



RETHINKING TOURISM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH FROM INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Tourism is a rapidly growing phenomena which became an integral part of our modern life. As its core, tourism involves individuals or groups travelling to new destinations, seeking experience distinct from their daily routines. It encompasses a broad range of activities which includes sightseeing and exploring new places, visiting historical and cultural sites, engaging in outdoor and adventure activities etc. The significance of tourism extends beyond personal enjoyment, as it plays a substantial role in the global economy. Tourism generates revenues, creates employment opportunities and fosters cultural exchange and understanding among people from diverse backgrounds. This paper examines the complex relationships between tourism, environment, and economy in India, using a sociological approach. The article mainly focuses on the positive and negative impacts of Tourism on environment and economy, types of tourism, schemes to boost tourism in India, challenges faced by tourism in India. Tourism can contribute to environmental conservation and economic benefits for local communities, but only if it is managed in a way that prioritizes social justice and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Tourism, Environment, Pollution, Government Revenues, Wildlife

Introduction

Tourism is one of the biggest and fastest growing sectors in the global economy and has a significant impact on the environment, culture, society and also on the economy both positively and negatively. India, a land of diverse cultures, rich heritage, and breath-taking natural beauty, is poised to emerge as a global giant in world tourism. With its immense scope and potential, tourism in India is growing continuously, generating employment, earning foreign exchange, and contributing to the country's economic and social development. As a flourishing sector, tourism

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plays a vital role in preserving and sustaining India's natural and cultural diversity, making it an integral part of the country's progress and prosperity. This paper explores the significance of tourism in India, its growth drivers, and the imperative factors necessary for successful tourism development, highlighting the need for government support, new initiatives, and strategic plans to maintain a strong position in the global tourism industry. Tourism is inextricably linked to the environment, relying heavily on natural resources to sustain its operations. While tourism has the potential to conserve and protect the environment, it also poses significant threats to the natural world. As a dominant force shaping the natural environment, tourism's impact is multifaceted, bringing about both beneficial and detrimental consequences. As the industry continues to grow, striking a balance between tourism development and environmental stewardship is crucial to ensure the long-term sustainability of destinations and ecosystems. Tourism has transformed into a global phenomenon, transcending its traditional role as a mere vacation activity. India, with its vast size and incredible diversity of natural, geographic, cultural, and artistic attractions, presents unparalleled opportunities for the travel and tourism industry. The government's proactive promotion and aggressive marketing initiatives are poised to further catalyze the influx of tourists, unlocking the sector's immense potential for growth and development.

Objectives

The Specific Objectives of the Research Paper are as Follows:

- 1) To study the concept of Tourism and Environment.
- 2) To examine the positive and negative impact of tourism on environment and economy.
- 3) To analyse various schemes implemented to boost tourism in India.
- 4) To highlight the challenges of tourism in India.

Research Methodology

This is a descriptive research article based on secondary sources of data. For preparing this research article data was gathered from various sources like websites, books, magazines, seminar research papers, publications and journals.

Types of Tourism

- Recreational Tourism
- Environmental Tourism
- Historical Tourism
- Ethnic Tourism
- Cultural Tourism
- Adventure Tourism
- Health Tourism
- Religious Tourism
- Music Tourism
- Village Tourism
- Wildlife Tourism

Positive Impacts of Tourism

Tourism can play a significant role in supporting conservation and sustainable development in several ways:

1. **Direct Financial Contributions:** Revenue generated from tourism, such as park entrance fees and special fees for conservation, can be allocated directly to protect and manage environmentally sensitive areas.

2. **Contributions to Government Revenues:** Taxes and fees collected from tourism, including user fees, income tax, and sales tax, can contribute to government revenues. These funds can be used to support conservation programs, natural resource management, and environmental protection.
3. **Improved Environmental Management and Planning:** Effective planning and management of tourism can help avoid environmental degradation and promote sustainable development. This includes providing better hotel facilities, avoiding destructive mistakes, and implementing quality environmental management practices.
4. **Generating Income and Employment:** Tourism can contribute to local and national economies by generating income and creating employment opportunities. In India, for example, tourism contributes 6.23% to the national GDP and supports 8.78% of employment, with approximately 20 million people working in the industry.
5. **Source of Foreign Exchange Earnings:** Tourism is a vital source of foreign exchange earnings, contributing favourably to a country's balance of payments. In India, tourism contributes 9.3% to the nation's GDP.
6. **Infrastructure Development:** Tourism encourages the development of multi-use infrastructure, benefiting host communities with improved transportation, healthcare facilities, sports centres, and more. This infrastructure development induces other productive activities.
7. **Creating Environmental Awareness:** Tourism increases public appreciation and awareness of environmental issues by bringing people closer to nature. This interaction fosters environmentally conscious behaviour and encourages community involvement in preservation activities.
8. **Protection and Preservation of Environment:** Tourism contributes to environmental protection by conserving biological diversity, promoting sustainable resource use, and identifying valuable natural areas. This leads to the creation of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and laws protecting forests and native species.
9. **Promoting Peace and Stability:** Tourism can promote peace and stability in developing countries like India by generating income, creating jobs, diversifying the economy, protecting the environment, and promoting cross-cultural awareness. However, addressing challenges like regulatory frameworks and reducing crime and corruption is crucial to realizing these benefits.

Negative Impacts of Tourism

Tourism also performs some negative role in the pathway of environmental development:

1. **Depletion of Natural Resources:** The development of tourism can lead to the depletion of natural resources, particularly in areas where resources are already scarce. This can result in: **Water Scarcity:** The tourism industry is a significant consumer of water, with high usage in hotels, swimming pools, golf courses, and personal consumption by tourists. This can lead to water shortages, degradation of water supplies, and increased wastewater generation. In dry states like Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, water scarcity is a major concern.

Pressure on Local Resources: Tourism can put immense pressure on local resources like food, energy, and raw materials, which may already be in short supply. The increased extraction and transportation of these resources can exacerbate physical impacts associated with their exploitation. During peak seasons, high demand is placed upon these resources to meet tourist expectations, such as heating, hot water, and other amenities.

Land Degradation: Tourism can lead to the degradation of important land resources like minerals, fossil fuels, forests, wetlands, and wildlife. The increased pressure on these resources and scenic landscapes can result in: Deforestation due to fuel wood collection and land clearing for tourist infrastructure. Examples of these impacts can be seen in the Himalayan region, Sikkim, and Assam, where trekking and other tourist activities have led to environmental degradation.

2. **Pollution:** Tourism can generate various forms of pollution, including:

Air and Noise Pollution: Increased tourist activities in India have led to a rise in transportation emissions, contributing to: Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) linked to acid rain, global warming, and photochemical pollution. Local air pollution, particularly in remote areas like Ajanta and Ellora caves. Noise pollution from vehicles, causing annoyance, stress, and hearing loss for humans, as well as distress to wildlife.

Solid Waste and Littering: High tourist concentrations and improper waste disposal can despoil natural environments, including: Rivers, scenic areas, and roadsides. Mountain areas like the Himalayas and Darjeeling, where trekking tourists generate significant waste.

Sewage Pollution: Construction of tourist facilities often leads to increased sewage pollution, damaging: Marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, due to algae growth and changes in salinity and siltation. Human and animal health, particularly in coastal states like Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

3. **Destruction and Alteration of Ecosystems:** Tourism can harm ecosystems, which are geographic areas comprising living organisms, physical surroundings, and natural cycles. Attractive landscapes, such as beaches, lakes, and mountains, are often transitional zones with species-rich ecosystems. For example: Kurusadai Island, once a paradise for marine biologists, has been abandoned due to massive destruction of coral and marine life.
4. **Undesirable Social and Cultural Change:** Tourism can lead to the destruction of a community's social fabric and loss of identity. For example: Goa's culture was transformed by the influx of hippies in the 1960s-1980s, leading to a rise in drug use, prostitution, and human trafficking.
5. **Impacts on Wildlife:** Tourism can harm wildlife through: Infrastructure development, restricting migratory ranges and altering habitats. Tourist activities, such as: altering eating habits and feeding patterns can disturb habitats, causing stress and behavioural changes.

Challenges faced by Tourism in India

The tourism industry in India faces several challenges, including:

1. Infrastructure Roadblocks

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- Inadequate transportation networks.
 - Poor connectivity to tourist destinations.
 - Insufficient accommodation and amenities.
- 2. Environmental Concerns**
- Degradation of natural resources.
 - Pollution and waste management issues.
 - Climate change impacts.
- 3. Resource Concerns**
- Over-reliance on limited resources (e.g., water, energy).
 - Inefficient resource utilization.
 - Threats to biodiversity and ecosystems.
- 4. Fragmented Policy and Programs**
- Lack of coordination among government agencies.
 - Inconsistent policies and regulations.
 - Insufficient funding and resources.
- 5. Socio-Economic Concerns**
- Safety and security concerns (e.g., violence, crime).
 - Health standards and hygiene issues.
 - Displacement and marginalization of local communities.

Schemes to Boost Tourism in India

- 1. Swadesh Darshan:** Include development of 15 thematic circuits like North East Circuit, Buddhist Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, etc. having tourist potential in a planned and prioritized manner, Integrated development of infrastructure in Identified circuits, promote cultural heritage of country, developing world-class infrastructure in circuit destination, pro-poor tourism approach, promote local arts, handicrafts, cuisine, generate employment.
- 2. National Mission on Pilgrimage rejuvenation and Augmentation Drive, PRASAD:** Aims to promote sustainable pilgrimage tourism in the country, to strengthen measures for safety, security and proving the quality tourism services in pilgrim cities, etc.
- 3. Hunar Se Rozgar Tak:** for creation of employable skills amongst youth. The initiative is fully funded by the Ministry of Tourism.
- 4. Swachh Bharat Swachh Pakwan (Hunar Zaika):** The street food vendors constitute a significant percentage of the hospitality service providers, are part of the Indian milieu through the ages and have a pan India presence.
- 5. Incredible India Helpline:** On a pilot basis, the Ministry of Tourism has set up the 'Incredible India Help Line' to be operated in-house to address and guide the tourist's natural calamities or on being stranded.

Conclusion

Tourism has the potential to promote pluralism, multiculturalism, and secularism in India's diverse communities, while also improving its “soft power” and creating jobs in various sectors. With the industry experiencing steady growth driven by the growing Indian middle class, increasing high-spending foreign tourists, and coordinated government campaigns, it is essential to adopt a collaborative approach to sustainable tourism development. This requires participation from private businesses, governmental agencies, educational institutions, communities, and citizens to ensure that tourism accommodates and entertains visitors while preserving the environment and native cultures. Emphasis should be placed on ecotourism to conserve and sustain natural and cultural environments, and collective efforts are necessary to achieve sustainable growth in the tourism industry, involving both Central and State governments, private sectors, and voluntary organizations working together in partnership. In conclusion, we can say that India's tourism industry has emerged as a significant contributor to the country's economic growth and development, generating substantial revenue and employment opportunities. With its vibrant and diverse offerings, tourism has become an integral part of India's progress, supporting various sectors such as horticulture, handicrafts, and agriculture. As the industry continues to evolve and incorporate new concepts, government support is crucial to ensure its sustained growth and development. With a projected annual growth rate of 6.9% to reach 32.05 lakh crore by 2028, tourism is poised to remain a vital sector in India's economy, underscoring the need for continued investment and collaboration to harness its full potential.

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