable way should be understood. Government should develop strategy for inclusive growth of these local communities and woman. Local communities should get the equitable share in the benefit for their traditional knowledge use and exploitation.

Ecotourism policy in Karnataka: On 15th August, 2013 the Karnataka state cabinet approved the proposal to set up the Karnataka eco-tourism development board. The forest minister of Karnataka would serve as the chairman. The initiative would help the government immensely in protecting the wildlife, creating awareness about it, encouraging eco-tourism, forest safaris and also prevent damage to eco-system in the name of tourism (Karnataka Eco tourism). Considering that multitude of tourists visiting India and the domestic tourists do visit destinations that fall in the categories of Eco tourism and nature based tourism; it is pertinent that studies in the sector will add value and bring about positive growth and development if approached from a 360° angle. Karnataka has been a forefront of many aspects of tourism promotion and off late there has been a qualitative churn and an intensive focus on Eco tourism. The creation of the Karnataka Eco Tourism Development Board (KEDB) in 2013 has provided a fillip to bring in a new structure, a policy, create guidelines and frameworks, awareness and education, and provide opportunities for training and capacity building amongst the stakeholders, besides standards and certification.

It is significant to engage all stakeholders in executing ecotourism guidelines. Synergy and collaboration amongst the Central Government, State Governments, hospitality sector, State Forest Departments, Protected Area managements, and local communities and civil society foundation is vital for guaranteeing successful carrying out of the guidelines.

Green Skill Development Programme (GSDP) :

GSDP is developed in The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF & CC) in consultation with the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), the nodal agency for synergizing skill development initiatives in the country, under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The programme endeavors to develop green skilled workers having technical knowledge and commitment to sustainable development, which will help in the attainment of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), National Biodiversity Targets (NBTs), as well as Waste Management Rules .

III. CONCLUSION:

The analysis of the environmental impacts of tourism has been predominantly qualitative and mostly descriptive. The environment is being increasingly recognized as a key factor in tourism. In the last decade of the twentieth century, it was noted that tourism depends ultimately upon the environment, as it is a major tourism attraction itself, or is the content in which tourism activity takes place. The relationship between tourism and the environment is taking place on various levels. In addition to direct tourism impacts on the environment through e.g., pollution, noise and disturbance. With the focus on the economic benefits obtained by the areas due to the development of tourism, the adverse non-economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts are totally ignored. Environmental costs continued to be neglected because of the prevalent belief of the nature being inexhaustible and renewable. This led to an indiscriminate and unplanned growth of tourism infrastructure in many countries and soon the negative effects in the form of social and environmental degradation started emerging. Specialists tours such as photographic safaris and wildlife watching, which can affect animals through noise, visual and scent disturbances, and by affecting predation and breeding behaviour.

Ecotourism not only depends on mass tourism enterprises and infrastructure (air, travel, other forms of transports, tour operators, hotels, etc.), but also involves the danger to eventually promote mass tourism itself. Unfortunately, the experience of alternative tourism in general shows that adventurous travellers have just served to open up destinations “of the beaten track” to large-scale tourism projects, accelerating the pace of social and environmental degradation of these areas. As a result of increasing globalization and liberalization, the competition within the international tourism industry and among tourist-receiving countries has become so fierce that there is hardly any margin left for social and ecological concerns.

In some destinations, ecotourism can produce a local economic boom leading to uncontrolled high-impact private development, high resource consumption, waste generation beyond the capacity of local waste treatment disposal systems, if any, and land clearance and harvesting with major impacts on biodiversity. In addition, infrastructure built for tourism may be used for illegal collection of endangered plant and animal species. Small-scale operations may eventually turn into much larger and more destructive operations. The study of the Environment Impacts of ecotourism is currently in a growing stage and more research is expected to appear. Karnataka is rich in its biodiversity. Government agencies and local communities, NGO’s working on ecotourism and sustainability, should come further to make it more preservative and successful through effective laws, policies, acts and more awareness programs.

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