



Ecology, Ecotourism and Sustainable Development in India

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ABSTRACT

Conservation of nature and environment is an essential and important task. Apart from environment and ecology, the local community also has an important role in eco-tourism. This is where the concept and idea of community-based eco-tourism emerges. Being an eco-friendly activity, eco-tourism aims to promote environmental values and etiquettes and to conserve nature. Thus, ecotourism benefits wildlife, nature and local communities by contributing to ecological integrity and its conservation. The participation of the local people in this also provides alternative opportunities for economic benefits to them, which in turn helps them to have a better standard of living and make their lives easier. I have tried to emphasize in this article that environment, ecology, ecosystem and tourism should complement each other only then the concept of sustainable development can be meaningful.

Keywords: *tourism, nature, ecology, rural community, sustainable development, environmental protection*

INTRODUCTION

In general terms, eco-tourism means tourism and management of nature, ecology and environment in such a way that tourism and ecological needs can be met on the one hand and employment, new skills, income and better life for local communities on the other. to ensure a standard and easy life; Along with this, natural resources of local communities or tribes, their cultural-social customs and heritage, traditional values and lifestyle can be protected.

The credit for giving the term eco-tourism goes to Héctor Ceballas-Lescuren of Mexico City, who first used the term in 1983. While defining eco-tourism, he said that- eco-tourism to visit relatively untouched and uncontaminated areas with the specific objectives of appreciating, studying and enjoying natural

scenery, wild plants and animals and cultural assets found in these areas. Can say. According to this definition, ecotourism is not limited to viewing and appreciating natural scenery, but also includes enhancing tourists' understanding of the scientific and ecological characteristics of areas of natural interest.

In general, tourism is an activity related to the visit of buildings and monuments of historical importance, picturesque mountainous sites and scenic places with natural beauty, which has taken the form of industry in today's time. The biodiversity of a tourist destination attracts tourists and they travel far and wide to enjoy the fauna and natural beauty of the place. Along with environment and ecology, local communities also have an important role in the development of eco-tourism. It is from this idea that the concept of community-based eco-tourism has emerged.

Eco-tourism is also known by the names of nature-based tourism, green tourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, and soft tourism. Although some things are common in these different types of tourism, but there are differences among them. Ecotourism generates revenue and does not exploit the environment and resources. Although the importance of eco-tourism as a concept has been recognized recently in India, but as a way of life, Indians have been following this concept for centuries.

Today, eco-tourism is developing as a huge industry in different countries of the world. It has a significant contribution in the economy of many countries and eco-tourism is emerging as an excellent way of earning foreign exchange; Which can be used for the protection and conservation of nature and wildlife as well as in the development of the nation. Eco-tourism is also indirectly associated with sustainable development. The communities living in and around

the areas concerned with eco-tourism can be benefitted in a well-planned manner. For this, harmony has to be established between long-term biodiversity conservation measures and local social and economic development. In fact, throughout the developing tropics there is a struggle to balance the need to protect natural wilderness areas and the economic development of local communities and the need to preserve cultural resources. The development of eco-tourism can become a permanent solution to this struggle.

Eco-tourism and its implications:

Ecotourism highlights three important aspects – nature, tourism and the local community. Conservation of nature, ecology and environment as well as respectful protection of cultural diversity are important aspects of eco-tourism. In other words, we can say our point in such a way that the following points should be included under eco-tourism-

1. Recognizing the natural values of nature and accepting that the basic purpose of national parks is the conservation of plants, animals and land areas.
2. To promote and develop travel and tourism ecologically and culturally.
3. To promote and encourage the conservation of investments made in natural and cultural resources used for tourism.
4. To make tourists aware and encourage them so that they respect the natural and cultural wealth through their participation.
5. To develop code of conduct and standards for eco-tourism.

We can say that eco-tourism is ecologically sustainable travel to natural areas that instills in tourists a sense of environmental and cultural understanding, respect and conservation. Thus eco-tourism can be effective in achieving the following three basic objectives-

- Conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity by optimizing public and private conservation area management systems, contributing to healthy ecosystems.
- To enable local communities and tribal people to share equally in the benefits of eco-tourism activities by obtaining their full consent and participation in planning and managing the eco-tourism business, and

- Promotion of local use of biodiversity by generating income, employment and business opportunities from eco-tourism and associated business networks.

Notable advantages of eco-tourism:

1. **Protection and conservation of environment-** Conservation of nature and environment will be a very important task as it will reveal the reality of their invaluableness and thus conservation efforts will be intensified. Along with this, public participation can also be ensured.
2. **Development of Environmental Consciousness-** Eco-tourism can be helpful in the development of environmental consciousness among the people because through this an attempt is made to bring the general public and the environment together. With this, people will be aware of the benefits of the environment and they will be able to cooperate in conservation works in a better way.
3. **Economic benefits-** Eco-tourism can yield direct economic benefits, which can be used for the promotion and protection of biodiversity and ecosystem. The government earns foreign exchange as a direct benefit. In indirect profit, revenue is also received through various types of taxes and fees. In this way, eco-tourism not only contributes to the promotion and protection of the environment, but also contributes directly to the country's economy.

India's efforts in the field of tourism development:

In India, since ancient times, people used to travel to different places of the country for educational and religious purposes, which was called Deshatana. But, now it has taken the form of tourism. Broadly speaking, tourism is travel undertaken for the purposes of entertainment or leisure. In tourism, special care is taken for the convenience of the people traveling in the country and abroad. It can be reflected from ancient to present times. Passenger facilities were properly taken care of during the time of Emperor Ashoka to Samudragupta and after that even during the time of Sher Shah Suri. Tourism has grown steadily over the past few decades and tourism is becoming an important part of human activities in the modern era. Tourism today is a big industry which is growing very fast at the national and international level and is emerging as a major economic sector. Tourism is the largest service industry in India where it contributes significantly to the national GDP and total employment of the country.

The first real attempt at tourism in India in modern times was made in 1945 when a committee for tourism development was formed under the chairmanship of the then education advisor Sir John Sargent. But, the real development of tourism in India started from the decade of 1980s. The National Tourism Policy regarding tourism was announced in the year 1982. A national committee was constituted in 1988 to prepare a business plan inspired by the objective of sustainable development in the tourism sector. Tourism Corporation was established in the year 1989 to provide financial assistance to tourism related activities. A national strategy was prepared in 1996 for the promotion of tourism in India. In 1997, a new tourism policy came in which the role of Central and State Governments, Public Sector Undertakings and Private Sectors was determined, as well as the participation of Panchayati Raj Institutions, local bodies, non-governmental organizations and local youth was officially approved.

Some important decisions have been taken by the government and the private sector in India to promote eco-tourism and community-based eco-tourism. For example, the Government of Himachal Pradesh has announced an eco-tourism development policy that calls for the participation of local communities. Similarly, Forest and Tourism Departments of Karnataka, Sikkim, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh have nominated officers who will coordinate these activities. Thenmala Eco Tourism Society, set up by Kerala, will create a model of eco-tourism. The concept of eco-friendly resorts and hotels is gaining momentum in the private sector as well.

Emerging trends of community based eco-tourism in North Eastern states of India-

A wonderful confluence of traditional festivals, dances and folk arts can be seen in the form of tribal culture in the northeastern states. There are also many ancient palaces and temples here. Buddhist monasteries representing Buddhist culture are also seen here. The unique skill of traditional craft ie handicraft and workmanship is also visible in these states. There are also many museums and village culture centers in these states. For the last few years, the concept of eco-villages is also gaining momentum in these states. The Government of India is also trying to promote tourism here. The government has provided special facility of air travel to the government employees to visit the North-East region. The North East region with its untouched beauty and bio-diversity and cultural diversity has started attracting domestic and foreign tourists.

If we want to see the beauty of nature and the heritage of tribal culture and civilization in its original form, then we have to take a trip to the North-Eastern states of India. There are seven states coming in the North-East region – Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland rich in unique culture. Sikkim, the land of flowers, is also associated with the seven states called 'Seven Sisters' in the northeastern region. Thus the total number of northeastern states is eight. By the way, all these North Eastern states have their own distinctive culture and civilization. But the special thing about Meghalaya is that this state is developing rapidly in the field of information technology. Spread over an area of 2,65,000 square kilometres, the northeastern region comprising eight states is rich in folk culture and arts, apart from a variety of flora and fauna. This region is inhabited by more than a hundred tribes and sub-castes.

For the last decade and a half, the trend of community-based eco-tourism is being seen in the North East region of India. Although this is a new concept for this region at present, but the feeling of conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity of their respective states is very strong among the local and tribal people. That's why these people are taking special interest in the protection of their villages and forests considered sacred; Some tribal villages have been developed especially in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. In these villages, their traditional culture and craft, food and different types of living and housing are displayed so that tourists can be attracted towards them and stay here to get acquainted with their traditional culture and civilization. Thus, while promoting eco-tourism, it also ensures responsible participation of the communities, which is essential for the success of community-based eco-tourism.

Undoubtedly, there is immense potential for community-based eco-tourism in the northeastern states, which are full of bio-diversity and cultural diversity. But, there is a need to create awareness among the local and tribal people to ensure their participation. Apart from this, it is also necessary to extend the economic benefits derived from tourism to them so that their standard of living improves and they can lead a prosperous life. At present, there is a great lack of practical and executive planning in this direction. But some steps are definitely being taken in this direction by the villagers and village heads. People are showing interest to preserve their cultural

heritage and environment of the state, which is a welcome step for the development of community based eco-tourism.

Major challenges in the path of development of eco-tourism:

Due to tourism activities, there is definitely some harmful effect on the ecology and environment of the particular place. For example, many schools and universities organize trips for educational purposes. Some plants are uprooted for study and knowingly or unknowingly some small but important plants are crushed under feet, this harms biodiversity. In the same way, monuments, buildings or national heritage of historical importance are spoiled by writing on them or making pictures etc. Apart from this, the contaminated sewage released from the tourist facilities situated on the banks of the rivers or the sea pollutes the water sources, which has a direct effect on the coastal areas, aquatic organisms and the people living near those water sources. The disposal of waste, especially plastic waste, and waste at tourist sites is also a huge problem. In many places, especially in the hilly areas, this problem is so serious that the appearance of those places has started deteriorating. The observation of wildlife in wildlife industries by fishermen influences their daily activities, especially their free-ranging behavior and breeding cycles. In this way, tourists knowingly or unknowingly harm the tourist places in many ways. It also includes the damage to the ecology of tourist places and the environment there. The danger of tampering with the socio-cultural heritage and characteristics of local communities, especially tribes, is also seen in public tourism. Exploitation of nature and culture of local communities, tampering with their identity is the invisible side of public tourism.

In fact, environment, ecology, ecosystem and tourism should complement each other, only then the concept of sustainable development can be meaningful. It is clear that conservation of nature, ecology and environment is necessary for the development of tourism. Tourists will be attracted towards historical buildings and monuments and common tourist places only when the cleanliness, cleanliness and natural beauty of the place remains in its original form. In view of this, now a new concept has emerged apart from public tourism, which has been given the name of eco-tourism i.e. ecotourism. In this, their participation is ensured to take care of the welfare and interests of the local communities or tribes. This has

also led to the new concept of community-based ecotourism.

At present, some problems have emerged as challenges in the development of community-based eco-tourism. Among these, a major problem is related to properly defining the community-based tourist sector. Along with this there are also concerns related to the management of negative impacts caused by tourists on the local environment and ecology. Involving local communities with their consent in the decision making process and planning so that the economic benefits derived from tourism activities can reach them is also a serious problem. At present, there is a severe lack of methods of obtaining community consent in development projects related to tourism, and there is also a lack of infrastructure in this direction.

Some useful tips for the development of eco-tourism:

With the right action plan, community-based eco-tourism can become a viable alternative to supplemental income as well as economic development of local communities. Not only this, but preservation of traditional arts, handicrafts, dance, music, drama, food, living, customs and festivals and some aspects of traditional lifestyle can be directly linked to community-based eco-tourism. The Government of India still needs to make more efforts towards the development of community-based eco-tourism. To make community-based eco-tourism a new emerging concept of eco-tourism, it will be useful to pay attention to the following points-

- A. To match the scale and type of development of ecology to the environmental and cultural-social characteristics of the local community.
- B. Identify and eliminate or minimize potential conflicts between local communities and the use of resources for ecotourism.
- C. Due to the traditional understanding of ecology and conservation, the local community should be involved so that the overall economic development of the area can take place.

Conclusion:

Some basic steps need to be taken by the Government of India to promote community based eco-tourism. The ecosystem of the North Eastern States should be properly assessed to get a true account of its carrying capacity. With this, over-exploitation of natural, cultural and human resources of these states by

tourists can be controlled. Apart from this, the government should help the local communities by training them properly so that their participation and consent can be ensured in community-based eco-tourism. Appropriate steps need to be taken by the government in the direction of keeping the customs, traditions and cultural diversity of these states intact; Only then community-based eco-tourism in the North Eastern states can flourish properly and bring happiness in the lives of the people there and prove to be a useful component of sustainable development.

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