

AN OVERVIEW OF NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF SHIMLA

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Abstract:

Tourism is rapidly growing industry in Himachal Pradesh. The industry has numerous economic and socio-cultural benefits for community. The state has harvested these advantages but environmental impacts have started to emerge. This paper assesses the environmental pollution created by tourism activities in Shimla. The study identifies air pollution, sanitation problem and traffic jam as major problems. The guidelines for Government, local community and hospitality industry have been presented at the end of study.

Keywords: Tourism, Environmental Impacts , Air pollution, Sanitation, Traffic Jam

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Introduction

Himachal Pradesh came into existence in 1971 with capital city Shimla. High snow-capped mountains, rivers, forests, culture and its status of 'Devbhoomi' made it a famous tourist destination. The state has received 4.85 lakh tourists in year 2011-12. Tourism has contributed in developing its economy by generating Rs. 300 crores per year. The creations of job opportunities, revenue generation for local administration, improvement in handicraft and handloom industries, infrastructure development and exposure of local culture to outer world are some of advantages of this industry. Tourism has diversified the economic activities in areas of highly sensitive eco-system with a very limited carrying capacity and low level of tolerance for other activities of economy. But developments of mass tourism from supply side have started to create environmental problems. Population explosion and increased number of tourists has demanded infrastructural development which results a number of environmental problems. The same happened in Shimla. The city is located at lower ranges of Himalayas and provides picturesque surroundings. Tourism development has shown rapid growth in last three decades. In year 2010, the city received 127737 international and 2485564 domestic tourists. This paper provides an insight of tourism activities which creates pollution. The study is based on secondary data.

Tourism as Environmental Pollutant

Shimla has highly fragile ecosystem with limited scope of space, services and energy utilization. But government's planning to attract more and more tourists (mass tourist) seems to be motivated by significant economic contribution of tourism industry. The development of the industry has appeared with some negative environmental impacts in last decade. This paper discussed following points in this context.

Air Pollution

Once considered as neat and clean hill station is getting polluted year by year. This degradation can be associated with increased number of tourists and population rise of city. According to Pollution Control Board, high level of pollution is witnessed in season of peak tourism and apple harvesting. This is because of increased number of vehicles and winter season. In these months, Bukharis and other heating devises release smoke which makes the atmosphere hazy. Apart that use of coal and wood for cooking and other purposes in hospitality industry also causes

pollution. Sometime, workers of Municipal Corporation also execute the simplest and easiest way of garbage disposable i.e. burning. This also provides them pleasant warmth in winter season. The city has two stations for monitoring of pollution level. According to these stations more than 2000 vehicles a day (majority of tourist buses and apple loaded trucks) uses the circular road and raises the level of air pollutions. National Pollution Control Board (NPCB) also reveals that every peak season of tourism witnesses more degree of suspended particulate matter than $100/\mu\text{g}/2$ (prescribed limit). The city has been listed as “sensitive of air pollution”.

Sanitation Problems

The Mall Road, Near Combermere Bridge has become a place of encounter between piles of rubies and tourists. Foul smell generated by flies and mosquitoes has become a reason of contagious diseases in the area. The rapid growth in population also created stress on sewerage system, streets, roads, water supply and other general infrastructure. People dumping garbage in drains, natural streams and back lanes is a common scene. Stray cows, dogs, monkeys and pigs also show their rightful status in public places including roads. The topographic conditions advocates' different sewerage disposal points instead of one central point. H.P. Pollution Control Board (in 1996) revealed that all points with bad odor and too high level of chloride, alkalinity contents, sulphate in case of Lalpani sewerage point. Apart that solid waste disposal system hopelessly lag behind supply. More than half of total garbage is left unattended by Municipal Corporation. Further migrated labor from other states involved in construction activities also create problem of uncleanliness because of provisions of poor sanitation conditions in city. The city once called heaven of tourist needs attention because of increased amount of garbage.

Problems of Tourist Traffic

During peak season traffic jam is a common feature of city. The jam which varies from couple of hours to several hours makes tourist irritated who is coming with a motivation of relax and enjoy. The traffic on mall clearly indicates the sorry status of affairs. “Restricted road” and “sealed portion” for bureaucrats, politicians and journalists etc. makes the road terribly crowded. One km distance between general busstand to lift consumes 30-40 minutes driving in peak season. Parking manners of locale mini bus drivers contribute maximum in traffic bottleneck. Jam packed parking slots indicates shortage of facility. Tourist traffic face problems while crossing single lane of Dhalli Tunnel. The large flock of traffic in peak season creates problem for tourists

and residents. Conclusively, this is beyond carrying capacity use and has implications with local eco-system.

Other Problems

With growth of industries including tourism, Shimla has witnessed the problem like development of slums in forest areas, encroachment for infrastructural development, de-forestation and inadequate garbage disposable systems. Local architecture has become a thing of past. All these cause environmental degradation.

Recommendations:

1. Use of contemporary conservation techniques in conservation of environment.
2. Implementations of formal and periodical monitoring system and rapid corrective actions.
3. Motivations for consumption of locally produced goods.
4. Adequate provisions of basic amenities like drinking, parking and toilet facilities.
5. Check on haphazard and unplanned growth.
6. Creation of extra carrying capacity (temporarily) during peak season.
7. Campaigns for community participation.
8. Regeneration of forest on periodical basis.
9. Use of fuel efficient transport mode equipped with unloaded fuel.
10. Economical use of water and recycling.
11. Modern garbage disposable system.
12. Use of biodegradable packaging.
13. Recycling of all wastages of hospitality industry.
14. Ecology awareness programs for all stakeholders of tourism industry.

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