



Research Paper

Ecotourism: an adversity in itself with special reference to Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract: Tourism industry is the fastest growing service industry in the world and a source of employment generation & economic development with its multiplier effect. Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has a greater potential to become one of the best tourism destinations in the world with its geographic location, mesmerizing scenery, unending attractions and virgin valleys. This state truly has been a perfect destination for ecotourism. Ecotourism being a product of tourism is intended as a low-impact alternative to conventional mass tourism which leaves behind a less negative impact on the environment, increase the level of education and activism among travellers, making them more enthusiastic and effective agents of conservation and serve as a viable mean of economic development for local communities. In other words, ecotourism is a mixture of conventional tourism with a twist of conservation and sustainable development. In J&K Ecotourism operations occasionally fail to live up to conservation ideals. Irrespective of many efforts made by the stakeholders of ecotourism development to sustainably develop ecotourism projects keeping in view the natural and cultural preservation,

the mass tourism brought many negative impacts beside the significant positive impacts on local environment. By going through the existing literature on the subject, the present study attempts to find out; if the image of ecotourism in J&K portrayed theoretically have the same implications when it comes to its practical applicability? Or the reality lies far away from the theory?

Keywords: Tourism, J&K, Ecotourism, Conservation, Ecology, Local communities, Indigenous culture and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is phenomenon involving the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. Tourism, thus, refers to all activities of visitors, including both “tourists (overnight visitors)” and “same-day visitors” (W.T.O, 1994). Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and is considered as tool for economic development, increasing employment opportunities, and is a main

source of bringing foreign exchange in the region. International tourism currently accounts for 9% of global Gross domestic product GDP, 30% of services exports and 1 in every 11 jobs (UNWTO 2015). As per the estimates of United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), global tourism receipts hit a record by earning US \$1159 billion in 2013. Despite occasional shocks, international tourist arrivals have shown virtually uninterrupted growth from 25 million in 1950 to 278 million in 1980, 528 million in 1995, and 1087 million in 2013 and are expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO's long term forecast tourism towards 2030).

Present era is the era of technological development. The evolution of communication and transport technology has made the world a small place. Distances of hundreds of miles are covered within seconds; even the most remote places round the globe are within reach of a traveller. Today, people want to explore new, untouched and virgin destinations for their spiritual and recreational wellbeing. They want to experience nature and natural phenomenon, but it is important that they do so keeping in harmony with nature. This increased appreciation of natural experiences has given rise to a new travel ethics called ecotourism. According to the International Ecotourism Society (1990), ecotourism is *“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”*. In 1996 the World Conservation Union (IUCN) describes ecotourism as *“Environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples”* (Joshi, 2011).

Thus ecotourism is a form of tourism involving socially responsible travel to fragile, serene, and relatively undisturbed natural environment, intended as a low-impact alternative to conventional mass tourism (“What is ecotourism”). Ecotourism tries to raise environmental consciousness, offering tourists an insight into the impact of human beings on the environment by providing practical environmental experiences. Taking part in ecology actively and experiencing how ecosystems work influence peoples' way of thinking, ultimately raising awareness of conservation and protection.

Ecotourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism industry, growing annually by 10–15% worldwide (Miller, 2007). Shift from conventional tourism to ecotourism has a huge impact on biodiversity, society, economy, culture, ecology and as a whole on environment. There are as many adversities as benefits. Thus the travel industry along with government and other NGOs should develop and adopt more environment friendly ways and practices for tourism in order to protect natural and cultural heritage of a destination, and support local communities.

BACKGROUND:

Tourism is the fastest and biggest growing industry in the world. It has become the popular global leisure activity that essentially relies on natural environment. Over the past few decades, there has been a gradual shift of the tourism from comfortable and luxurious forms towards the more responsible forms. This era of heightened environmental consciousness and accessibility to remote areas, has brought inevitable evolution in tourism and gave rise to what is called as Ecotourism. According to Honey (2008), ecotourism is *“the practice of low-impact, educational, ecologically and culturally*

sensitive travel that benefits local communities and host countries”

The shift from conventional tourism to ecotourism and varying effects of such activities on biodiversity, local socio-economic conditions and environment has put a limit on what to consider as ecotourism and what not. For this reason, ecotourism is defined differently by different organisations. Environmental organizations argue that ecotourism is nature-based, conservational and educational in nature. While on the other hand, tourism industry and governments focus more on the product aspect, treat ecotourism as equivalent to any sort of tourism based in nature (Tuohino and Hynonen, 2001).

The problems associated with defining ecotourism have often led to confusion among tourists and academics. Ecotourism is often misinterpreted as any form of tourism that involves nature or something that can be achieved by simply creating destinations in natural areas. However the reality is that true ecotourism must educate people and make them understand the value, beauty and fragility of nature (Singh, 2008).

Although there is a range of terms used to represent the concept but “Ecotourism” is the oldest and most commonly used word for it. More recent terms include green travel, nature travel, responsible travel, ethical travel, mind-full travel, conscious travel, and many more. Regardless of what we call it, the central concepts that these philosophies share in common are that the travel industry as a whole should adopt more environment friendly practices, protect the natural and cultural heritage of a destination, and support local communities. Most tourism in natural areas today is not ecotourism and is not, therefore, sustainable. But ecotourism essentially possesses the following characteristics:

- Conscientious, low-impact visitor behaviour
- Sensitivity towards, and appreciation of, local cultures and biodiversity
- Support for local conservation efforts
- Sustainable benefits to local communities
- Local participation in decision-making
- Educational components for both the traveller and local communities

Ecotourism operations occasionally fail to live up to conservation ideals. Many of the ecotourism projects are not meeting these standards. Even if some of the guidelines are being executed, the local communities are still facing many of the negative impacts. Some of the main parameters which are adversely affected are:

Environment and Ecology:

Ecotourism like any other harmful human activity viz; Industrialization, urbanization and uncontrolled agricultural practices is considered to be having serious adverse impact on the environment. Ecotourism increases the rate of environment degradation, deforestation, pollution and disruption of ecological life systems. Increase in population of visitors puts direct pressure on the local environment and necessitates the development of infrastructure like construction of roads, Sanitation and accommodation facilities that come at the cost of deforestation and Habitat destruction of both plant and animal species. In other cases, the lack of adequate sanitation facilities results in the disposal of campsite sewage in rivers, contaminating the wildlife, livestock, and people who draw drinking water from these water bodies (Tuohino and Hynonen, 2001). Increased vehicle trespassing through the natural habitats of endangered and rare species divide and decrease their natural habitats, invade undisturbed areas and disturb flora and fauna. Increased

visits of people and vehicles also leaves behind garbage and pollution associated with the Western lifestyle thus directly lead to environmental pollution. Mass ecotourism wears out the marked trails and create alternate routes, contributing to soil impactions, erosion, and plant damage. Construction of roads and other facilities lead to clearing out a huge area of forest cover, also leading to deforestation.

Wildlife:

Wildlife and natural surroundings are the assets of ecotourism therefore the eco-developers are highly focused on conserving and protecting them. However, harmful tourism activities and miss management may create pressure of mass tourism and infrastructures in undisturbed areas, thus causing negative impacts on the wildlife. Eco-tourists believe that by only taking pictures and leaving footprints, they keep ecotourism sites undisturbed, but they don't acknowledge the fact that the noises they and their motor vehicles make can be ecologically destructive. Presence of people in wilderness for wildlife viewing can scare away animals, disrupt their feeding and nesting sites, interfere in their breeding and even change their natural behaviour.

Ecotourism also has an effect on species through the value placed on them. People attempt to make money by selling natural products of fauna and flora. Certain species have gone from being little known or valued by local people to being highly valued. Taking into account the profits, people are ready to hunt and kill even critically endangered species leading to the extinction of various rare species of flora and fauna. Consequence of these activities is that the environment and biodiversity are deteriorated. Many people claim that 'the more popular ecotourism destination is the more devastated it will be'.

Indigenous and local Culture:

Despite the potential to alleviate poverty by bringing money into the economy,

creating jobs and other benefits like: development of better roads, hospitals, schools and communication, ecotourism is often believed to "preserve" and "enhance" local culture. Ecotourism doesn't always seem to fulfil these claims. With the establishment of an ecotourism destination and protected areas the first things to happen are, local people losing their homes, being pushed onto marginal lands with harsh climates, poor soils and lack of water (Kamuaro, 2007).

Local communities and indigenous cultures can be harmed in numerous other ways by an influx of foreign visitors and wealth. The prolonged exposure of local people to indefinite foreign tourists coming from varied cultural backgrounds has a huge impact on their indigenous culture. Local people struggle for cultural survival and freedom of cultural expression while being observed by foreign tourists. With time, local people evolve and adopt elements of foreign cultures, thus threatening the integrity and purity of local culture.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Ecotourism, with the potential of being an important sustainable development tool, has been growing rapidly over the last few decades. It plays a unique role in conserving natural areas, benefiting local people and educating visitors about the value of a healthy environment and biological diversity. However the global growth of ecotourism poses a significant threat to cultural and biological diversity (Epler Wood, 2002).

Ecotourism, "a form of tourism involving socially responsible travel to fragile, serene, and relatively undisturbed natural environment, intended as a low-impact alternative to conventional mass tourism", is usually entrusted with conservation and sustainable development of the destination and accompanied cultural features. Tourism is a highly complex activity and

thus requires tools to assist in effective decision making to come to terms with the competing economic, social, and environmental demands of sustainable development (Fadahunsi, 2011).

Ecotourism came into existence as a result of increasing interest of consumers in developed countries to explore and experience natural environment as an alternative to conventional holidays, along with a desire to reduce the impact of their social activities on environment (Weaver, 1998).

Ecotourism has been regarded a way of solving many of the environment and economy related problems of under-developed nations. However, regardless of how socially and environmentally responsible ecotourism may be in theory, in practice it is just another version of conventional tourism (Wall, 1997).

If planned properly, ecotourism can accommodate conservation of biodiversity, promote environmental consciousness and facilitate socio-economic development of local communities. However; poorly managed ecotourism can have critical negative effects including extreme environmental degradation, negative cultural changes and decreased community welfare (Mehmood and Fayyaz, 2017).

According to Rome (1999) Ecotourism is one strategy for supporting conservation and providing income for communities in and around protected areas. It can contribute to economic development and conservation of protected areas, by generating revenues that can be used to sustainably manage protected areas and providing local employment. However, without careful planning and management that balance ecological, social, and economic objectives, it may lead to environmental damage.

While ecotourism has a potential to create positive environmental and social impacts, it can unfortunately be as damaging as mass tourism if not done properly.

Typically located in fragile and pristine ecosystems, ecotourism projects run the risk of destroying the very environmental assets on which they depend. The loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitats, production of waste and polluted effluents in areas that have little or no capacity to absorb them are just some of the worries there are much more serious concerns to arise (Wood, 2002).

The construction of accommodation, visitor centres, infrastructure, and other services has a direct impact on the environment in the form of clearing vegetation, animal disturbance, habitat destruction, impacts on drainage etc. Animal behaviour may be significantly changed (travel routes, breeding areas, nesting grounds etc.) by all kinds of tourist activities. Transportation may have direct negative impacts on the environment including vegetation removal, air pollution, noise pollution causing animal disturbance (Kiper, 2013).

Similarly, tourism activities generally can create various negative impacts on the surrounding environment. Increased human interference in ecologically fragile areas can cause irreversible change in the existing ecological processes. These problems can be reflected in degrading natural resources, changing vegetation structure and decreasing size of the habitat patch, increasing deforestation and decreasing upstream water flow (Queenland, 2002).

According to Tuohino and Hynonen (2001), ecotourism activities in themselves are environmental issues because they can disturb flora and fauna. Even harmless ecotourism activities such as nature hikes and wildlife viewing can be ecologically destructive leading to scaring away animals, disrupt their feeding and nesting sites, acuminate them to the presence of people. Wildlife-observation drives animals and birds off their reserves,

increasing the risk of inbreeding, thus endangering the species.

Agreeing to Kiper and Saglam (2011), ecotourism activities which are not performed according to the intended purpose, principles and the characteristics cause destruction of environment, economy and socio-cultural fields especially in sensitive ecosystems like natural and cultural areas. Thus, in order to provide sustainability in the ecotourism, it is necessary to know environmental, social and economic effects of ecotourism activities and to keep them in mind during planning and implementation.

Objectives:

- To study the various factors responsible for adverse impact of Ecotourism.
- To highlight various environmental issues caused as a result of Tourism activities in J&K.

Method of Study:

The present study is descriptive and is based on the secondary information and primary information is also used as supplementary in the form of interviews, observations, opinion etc. The secondary information has been collected from, libraries, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspaper, books, newsletters and other available sources.

Various factors responsible for adverse impact of Ecotourism

Ecotourism consists of conservation of natural and cultural heritage, participation of local and indigenous people in planning and making profits from tourism, educating visitors and making them aware of need of conservation with individuals and small groups of visitors as a main target (Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism 2002:2). Ecotourism is nature based, environment friendly and improves the wellbeing of the local people. But lust of travel and recreation in the modern generation has resulted in tapping of new virgin areas for quenching their thirst.

Although stock holders of tourism industries are paying their full efforts to have minimum environmental impacts by developing or introducing new tourism activities, but there are some loopholes in the policy makers and implementing agencies either public or private which lead to various issues either directly or indirectly, due to introduction of new tourism activities or destinations all though we name it as Ecotourism. Some of the factors which need to be addressed are:

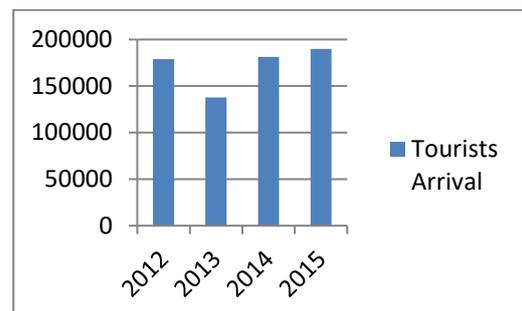
Ecotourism should not be used as a tool of economy development of particular region not merely as a tourism product which generates income. We cannot expect full conservation of ecology along with development. It is just assumption that ecotourism will conserve environment and benefit local community. "Visitors rely more heavily on local lodging, transportation, and locally made products. Operators are expected to minimize water consumption through proper disposal and recycling methods and initiate such environmental policies for their clients that are based on responsible behaviour (Gartner, 1996: 150). Humans tend to be selfish and greedy by nature, the more we have the more we demand. Same is the case with local community, once they start generating income from tourists, they start receiving more and more tourists providing them with new facilities and amenities by construction new accommodations' and restaurants. The tourists can contribute to the preservation of an area through entrance fees and donations. When villagers recognize that the potential exists to receive continuous income from tourists without an unsustainable use of their natural resource (e.g. logging), they will understand the importance of preserving the natural area (Goodwin, 1996). Our environment or natural reservoirs are now benefitted by high visitation levels, or by revenue received by the government or public. It is

safe until and unless it is virgin and natural.

Government has one of the important role in the mitigating the adverse impact of ecotourism on environment where tourism planning and promotion tend to be controlled directly by them. They have the major role in formulating Rules, regulations laws, allocating funds and management of tourism initiatives. Governments are motivated to play an integral and collaborative role in tourism planning and management and the private sector requires government assistance to ensure the sustainability of tourism. Sustainability issues affecting tourism on the agenda of governments as government agencies have control over a wide range of features that affect the maximization of benefits tourism can deliver to communities (Simpson, 2008). Governments are able to support tourism through marketing, information services, education and advice through public-private collaborations (Hall, 1999). Government should formulate strict rules for preservation and conservation of ecology. Environmental degradation by means of human activities related to tourism products should not be compromise at any cost with mere economic benefit. The vision of the government should be to protect aesthetic landscape in the region by regulating tourism in an ecologically sustainably manner and to restore already existing tourist detonations which have suffered ecologically due to mass tourism. Thus it is the role of the Government to educate local community regarding values of environment and the benefits they will get in return if draft implemented positively by providing them training in different ecotourism activities like guides & hospitality and skill development in income generating activities.

The various environmental issues resulted by Tourism activities in Jammu & Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir is one of the developing hill stations of the world with its exotic landscapes, breath taking views, virgin valleys and lakes it offers a vast scope for ecotourism in the valley. Tourism industry is multibillion dollar industry in Jammu and Kashmir which provides economic support to the people of valley directly or indirectly. From last one decade there has been a tremendous increase in the number of tourists arriving in Jammu and Kashmir. Both domestic and foreign tourists (Table 1) have continuously visited these destinations neglecting carrying capacity and development of infrastructure and superstructure for attracting tourists from round the globe.



(Economic Survey 2014-15, Govt. of J&K/department of Tourism J&K)

Mass tourism has been allowed to eco sensitive destinations to earn revenues, which has caused serious threat to the ecology of the area. "Load on natural resources, pollution, waste generation and damage to ecosystem are the main environmental impacts of tourism" (O, 2016). But this callous and greedy attitude from Government and locals to double the revenue has lead to even more serious environmental issues in this part of the world. Batra and Kaur (1996) in their study highlighted the increasing conflicts between tourism and the environment and

observed that increasing number of tourists arrival at a destination leads to overcrowding which further leads to supply of polluted water and causes damage to the surroundings. Vegetation of a place suffers from constant trampling and crushing by feet, Fumes emitted from the exhaust pipes of automobiles also cause wanton destruction to the fragile environment of the place. Growing number of tourists and tourism related activities has lead to serious threat to the environment like, deforestation, increase of pollution(Air, water, Land), waste disposal ,loss of natural habitat and threat to endangered species specially Kashmiri Stag in Dachigam National Park. Earlier times our forests were so dense that one could easily find wild animals roaming in their natural habitat, but now it is a distinct dream for current generation. Due encroachment and deforestation for developing infrastructure and superstructure for tourist facilities has forced most of the wild animals to leave their natural habitat and settle down elsewhere, which is the main cause of their extinction from these regions like: Gulmarg, Phalgam, sonmarg etc.

Pilgrimages like Mata Vishnu devi, Amarnath Yatra and others contributes a major portion to the tourism in Jammu & Kashmir. Study has showed that every year number of devotees visiting these destinations is increasing, which in turn has a greater negative impact on the environment. Heavy influx of yatris has created a condition of excessive pollution. Excessive use of polythene, carrying bags, leftover food and plastic bottles has polluted glaciers and river like sind and Lidder resulting in significant degradation of water quality. This has created epidemic threat in the villages dependent on these major rivers or their tributaries for portable water

Gulmarg known as “Meadow of flowers” is one of the best health resort cum hill

station recognized not only in India but around the world for its lush green meadows, dense forests, crystal clear water streams, surrounded by high spectacular mountains. This place was one of the hotspot destinations of the kings and British army officers during the holidays. But the indiscriminate use of this destination without taking into notice environment impact assessment has adversely effected and degraded the biodiversity and environment. The famous Gondola project is one of the examples of how ecotourism can have adverse effect on biodiversity and environment of the region. Before construct of Gondola, tourists used to trek and enjoy horse riding, used to go ridding to magnificent “Strawberry valley”, “leopard valley” and ride up to “Kongdori” to see the frozen lake of “Al-pathar” and see the wild animals in their natural habitat, but due to construction of first and second phase of Gondola to reach these places quickly has ruined the actual cause of ecotourism, has adversely effected biodiversity and destroyed the alpine habitat. It has forced wild fauna of the area like snow leopard, wild goat, Jackal, bear etc, which once were the attractions for the eco friendly tourists, to move out from these regions due to deforestation and huge sound generated by the Gondola. Gondola has also replaced eco-friendly horse ridding and trekking to “Kongdori” to see frozen lake resulting not only in snatching the lively hood of local people but also converting ecotourism into mass tourism.

Conclusion: The study provided us a wider understanding of ecotourism, its operation and its implications on local environment and local communities. During this study we came to learn that there are different positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on the local environment of a destination. A positive impact of ecotourism brings awareness and

a sense of responsibility for visitors, communities, management and operators towards the environment and its maintenance through collaborative efforts. Although ecotourism supports conservation and preservation of the environment at the destination, we cannot ignore the negative impacts on environment, ecology, local community and local culture. A literature review of the topic suggests that the term ecotourism is more complex, confusing, misunderstood by most of the tourists, and often abused by tourism hosts and organisers. There is a large gap between ecotourism on ground level, and what one believes to be true ecotourism. It has a tremendous tendency to develop into a small form of mass tourism. Thus the tourists, tour guides, tourism operator's local people and authorities need to join hands and work in collaboration, more to counter and minimize the negative impacts of ecotourism than to take opportunities to cash in and generate revenue. In other words, more focus should be drawn on conservational aspect than on the economic aspect so that the true ecotourism goals would be achieved.

The existing non-pollution norms should be tried and construction regulation should be enforced. A tourist "code of conduct" for this region should be evolved which could be applicable to both tourist industry and consumers, alike. Legal provisions should be made/applied for strictly following the "code of conduct" especially for the areas of archaeological value and there should be strict legal action for vandalism and like processes.

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