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Eco-Tourism and its Significance in Community-Based Tourism in India

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Abstract
Ecotourism aims to reduce the environmental footprint of tourism and tourism development and avoid negative impacts of massive tourism development in undeveloped regions. It promotes responsible travel that utilizes and respects natural resources, respects biodiversity, and promotes local community health.
This study aims to bring to light some of the most salient features of ecotourism and explore its impact on community tourism in India. This study identifies the development of community-based tourism perspectives as a response to the increasing awareness that tourism has to be more sensitive to the communities, being more democratic in the decision-making process of tourism. It highlights the role of grassroots communities in destination planning and management, and focuses on socially, economically and environmentally based benefits for the local communities.

Keywords: Eco-tourism, Community-based tourism, Tourism

Introduction
Tourism is social, cultural and economic activity that people undertake during their travel to places away from their home environment for their leisure, business or other activities. This encompasses the activities that travelers engage in during their visit, including tourism-related spendings for vacations, excursions and recreational activities. Ecotourism is especially well recognised as a way of helping to conserve nature and advancing scientific research, bringing benefits to rural communities and sustainable development in less economically developed areas. It helps to raise awareness on both the ecological and cultural aspects of travel, promotes environmental responsibility in the tourism sector and offers meaningful learning experiences for tourists.
Increasingly, the rural communities see ecotourism as a valuable economic revitalization tool, as it provides them with jobs, opportunities to become entrepreneurs and maximize their skills and resources. Due to its cultural diversity, tradition, ecosystems and diverse geographical features, it is considered as one of the unique tourist destinations in India (Das & Hussain, 2016) [4]. Ecotourism has been recognized long ago as a key instrument for natural resources conservation and enhancement of the indigenous people's livelihoods (Stronza, 2007) [18].
Ecotourism is a sustainable tourism that aims to reduce environmental impact, ecological balance and negative effects that usually occur during the development of large-scale tourism in regions that are little or not touched by human activity. The development of ecotourism creates jobs in the sector with eco-lodge, homestay, restaurants, transportation, souvenir shops, campgrounds, and guiding services, which, in turn, is responsible for community development (Reimer & Walter, 2013) [16]. The aim of this research work is to analyse the concepts and importance of ecotourism in light of the community based tourism in India. But in the Indian context, the policies supporting the concept of ecotourism are fragmented due to its multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings (Cabral & Dhar, 2018) [3].

Ecotourism
Ecotourism is a rapidly growing industry and is expanding at an annual rate of 15-23% worldwide. Ecotourism is an economic benefit for South Africa, however the issues raised such as physical displacement of people, serious violations of certain rights and environmental risks outweigh the benefits of this tourism type in the short term (Hongalad &

Biradar, 2018) [7]. The varied topography of India makes for several tourist destinations that will rejuvenate as well as relax you. It can be done in a number of ways to experience Mother Nature in its purest form. The Himalayan Region, Kerala, northeast India, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Lakshadweep Islands are some of the places where you can enjoy Mother Nature's invaluable gifts. The first plan to build an ecotourism resort in India exclusively for people interested in the tourism of the natural environment is called Thenmala in Kerala.

India has a rich diversity of plant and animal life. India's surroundings are home to a plethora of uncommon and endangered species. Several monarchs hunted the animals and this affected the wildlife resource, but the establishment of the various wildlife regions and national parks have helped to expand the wildlife resource. There are now many wildlife sanctuaries and protections in place in India. The Indian government has more than 80 national parks and 441 wildlife sanctuaries aimed at the protection and conservation of the nation's wildlife resources.

India has different Botanical and Zoological Gardens that are working towards enhancing the ecosystem. To a considerable extent, poaching has ceased. Harsh penalties are imposed against poachers, hunters and illicit animal and plant traffickers. Trees are being planted in a variety of locations. There are various animal and plant rights organisations that advocate for animal and plant rights. There are a number of organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who are coming in to provide environmental education at the grassroots level.

Ceballos-Lascuràin invented the word ecotourism in 1983, and it was first used to denote nature-based travel to relatively undeveloped areas with an emphasis on education. However, the notion has evolved into a scientifically based approach to tourist and activity planning, management, and development. Ecotourism planning is an important component that may help with the overall growth of tourism, ecosystem management, biodiversity protection, and improving the economic situation of local populations.

Definition

According to The Oxford English Dictionary, the word "ecotour" was first recorded in 1973, followed by "ecotourism" in 1982.

There, the word is defined as, "Tourism to areas of ecological interest (typically exotic and often threatened natural environments), especially to support conservation efforts and observe wildlife; spec. access to an endangered environment controlled so as to have the least possible adverse effect."

Ecotourism was perhaps best defined in 1990 by Megan Epler Wood, the co-founder of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and author of six influential books on the subject. Her latest, Sustainable Tourism on a Finite Planet: Environmental, Business and Policy Solutions, was released in 2017.

The present director of the International Sustainable Tourism Initiative at Harvard, Epler Wood's original definition was simpler and to the point. She described ecotourism as, "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people."

In India, ecotourism has been observed in various states like Kerala, Tamil Nādu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and boosts the economy by generating thousands of jobs, building infrastructures of a country and instilling a sense of cultural exchange between citizens and foreigners. Ecotourism, 2019 and Yehia, 2019 have indicated that governments with high tourism dependency spend a lot of resources on building the infrastructure of their country.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) provides the following definition for ecotourism: "Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment, supports the well-being of local people and includes interpretation and education." This kind of travelling can be realized through an international network formed by individuals, institutions and tourism industry in which the tourists and the tourism professionals receive training about ecological problems.

Meanwhile, the Australian National Ecotourism defines ecotourism as: "ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation."

Literature review

CBT has been well acknowledged in the last 20 years in terms of sustainable tourism development. International and national conservation organisations, in the field, are paying increasingly closer attention to the ground rules of community based conservation and people's participation in conventional conservation speech (Pimbert & Pretty, 1997) [13].

An integrated study on 'Community Based Tourism and ecotourism' is one viable alternative to facilitate the conservation of natural resources of Sundarbans- A theoretical perspective (Md. It is based on one of the theoretical perspective of such type of alternative tourism as was done by Wasiul Islam., 2010 [9] and it focuses its potentiality at SRF and its surrounding villages.

In this paper, the authors consider a nature-based UNESCO heritage site that has emerged as a prominent ecotourist destination in Indonesia, Komodo national park (KNP), to add to this discussion.

The study aim is to evaluate the performance of community based ecotourism in case study of Satun province, Thailand (Piyanut Pornprasit and Suthinee Rurkkhum, 2017) [2] reveals that the tourist destinations in the areas have many natural attractions and cultural traditions related to the people living in the areas who are Muslim which have a potential to be utilized under the CBET concept.

The study "Community based tourism for the sustained economic development of Kerala: a study with a focus on ecotourism (Pradeep *et al*.,) aims at critically examining the possibilities of promoting Community Based Tourism (CBT) as a tool for sustainable and equitable economic development of the Kerala state of Indian union.

A recipe for success or a mess - ecotourism for wildlife conservation and sustainable livelihood through community based homestay. This study and (Birendra KC, 2020) explored a community based homestay in Bardia National Park (BNP) buffer zone community.

In a Community Based Tourism in Developing Countries: A Framework for Policy Evaluation (Andrea Yanes, *et al*., 2019) [1] the purpose of an article is to evaluate the tourism policy documents related to the factors that facilitate and constrain CBT in developing countries.

Community based ecotourism: Trend and prospects in Tamil

Nadu (Saleth Mary) and aim of study is to provide high degree of control of the activities undertaken by a local community and significant benefits to them.
This paper aims to examine the factors that affect the participation of the local communities in CBT in a migratory birds sanctuary (Harshvardhan Reddy Kummitha & Peter Onyonje Osiako).The results can hopefully be used to inform the future decisions and strategies for tourism development for this and other tourism ventures.

Development of tourism and community-based tourism in India

India is a late comer in the international tourist market, but Indian tourism is very diverse with various types of tourism being promoted simultaneously. The masses are the target on one hand—for India, the percentage of international tourists is rather small (0.64% in 2012), and on the other, rural sustainable and ecotourism are a priority in the government's agenda.
International visitors to the country in 2012 totaled 6.58 million, earning US$17.74 billion in foreign exchange. International visitor arrivals grew by 7.5 million in 2013, and are expected to grow at a CAGR of 9.6 per cent to reach INR 2958 billion by 2023.
In 2013, the direct contribution of tourism and travel to GDP was INR 2,178.1 billion (2.0 per cent of overall GDP) and will grow at 7.5 per cent in 2014 to INR 4,346 billion (2.1 per cent of overall GDP) and will increase by 6.4 per cent per year from 2014 to 2024.
Tourism and travel contributed INR 6, 31.6 billion (6.2 percent) to GDP in 2013, and is expected to increase by 7.3 percent in 2014, and by 7.0 percent each year to INR 13,983.0 billion (6.8% of GDP) in 2014.
In 2020, the travel and tourism industry accounted for 121.9 billion dollars of GDP and it is expected to increase to 512 billion dollars by 2028. The industry's direct contribution to GDP in India is expected to grow at 10.35 per cent annually between 2019 and 2028.
The increased expansion is due to the improvement in income levels and lifestyle changes, multifaceted tourism products, tourism policy and infrastructure development including facilitation in the visa process, tax concessions for hotels, 'Incredible India' campaign, and approval of 100% FDI in the Hotel and Tourism related industry under the automatic route.
But a lot more remains to be done for the country to truly become competitive.
India's position in Asia Pacific has improved to 11th rank while its global ranking improved to 65 in 2013 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index. (World Economic Forum, 2013).
As per the report, India has been climbing in the travel and tourist competitiveness rankings and is now the 34th country in the world. India is up 6 positions to 34th position in the international travel and tourism competiveness ranking due to its rich natural and cultural heritage and low cost of travel (WEF, 2020).

Significance of Ecotourism in Community-based Tourism

Economic Effects of Ecotourism

The jobs created by ecotourism are a major factor for people's interest in and support for it. These employments are generally found in locations that have remained largely unaffected by traditional development initiatives, and they reflect real economic advantages from natural environments. Several studies have examined the economic advantages of ecotourism in local communities; unsurprisingly, the magnitude of the benefits varies greatly due to differences in attraction quality, accessibility, and other factors.
The following are some of the most significant economic consequences of ecotourism:

Fiscal Impacts (taxes, fees, expenditures)

Ecotourism provides money for the government through a variety of routes, including business and other general taxes, as well as industry-specific channels such as the payment of occupancy and departure taxes.

Reduced access to the resource

Tourism incorporates a variety of resources into the products and services it offers to visitors. One of these items in the case of ecotourism is nature in a partially or completely maintained form.
Natural area preservation sometimes necessitates a reduction in local access to resources such as timber or medicinal plants. When tourism is used as a partly or only reason for protecting a region, it reduces access to resources.

Inflation

Many places have seen increases in the price of products, services, and land as a result of tourist expansion, and this is a cost incurred by local inhabitants who purchase these commodities.

Effects of the income distribution

Tourism growth can worsen existing wealth disparities within destination areas, but it can also create new financial elites.

Revenue sharing

Residents benefit from revenue-sharing programs in certain ecotourism sites, which give monetary rewards or, more typically, support for community projects such as wells or schools.

Conservation

Ecotourism provides effective economic incentives for maintaining and expanding bio-cultural variety, as well as helping to safeguard our beautiful planet's natural and cultural legacy, by providing market-linked long-term solutions.

Communities

Ecotourism is an excellent tool for enabling local communities throughout the world to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development by enhancing local capacity building and employment possibilities.

Capacity Building and Employment opportunity

Ecotourism is an excellent tool for enabling local communities throughout the world to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development by enhancing local capacity building and employment possibilities (The International ecotourism society).

Community based tourism in India

The community-based tourism in underdeveloped countries

"tends to unavoidably be concentrated in rural regions" (Equation, 2008) [5]. India is a little late for tourism, but is opening up more and more spots in allot of remote and small places in comparison to the rest of the world. Rural tourism is defined as any tourism within the rural areas. Examples of this type of tourism include farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, natural tourism, adventure tourism, community-based tourism and ecotourism. Traditional tourism also has a few distinguishing features as compared to rural tourism; it is mostly in urban settings, it is based on the preservation of culture, history and traditions, it is less known and less populated.

A number of rural tourism projects are underway under the banner of Community Based Tourism that is embracing aspects of community development, poverty alleviation, cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection. When the Government of India's Tourism Policy was drafted in 2002, rural and community based tourism was considered and it introduced the concept of rural tourism to showcase the rural lifestyle in India.

The Ministry of Tourism rolled out the Rural Tourism plan in 2002-03 to promote the rural way of life, art, culture and history of rural areas and communities that have a core competency in art, craft, handloom, textiles and natural environment. This was done to help the local community economically and socially as well as for the visitor and local to have an experience that would benefit both parties. The establishment of a village tourism was also aimed to provide income generating opportunities for the villagers by attracting visitors to the village, and to reduce the migration from rural areas to urban areas.

Since then, there has been a push to develop tourism in the countryside from all quarters – central and state tourism ministries and departments, forest agencies, commercial sectors in the tourist industry, and even nationalised banks, all wanting to invest and lend. In the midst of this, there are villages that have joined hands to harness tourism benefits, to become self-sustaining and to build their own assets. Many models concentrating on various features have emerged as a result of many of these endeavours.

In India, tourism is seen and promoted as a 'development paradigm' and an important growth engine. But often development is equated with economics, without considering the importance of environmental, social, cultural and institutional aspects.

The Endogenous Tourism Project (EPT), is one of the projects that have emerged from the National Tourism Policy 2002, which aims to boost tourism in rural areas, was one such innovative project. The ETP was started in 2003 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism (MoT). This project is spread across 36 villages in India and has three thematic objectives: Human Development, Gender equality, Decentralisation, Urban and Rural livelihoods, Energy and the environment and Vulnerability reduction (Explore Rural India, 2005).

The National Tourism Policy of 2002 was the genesis of Mountain Shepherds Initiative. The Mountain Shepherds Initiative (MSI) is a community-led, community-controlled ecotourism project close to the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve in Uttrakhand, India, which was launched in 2006. The idea was born out of the Chipko movement (early 1970s) and the JhaptoCheeno movement (late 1990s), and then by the more recent Nanda Devi campaign which sought to restore people's land and forest rights. The Bhotiya community of Niti Valley has already been in the forefront of fair, inclusive and respectful representation of the natural and cultural resources in the tourist discourse.

The Indo-China border battle in 1962 and closing of the Nanda Devi National Park in 1982 followed by the establishment of the Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site have altered the lives of Bhotiya in Nity Valley.

With the founding of the Mountain Shepherds Initiative, the Nanda Devi Campaign is taking on the massive task of building a community-based business that will align with its aspirations for a future where human trafficking and environmental harm are eradicated to the detriment of the community. The aim of the campaign is to integrate the guiding principle in everything related to tourist planning, especially taking into consideration the possibility to make mountain tourism accessible for all age groups, income and abilities. Its success as a model will have a significant impact on the fate of the Himalayas and its inhabitants.

Compared to the ETP, the process followed by MSI is a slow and unchaste one that has been done over time, allowing the community to welcome and re-engage with tourism on their own terms.

The program of rural tourism implemented 107 villages around the country, some of them being ETP and MSI, with varying effects. However, where successful, it was found that the involvement of the host communities was an important part of the process (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India 2010 & 2012).

Community Based Tourism (CBT) in the shape of rural tourism and home stays is sought after by various state governments apart from the Government of India. Ladakh is found in many states such as Jammu and Kashmir, Uttrakhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Karnataka, Kerala and Rajasthan, to mention a few. They are being supported by local and national NGOs, and some foreign NGOs.

The advantages of community based tourism:

CBT is a therapy that has been researched by practitioners and scientists to see how effective it is. CBT views and practises tourism from a different perspective which is demonstrated in the benefits it offers. Research has shown that it boosts communities, enriches the visitor experience and safeguards tourism and natural resources. It is more immersing in nature, as tourists become a part of the society rather than living as outsiders and leaving their mark.

Another advantage of CBT is that it helps to preserve local culture. Wisdom and local knowledge may be passed down through generations if communities recognize the worth of their traditions and culture. The social benefits of CBT are also numerous, including working with governmental and corporate organizations, interaction with visitors and quality of life. CBT fosters a sense of unity, harmony, and cooperation among individuals, which can help to build a sense of self-reliance, self-respect, and hope for the future.

Table 1: Development area and Potential Development Benefits

Development Area	Potential Development Benefits
Economic	• Generate suitable and independent source of fund for community development • Creates employment in tourism • Increases household income
Social	• Raises quality of life • Promotes community pride • Promotes gender and age equality • Build capacity for community management organization
Culture	• Encourages people to respect different culture • Foster culture exchange • Incorporates development into the local culture
Environmental	• Promotes environmental responsibilities • Raises awareness of the need for conservation for tourism and villagers • Promotes management of waste disposal
Educational	• Promotes acquisition of new job skills • Creates new professions in the village • Encourages use of new knowledge in the village • Cross- fertilization of ideas with other culture- promotes mutual respect.
Political	• Enable participation of local people • Increases the power of communities • Ensures right in natural resource management in community
Health	• Promotes good hygiene • Increases in and diversification of food production for tourists improves nutritional status

Moreover, CBT can be used to decentralize the tourist sector by shifting the decision–making process to the community level which would lead to the empowerment of the local communities, establishment of local institutions which would mean local ownership, community identity and pride.

Conclusion

Tourism is sometimes chastised for allowing outsiders to dominate commerce while locals/hosts are forced to work in low-wage occupations due to a lack of appropriate skills. As a result, the host population feels alienated in their own homes, with no significant economic gains coming to them as a result of new initiatives and the disintegration of established structures. Community-based tourism (CBT) has been proposed as a solution to such problems, with the community at the centre of tourism development. Tourist facilitation by the local community is a feature of CBT tourism development strategies, as is their engagement at every step and level.

CBT programmes attempt to include local inhabitants in the administration and operation of small tourist ventures as a way to alleviate poverty and provide a source of income for community members. Respect for local customs, culture, and natural heritage is also promoted through CBT activities. Through the creation of Community Based Tourism programs, the UNWTO has assisted many local communities in developing tourism based on the principle of sustainability (UNWTO, 2008).According to (Pearce and Moscardo 1999), the term "tourism community connection" is commonly used in research planning papers and is regularly assigned top priority in lists of global, national, and local tourist research agendas. The notion of Community Based Tourism has emerged as a result of these dynamics.

The emergence of Community Tourism viewpoints is founded on a rising awareness of the need for more resident responsive tourist, or more democratic engagement in tourism decision-making by destination society's grass-roots people. Community-based tourism is a kind of sustainable tourism that emphasises pro-poor methods in a local environment.

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