



## Eco Tourism in India: A Useful Component of Sustainable Development

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**Abstract**— Conservation of nature and environment is a very important task. Apart from environment and ecology, the local community also has an important role in eco-tourism. From this the concept of community-based ecotourism has emerged. Being an eco-friendly activity, eco-tourism aims at promoting environmental values and etiquettes and preserving nature uninterruptedly. Thus, ecotourism benefits wildlife, nature and local communities by contributing to ecological integrity. The participation of the local people in this ensures economic benefits for them, which in turn helps them to have a better standard of living and ease of living. Environment, ecology, ecosystem and tourism should complement each other only then the concept of sustainable development can be meaningful.

**Keywords:** conservation, ecotourism, wildlife, nature, sustainable, monuments, historical.

### Introduction

Tourism is generally associated with the visit of buildings and monuments of historical importance, picturesque hill stations and scenic spots with natural beauty. The biodiversity of a tourist destination attracts tourists and they travel far and wide because of their love for the beauty of the fauna and nature. Apart from environment and ecology, the local community also has an important role in eco-tourism. It is from this that the concept of community-based ecotourism has emerged.

Eco-tourism is developing into a huge industry all over the world. It has an important place in the economy of many countries. Eco tourism is emerging as a great way to earn foreign exchange which can be used for the protection and conservation of nature and wildlife as well as for the development of the nation. Eco-tourism is also indirectly associated with sustainable development. Well-planned eco-tourism can benefit the communities living in and around the areas concerned. For this, harmony has to be established between long-term biodiversity conservation measures and local social and economic development. Indeed, throughout the developing tropics, protected area managers and local communities struggle to balance the need for economic development and the protection of cultural resources. The development of ecotourism can become a stable solution to this struggle.[1,2]

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, there are differences among them. Eco tourism generates revenue and the environment and resources are not exploited. Though the importance of ecotourism as a concept has been recognized recently in India, as a way of life Indians have been following this concept for centuries.

### Main study

Eco-tourism means tourism and management of nature, ecology and environment in such a way that tourism and ecological needs are 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 ecotourism goes to Héctor Ceballas-Lescuren of Mexico City, who first used the term in 1983. He had defined eco-tourism in this way – ecotourism to travel to relatively untouched and uncontaminated areas for the specific purpose of studying, appreciating and enjoying the natural scenery, wild plants and animals and cultural wealth found in these areas. Can say. According to this definition, ecotourism is not limited to viewing and appreciating natural scenery, but also includes increasing tourists' understanding of the scientific and ecological characteristics of areas of natural interest.

**Eco-tourism and its implication**

Three important aspects are underlined in eco-tourism - nature, tourism and local community. Conservation of nature, ecology and environment as well as respectful protection of cultural diversity are important aspects of ecotourism. We can say that the following points should be included under eco-tourism-

1. To promote and develop travel and tourism ecologically and culturally.
2. Recognizing the natural values of nature and accepting that the basic purpose of national parks is the conservation of plants, animals and land areas.
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.

In essence, we can say that ecotourism is ecologically sustainable travel to natural areas that instills a sense of environmental and cultural understanding, respect and conservation among tourists.[3,4] Eco-tourism can be effective in achieving the following three basic objectives-

- A. Conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity by optimizing public and private conservation area management systems, contributing to healthy ecosystems.
- B. To enable local communities and tribal people to share equally in the benefits of ecotourism activities by obtaining their full consent and participation in organizing and managing the eco-tourism business, and
- C. Promotion of local use of biodiversity by generating income, employment and business opportunities from eco-tourism and associated business networks.

**Advantages of ecotourism**

1. **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 common people 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.
2. **Protection and conservation of environment-** Conservation of nature and environment will be a very important task as it will reveal the reality of their invaluable and thus conservation efforts will be

intensified. Along with this, public participation can also be ensured.

3. **Economic benefits-** Ecotourism 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 regarding tourism**

Since ancient times in India, people used to travel to different places of the country for educational and religious purposes, which was called Deshatan. 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.[5,6]

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 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. The 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 new concept of community-based eco-tourism in the North-Eastern states**

The trend of community-based ecotourism is being seen in the North-Eastern region. Although this is a new concept for this region at present, 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. In this way, apart from promoting eco-tourism, it also ensures responsible participation of the communities, which is essential for the success of community-based eco-tourism.[7]

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 kilometers, 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.

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 i.e., 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 a 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.

Undoubtedly, there is immense potential for community-based eco-tourism in the northeastern states, which are full of biodiversity 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. Presently, there is a great lack of practical and executive plan 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 ecotourism.[8]

To make the new emerging concept of eco-tourism, community-based ecotourism successful, it will be useful to pay attention to the following points-

1. Identifying the possible conflict between the use of resources for eco-tourism and the local community and resolving this conflict. eliminate or minimize.
2. To match the scale and type of development of ecology to the environmental and cultural-social characteristics of the local community.
3. Involvement of the local community due to traditional understanding and conservation of ecology so as to lead to overall economic development of the area.

### **Major challenges**

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, the appearance of monuments, buildings or national heritage of historical importance is 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 general 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 defining the community-based tourist sector correctly. 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.[6,7]

### Conclusion and Suggestions

With the right action plan, community-based ecotourism can become a viable option for economic development of local communities along with supplementary income options. Not only this, but the 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.

Some basic steps need to be taken by the Government of India to promote community-based ecotourism. 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.[8]

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