

Eco-Tourism in Northeast India: A Sustainable Development Perspective

Arupanjali Borah, Assistant Professor
Department of Economics, Mariani College

Abstract:

Ecotourism in simple words means management of tourism and conservation of nature in such a way so as to maintain a fine balance between the requirement of tourism and ecology on one hand and the need of the local communities for jobs, income generating employment and a better status for the women on the other. Northeast has enough potential for the growth ecotourism and has been expanding fast in recent years due to the heroic effort of various state government of this region. The northeast India is a unique destination for eco-tourism as the region represents the Indian ethos of 'unity in diversity' and 'diversity in unity.' The region is a mixed package of linguistic, racial, and religious streams. The region is not only well endowed with natural resources of diverse range of mountains ecosystems rich in pristine natural forests occupied by varieties of flora and fauna but also an abode of a variety of ethnic groups popularly known as ecosystem people who largely depend on their surrounding environment for sustenance of livelihood particularly in hill areas. All these factors provide the foundation for a potentiality robust ecotourism industry in the region. The aim of this paper is to explore the potential for sustainable eco-tourism development in the North-Eastern states of India. An evaluative and descriptive research methodology has been employed to write this paper.

Keywords: Ecotourism, potential, conservation, nature etc.

I. Introduction:

Ecotourism upsurges awareness about nature among travelers. It increases the opportunities for jobs and boosts the rural economy. It encourages governments, charitable organizations, and other enterprises for the conservation of nature (Saikhom, 2021). Ecotourism refers to the nature-based type of traveling, the purpose of which is to attract visitors to aesthetic nature. It is meant to be economically, ecologically and socially sustainable and is able to bring welfare to the immediate local communities besides enhancing the preservation of the natural surroundings. With this type of tourism, the local population gets to benefit without the need of a reduction of their cultural values and traditions. The sustainable ecotourism is beneficial to both visitors and host communities by following important guidelines, such as: (a) increasing visitors awareness of local culture and the environment; (b) limits social, psychological, and behavioral affects; (c) promotes nature protection; and (d) enable the empowerment of the local communities, notably, in waste management and environmental conservation. A lot of good comes with ecotourism. It brings revenue that can be invested in the area of environmental protection, community growth, and local

employment through which poverty and unemployment can also be reduced, and environmental awareness raised among tourists and locals, as well as favor environmental diversity and nature protection (Zimik and Barman, 2021).

The term tourism was introduced in the 19th century and was associated with sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism is involved with the development of both the present and future generations. Tourism means the movement of people outside their houses to visit various places. It is considered a bigger industry in terms of employment and foreign exchange earnings. It is useful for improving communications among people and solving various social disputes. It is useful for increasing the conservation of nature and economic growth. Travelers can witness the beauty of the natural environment and also learn about the culture of the ethnic people living in its lap. It can be useful for promoting the nature and culture of people. India's diversified culture and natural beauty open the opportunities for development of ecotourism. Lakshadweep Islands, North-East India, Kerala, the Himalayan region, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands have an enormous scope for the growth of ecotourism (Rubita, 2012).

II. Objective of the Study

To explore the potential for sustainable eco-tourism development in the North-Eastern states of India.

III. Methodology:

To address the objectives of the study, an evaluative and descriptive research methodology has been employed. This paper relies exclusively on secondary data, gathered from a range of sources including books, journals, magazines, reports, publications, and online resources.

IV. Discussion & Analyses:

The North East India is blessed with natural resources. There are numbers of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries which are created to preserve the valuable wildlife resources of the region. Such wildlife resources should be preserved, protected and promoted to attract tourists from the rest of the world.

V. Opportunity and Scope of Sustainable Eco-Tourism

Northeastern states of India are well-known for their beautiful natural landscapes. Hills and mountains dominate the region. This region constitutes the eastern part of the Himalayas. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim, and Nagaland are the eight states of the region. These are well blessed with flora and fauna, folk music, landscapes, mountains, mysterious clouds, cuisines, etc. However, connectivity due to geographical isolation is a big challenge to the tourism sector of the region. There is also an impression among the outsider that this region is not safe and secure for them to visit in contrast these states are more peaceful like their natural beauty. There are many wildlife sanctuaries and national parks in the region. The

specialty of the heritage of this region is the tribal culture. Many people visit this region to understand the tribal people and their indigenous culture. Local arts and crafts of them are different. Fairs and festivals can be useful for attracting more tourists. The Hornbill festival of Nagaland is a perfect example of this. Adventurous activities, jungle safari, trekking, pilgrimage tours, mountaineering, tea garden tours, ornithological tours, etc. opened the massive scope for ecotourism (Priya and Dhiren, 2016).

Loktak Lake in Manipur has more opportunities for ecotourism. It is a floating lake near its capital Imphal. It is the largest freshwater lake in India. The lake supports the livelihood of thousands of people as it absorbs the flood water in rainy seasons. Dzongu in North Sikkim is another destination for the tourists. This place is reserved for the Lepcha tribal community. They enjoy their unique culture, customs, and language. The village is near the Teesta River. The region is famous for various unique handicraft products. Handicraft and bamboo goods are traditionally produced by the local tribes. These products include the Lashingphee of Manipur, Carpets of Arunachal Pradesh, Muga products of Assam, are Shawls of Mizoram are examples of some unique products. Manas National Park and Kaziranga National Park have more scope for ecotourism. The Manas Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in Assam which is a hotspot of biodiversity. Kaziranga National Park is situated in Nagaon and Golaghat district of Assam. This park is well-known for its one-horned rhinoceroses. It was included in the list of World Heritage Sites in 1985. The ethnic landscape of the region is useful for other tourism, like mountain tourism, folklore tourism, tribal tourism, anthropological tourism, tea tourism, and ethnic tourism. Nameri National Park of Assam is situated in the foothills of the eastern Himalayas. It is a paradise for birdwatching with its unique biodiversity (Karmakar, 2023).

Khonoma is an Angami Naga village in Nagaland and it has a green village tag. The Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary were established in 1998 for the development of the place. Yuksom is a historical town of Sikkim which is famous for its green and charming climate. It is surrounded by high hills and lush green forests. Kanchenjunga National Park of Sikkim is popular among trekkers. Thembang is a beautiful ancient village in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. Community-based eco-tourism has been introduced in the village. Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is known for its diverse animal population. There are many rare animal and bird species in the sanctuary. Khumulwng eco-park of Tripura is situated in the Baramura hill range having a unique panoramic environment. Khumulwng in tribal language means "valley of flowers". It is surrounded by green forests and river valleys. The Ziro Valley of Arunachal Pradesh has plenty of natural elements for tourist interest and attractions. This valley is surrounded by blue pine and bamboo plantations. The other important attractions of this locality are the Hakhe Tari Trek, Talley Valley Trek, Pamu-Yalang Trek, Bird Watching Expedition, and Ziro Butterfly Meet. The Talley Valley Wildlife Sanctuary is another place of attraction in Arunachal Pradesh. It has a unique and endangered but diverse range of flora and fauna (Joshi & Dhyani, 2009).

It has been observed that wildlife parks and sanctuaries are scattered in various districts of Assam providing ample opportunity for ecotourism. Nameri National Park (Assam), Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (Assam), Orang National Park (Assam), Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary (Assam), Namdapha National Park (Arunachal Pradesh), Mouling National Park (Arunachal Pradesh), Dampa Tiger Reserve (Mizoram), Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary (Nagaland), Balpakram National Park (Meghalaya), and Singchung Bugun Village Community Reserve (Arunachal Pradesh) are the examples of some wildlife parks and sanctuaries. There is also a growing scope for ecotourism based on the tea plantations in the region. Tea plantation gardens are found more or less in every state of the region. Jorhat, Tinsukia, and Dibrugarh in Upper Assam are well known for their tea plantation. In the Lower Assam, tea gardens are available in Barpeta and Goalpara. Ambikanagar tea estate and the Bhuban Valley tea estate are popular in the Cachar district of Assam. The Tripureswari Tea Estate and the Hiracherra Tea Estate are renowned in Tripura. Mawlyngot Tea Estate and the Lakysiew Tea Estate are well-known in Meghalaya. Temi Tea Estate is popular in Sikkim (Bressers, 2004).

Ziro is a hilly station in Arunachal Pradesh. It has been found that homestay facilities are available in this town. Such facilities are available in Hong Village, Hari Village, Hapoli Village, Ziro Village, Suluya Village, Bamin Village, Mudang Tage Village, Michi Village, etc. Ziro is the capital of the Lower Subansiri District. There are possibilities for the growth of ecotourism based on adventure tourism in the region. River rafting, mountaineering, and trekking are also possible. Some examples of adventure tourism activities in the region are trekking in the Dzukou valley, white water rafting in the Brahmaputra River, paragliding in Sikkim, mountaineering in Arunachal Pradesh, caving in Meghalaya, biking in the Ziro valley, and angling in the rivers of Arunachal Pradesh. Manipur is another beautiful State in this region. Manipur is known as the land of jewels in the Northeast India. The state is popular for its cultural festivals which attract lots of tourists. The popular festivals are Chumpha, Ningol Chakhouba, Rasa Lila, Kut Festival, Heikru Hitongba, Ratha Jatra, Cheiraoba, Lai-Haraoba, Yaoshang (Doljatra), Lui-Ngai-Ni etc.

Manipur is blessed with gurgling rivers, rolling meadows, emerald mountains, and foaming waterfalls. The state is famous for its scenic beauty, rich flora and fauna, lush green plains and hills, salubrious climate, floating national parks, wetlands, and lakes. Manipur is the land of the Meitei, Kuki-Chin-Mizo, Nagas, and Gorkhas. Shiri-Kashong range is enriched with endangered species. There are various old caves like Khangkhui caves, Mongjam caves, Tharon cave, Sangbu caves, Nongpok Keithelmanbi caves, and Wangoo caves are popular caves in Manipur. Barak Waterfall, Khayang Waterfall, Alng Takhou Waterfall, Dilily Waterfall, Ngalo Falls, Bro Waterfall, Ishing and Thingbi Waterfall are the important waterfalls in the state. Andaro is a beautiful ancient village having the dolls of 29 recognized tribes of Manipur. Khongampat Orchidarium is popular among the tourists. It is the breeding center of 110 species of orchids. Singda is a beautiful hill station near Singda Lake. Loktak Lake and Sendra Island are well-known

among tourists. Kroubu-Ching, Thangjing-Ching, and Nongmaiching-Ching are the traditional eco-tourism centers of the State.

Ecotourism plays a vital role in the Tripura tourism industry. Lush green landscapes and diverse flora and fauna make the state a unique place for tourists. The state has many national parks and sanctuaries. Sepahijala Wildlife Sanctuary, Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary, Rowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Baramura eco-park, Gomati Wildlife Sanctuary, Kalapania Nature Park, Tepania eco-park, and Khumulwng eco-park are the popular ecotourism places of Tripura. Mizoram is another state in the region that has more potential for ecotourism. Tamdil Lake, Champai, Lunglei, Vantawng Water Falls. Bung and Paikhai are popular among tourists. Phawngpui and Dampa wildlife sanctuaries are the best places for trekking and wildlife viewing. Phawngpui is known as the Blue Mountain. It is a reserved place for rare exotic plants and medicinal herbs. Dampa is a popular wildlife sanctuary surrounded by Bangladesh, Mizoram, and Tripura. Champai is a small town near the Myanmar border. It is well-known for its natural beauty.

Meghalaya is blessed with the beauty of nature as there are more opportunities for ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and agri-tourism. There are scopes for hard and soft tourism activities. A Traveller can be involved in hard tourism, like rock climbing, trekking, caving, etc. Soft adventure tourism involves bird watching, eco-tour, fishing, boating, etc. Tourists can avail the homestay and homely stay in local resorts. Travelers can be involved in barn dances, campfires, meeting barnyard animals, breweries, etc. Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, and Garo Hills have an abundance of natural heritage. Sohpetbneng Peak, Spread Eagle Falls, Sweet Falls, Nongkhnum Islands, Kyllang Rock, Elephant Falls, Diengieipeak, and Cherrapunjee are the popular places in Khasi Hills. Balpakram National Wildlife Park, Nengkong, Balpakram, Siju caves, Resubalpara, and Wakso are the tourist-interested places of Garo Hills. Bishop and Beadon Falls, Elephant Falls, Sweet Falls, Lmilchang Dare Falls, and Spread Eagle Falls are the waterfalls of the state. Travelers can enjoy Shillong Peak and Tura Peak.

The Himalayan state of Sikkim is well-known for its tourism sector. Leppchas the tribals of the Sikkim call it "Nye-Mal-Ale" or "Heaven". There are many ecotourism zones in Sikkim. Nampong lingdok ecotourism zone, Okharey ecotourism zone, Uttarey ecotourism zone, Lingee Payong ecotourism zone, Lachung ecotourism zone, Lachen ecotourism zone, Kitam ecotourism zone, Khecheopari ecotourism zone, Hee-bermiok ecotourism zone, East Pendam ecotourism zone, and Dzongu ecotourism zone are the examples of them. Opportunities like river rafting, hiking, and trekking are available in the state. Cymbidiums, Hooheriana, Dendrobiums, Cattlelyas, etc. are the famous orchids that originate in the state. Fairy bluebirds like kingfishers, cuckoos, woodpeckers; Emerald Dove, etc. are attractive birds that adore the sky of the state. Sikkim has Khangchendzonga National Park, Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary, and Singba Rhododendron Sanctuary. White water rafting adventure sport is popular in the state. Saikip-Jorethang-Majitar-Melli and Makhna-Sirwani-Bardang-Rangpo are the two popular rafting routes. Homestays with the locals are popular in Sikkim.

VI. Conclusion

The tourism industry is considered a bigger industry in terms of employment and foreign currency earnings. It is useful for improving communications among people and solving various social disputes. Ecotourism is useful for increasing conservation and economic growth. Travellers can witness the beauty of the natural environment and also learn about the culture of the ethnic peoples. The specialty of the heritage of this region is the tribal culture. Many people visit this region to learn about the tribal people and their indigenous culture. Adventurous activities, jungle safari, trekking, pilgrimage tours, mountaineering, tea garden tours, ornithological tours, etc. have massive scope for ecotourism.

There are enormous scopes for sustainable ecotourism in the region. There are many wildlife sanctuaries and natural parks in the region. Homestays with the locals are popular in many places in the region. Assam is more popular among the tourists. It attracts more tourists due to its good connectivity and unique natural places. Nagaland is the least tourist-visited state. Loktak Lake in Manipur has more opportunities for ecotourism. There is also the scope for growing ecotourism based on the tea plantations in the region. Tea plantation gardens are available in more or less in every state of the region. Cultural festivals also attract lots of tourists. The ethnic landscape of the region is useful for other tourism like mountain tourism, folklore tourism, tribal tourism, anthropological tourism, tea tourism, and ethnic tourism. Homestays with the locals are popular in Sikkim.

VII. References

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