Conclusion

The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page

In the global scenario, tourism is the world’s largest industry and eco-tourism forms the largest proportion of the present tourism. Tourism industry in India is growing and has vast potential for generating employment and earning large amount of foreign exchange besides giving a fillip to the country’s overall economic and social development. The United Nations General Amnesty emphasizes the role of Tourism in sustainable development. It recognizes the need to promote the development of sustainable tourism and increase the benefits from tourism for host communities while maintaining their cultural and environmental integrity and enhancing the promotion of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritage. It recognizes that eco-tourism can have positive impact on education, job creation and income generation. It recognizes that eco-tourism creates significant opportunities for conservation protection and sustainable use of natural areas by encouraging local and indigenous communities in host countries and tourists alike to preserve and respect natural and cultural heritage.

Eco-tourism is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry of various states in India. It has received much attention in recent years, especially within the developing world. It has been linked to sustainable development initiatives, protected area, conservation efforts, regional and community development strategies in many places. This fastest growing segment of international tourism scene, urgently needs proper guidelines and directions of international standards to sustain its natural growth. Eco-tourism is being promoted as a means of giving nature value and hence of achieving sustainable tourism. This sector besides enhancing the visitors appreciation for nature and providing wholesome recreational experience to travelers, is offering substantial economic benefits to the local communities living in the vicinity of wilderness areas.

Eco-tourism generates money from natural environments by encouraging tourists to visit and during their stay, pay for items like entrance fees, concessions and licenses. Re-casting the environment as a way for local communities to look after themselves, encourages them to take care of it. Yet, the influx of eco-tourists can also degrade the
natural environment, which the tourists have come to see. Letting tourists loose in a
delicate ecosystem can lead to pollution and impact on the environment in unforeseen
ways. In today’s world, eco-tourism is the only tool for sustainable development. It has
lot of scope and at the same time, there are problems too.

The study areas namely Coimbatore and Nilgiris districts in Western Tamil Nadu
are rich in bio-diversity due to the spread of Western Ghats. During the study, some of
the problems have been identified with suitable suggestions. They are as follows:

The district of Coimbatore is blessed with attractive geographical features and
climatic conditions. The forests in Coimbatore district are responsible for cool weather,
green landscape and clean air. The forest department in Coimbatore has indentified
Karamadai and Boluvamppatti ranges to promote eco-tourism projects, because of the
rich and varied inhabitats of the regions comparatively. Baralikadu under Karamadai
range is near to Coimbatore. It started its operations since 2007 as an eco-tourism
destination by involving the tribal people in the region, which creates income for them as
well as awareness to the nature lovers about the place. Inspite of all rich components for
eco-tourism, this is not a well known destination in the eco-tourism market.

Problems :

- It lacks local authority initiative to promote the destination. It lacks proper
  advertisement. The area lacks strategies for the promotion of eco-tourism.
- The visitors are disappointed at the insufficient infrastructural development. The rich
  biodiversity of the area, its serene and calm atmosphere, comparatively undisturbed
  eco-system fails to satisfy the visitors without providing eco-friendly accommodation
  facilities due to the threat of man-animal conflict.
- Though the area is easily accessible from the city, the public transport to the
  destination is insufficient. The only road leading to the destination is very narrow and
  not maintained properly.
- Though the tribal community is familiar to the forest situations, the tribal culture
  which is their heritage is not encouraged by way of cultural activities to the visitors
  for enjoyment.
The tribals feel the need of the development of basic amenities like better housing facilities and a community hall for recreation.

The villagers particularly women expect increase in wages for the preparation for traditional cuisine.

The activities at the destination are limited.

**Suggestions:**

Before promoting eco-tourism, the forest department should have increased awareness about it.

The forest department can tie up with the local tour operators to conduct eco-tours in the circuit identified for tourism purposes. The forest department and local communities may come closer to deal with the issues tactfully, because this relationship will make the current eco-tourism project more community oriented. Emphasis should be given to change their capabilities and attitudes to deal with the business efficiently.

Since staffing of eco-tourism project is through local community, they can benefit through skill-training like nature-guiding, bird watching, botanisation, medical therapy and nursing work by ladies. Such capacity building especially of youth will have a key influence in positive future.

Easily accessible micro-credit and other directions of eco-tourism for local economy assistance should be provided to enable the local community to make necessary investment in providing services and facilities to the tourists. Some of the basic facilities which can very economically, be made available to tourists include accommodation and food during village stay. Villagers should be encouraged to erect a few eco-tents or tree-houses in the village where tourists might stay.

Good roads and frequent transportation facilities should be provided.

Since the tribal community is familiar to the forest, they could be encouraged to avail the medicinal use of herbs. Herbal Park can be set up.
• Awareness through educational and extension programmes about eco-tourism opportunities in local customs, cuisine, festivals, arts and crafts will be instrumental in increasing overall attractiveness of the area.

• Maximum attention should be centred on improving the quality of life of the people by providing solar light, medical facility, and primary education at the destination itself.

• Local institutions like the gram panchayat, Forest Protection Committee should be involved in any initiative to develop eco-tourism, so that the community feel a sense of ownership and put into its strength and resources for the success of such initiatives. Such institutional framework will act as an interface community and other stakeholders of the eco-tourism sector. Institutions have potential to work as regulatory mechanism to encourage good eco-tourism practices and standards.

• There is a need to streamline the function of the village forest committee with a view to involve villagers in the development and management of the area.

• An integrated holistic plan for the community based eco-tourism should be prepared through the involvement of all state holders and implement through the local people and a strategy for the sustainable eco-tourism management should be involved for all such areas.

Further the lakes that dot the district are under severe stress due to urbanization and industrialization. Construction areas and dumping of garbage are reducing the water levels which has gone down by 100 cubic feet on an average Bird life, dependent on lakes are affected. The survival of Coimbatore depends on preserving the existing lakes and water channels. INTACH has been championing this cause since 1990 onwards and it continues to work with likeminded NGO’s to prevent further exploitation and destruction of water bodies.

These resources should be used in a sustainable manner for the future growth of the district. Better protection and upkeep of lakes have to be made. Lakes must be desilted, dumping of garbages and construction must be strictly prevented, encroachments must not be allowed. Proper conservation of tanks and wetlands along
with the promotion of judicious use of water resources is the anyway districts like Coimbatore can meet the future challenges.

Deforestation and pollution also play a key role in the decline of the growth of tourism. According to a report, deforestation in the Western Ghats has been reduced by 19.5% for the past 22 years. The rapid urbanization has the threat of pollution which should be kept at a check. Deforestation results in global warming leading to climatic changes. Plastics wastes dumped all over the district pollute the environment. This in turn affects water, climate etc., which leads to the decline in the number of tourists. Thus, controlling deforestation and pollution is one of the measures to promote tourism.

**Problems identified at Nilgiris:**

Mountains are one of the world’s most important tourist destinations. Their soaring peaks and beautiful landscapes are becoming increasingly attractive as a place of escape in a stressful and urbanized world. But the mountain world today is in a perilous ecological state. The biophysical and socio-economic resource base is undergoing disastrous impoverishment due to human action. There is a great potential to develop tourism in the hill resorts, sanctuaries and national parks in Western Ghats. Tourism, presents both opportunities and dangers for mountain region. The influx of visitors into mountain region poses a threat to these unique pristine environments. So far, attempts have been made primarily to attract tourism without streamlining it to achieve the best desired objectives. Badly planned tourism has been a bane in all these attractive locations.

- Nilgiris, was once very quiet and peaceful, but in recent past, overcrowded, uncontrolled settlements and careless planning have destroyed its pristine beauty. This “Queen of Hill Stations” has become “the Queen of Smell Stations”. The unsatisfactory standard of sanitation and hygiene in public places and poor infrastructure led to the town’s prestigious sobriquet “Queen of Hill Stations” being converted to the “Queen of Hell Stations”. The negligence of civic amenities created health problems. Ooty, is loosing its charm due to unplanned development and mushrooming of illegal structure.
The main attractions in Ooty, the world famous destination, are littered with wastes. The tourists spots like Doddabetta, the highest peak in the south and the boat house are littered with garbage.

The massive inflow of tourists throughout the year, particularly during summer, causes an adverse effect on the environment. Such concentrated mass tourism may benefit urban market segments but not the local communities living in and around protected areas. Moreover the resources are unable to rise to meet the demands of the tourists.

The rapid growth of an affluent rural and urban middle class which had the leisure and means to travel for enjoyment, was one of the reasons that resulted in a tourism boom which changed the very landscape of towns such as Ooty, which changed the socio-economic scenario of the region with increased construction activity, destabilizing hill slopes and triggering landslips and the competition for basic resources such as fuel and water between tourists and local residents.

The tribals living in the interior forests areas for generations and who depend on the forests for their livelihood are worst affected because of unplanned development and encroachments, for example, private parties are making a lot of encroachments in the elephant corridor in the Nilgiris to set up hotels and resorts.

Dumping of waste along the Ghat road from Kallar to Udhagamandalam stretch that traverses through the ecologically sensitive Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve is a cause for concern. It poses a serious threat to the ecological system. A system of patrolling the Ghat section to prevent such activities has to be made.

Furthermore, the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve has been enduring human interference for a very long time through development projects, agriculture, horticulture and human settlement, which have brought about substantial change in the ecology of the area. As a result of land use, charges are brought about by felling of trees, tourism activities, plantation etc.

Eco-tourism activities carried over by private tour operation are turning largely commercial. There are over 44 private tourists resorts operating on the reserve forests by Masinagudi region in Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve. Sometimes, the private resorts
do not follow operation guidelines, or serve the purpose of increasing awareness about conservation.

- Intense biotic pressure, rapid development of tourism in and around the sanctuary, electroplating industries in Masinagudi, hydroelectric projects and increasing encroachment have done irreversible damage to the wildlife of the sanctuary.
- During summer season, the entry of vehicles causes congestion, smoke and noise pollution, thus affecting the environment.

Suggestions:

- The need of the hour is to clean up all the tourist spots in Nilgiris. The district administration and the tourism department should play a vital role in keeping the hill town including the tourist spots clean. A waste management and garbage disposal strategies for tourism intensive areas need to be worked out.
- Efforts should be made to educate tourists about proper disposal of waste in order to foster eco-friendly atmosphere and clean environment.
- The haphazard development in Nilgiris, should be checked. Construction of buildings in landslide prone areas must be restricted. Activities which may lead to escalation of man - wildlife conflict should be wiped in the bud.
- The Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve should have a separate governing body with regard to conservation and sustainable development to be formed with adequate powers consisting of representatives from Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu (3 states) that border the Nilgiris and the local Community.
- To protect the environment and mitigate the damages caused by tourism, eco-tax can be introduced, the income from such tax can be used for conservation and sustainable development if the Nilgiris with the participation of local communities.
- As the inflow of the tourists keep increasing, it is important to identify and develop adequate parking space.
- Tamil Nadu Registration of Tourists Trade Act must be enforced to check malpractices, whether they are cheated by hoteliers, autos, etc. a special squad of honest policeman should be charged with attending any complaint and also prohibit
begging outside the hotels, railway platforms, near restaurants on main roads and the tourist place.

- The Environment and Forest department may also consider to organize more nature camps and awareness campaigns for various groups ranging from school and college student, local community, tourists and others.

- Hoarding at prime locations should be raised for drawing the attention of visitors towards tourists code of conduct and better civic sense.

- To reduce traffic congestion, smoke and noise pollution the entry of any sort of automobiles, should be restricted at the tourist spot especially during peak periods.

- Introduction of cable cars with Dodabetta as the starting point will also be a crowd puller.

- Steps may be taken to provide cheaper accommodation to suit the tourists of middle income

- Eco-awareness among the public alone can ensure the preservation of eco-system in the long run. Eco-awareness among the younger generation can be created by opening up of eco-museum, library and by exhibition of educative films etc. by organizing educational treks and camps in forest areas, students should be brought nearer to nature and involved in the conservation of eco-system.

- A careful assessment has to be made before an area is declared as eco-tourism spot, even after the declaration, continuous monitoring is needed to assess the impact of tourism in the ecosystem and bio-diversity. In the name of tourism and eco-tourism nature should not be destroyed.

- The mountain people are the stewards of mountain eco-system, so any decision to develop tourism must be made with their involvement and agreement. Most of all, tourism must be sustainable, planned, to ensure that the beauty of mountain can be enjoyed by present and future generations.

- Man-animal conflict is a matter of serious concern, which calls for conservation education on one hand and preparedness of the wildlife managers to mitigate the sufferings of the people as well as wildlife on the other.

- Insurance schemes can be introduced for the benefit of the families affected due to man-animal conflict which has become a regular feature.
• The tribals should be given first priority in the forest plantation.
• The tribal involvement in eco-tourism at Topslip is very less compared to Parambikulam Eco-tourism at Kerala. Steps should be to promote it as a major eco-tourism centre.
• ATR should be promoted as a major eco-tourism centre promotional activities should be more from the Forest Department to attract more tourists. There should be very good quality brochures about ATR as well as MTR and its tourism assets are to be made available for the tourists.
• There is a need to have greater interaction between the Forest Department and the Tourism Department. At most of the sites, which are associated with nature, Forest Department is trying to manage and market the site all alone. The tourism potential of the sites can be enhanced by greater co-ordination between the two Department as the Forest Department could play a key role in managing the resources, while the Tourism Department, could market the site well at the local, national and international level. With better interaction between the two, there could also be training programmes organized which could help to impact the skill that are available with the Tourism Department for delivering tourist satisfaction to the stakeholders like the local staff, community etc. Although Tourism Department could learn more about the new places that are available inside the forests, which have got eco-tourism potential and thus be more aware of the various options available.

In the early stage of eco-tourism development, it was regarded as a completely new concept. However, today, the areas of both eco-tourism and nature tourism has become a significant portion of the tourism industry in general. Growing environmental awareness worldwide, paired with advances in transportation and communication, will only help to foster future eco-tourism growth. There is no doubt that the industry made tremendous studies in the last part of the 20th century. However, there is still much to be done. Green cloaking, mismanaged or poorly planned projects and lack of education are just some of the obstacles, ‘real’ eco-tourism must overcome in order to continue to serve its purpose.
Unhealthy practice of eco-tourism may cause many dangers to the nature. For a successful conduct of eco-tourism, the following points have to put into practice.

- Filtering of tourists should be done by the service providers. (really passionate people only to be allowed to this kind of fragile and sensitive area).
- Respect for the ecosystem and local culture of the destination.
- Development should be sustainable in nature (use of renewable energy, use of eco-friendly or natural products for construction, proper waste management etc.,)
- Local community participation is an important aspect in eco-tourism development, because they are more familiar with the environment, their expertise has to be used in the sustainable development of the destination which will provided them economic benefits.
- The 3R (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) has to be practiced in all the eco-tourism destinations.

The governments, tour operators, local people, forest department and others should plan together when and where eco-tourism sites should be established and how they should be managed. Then only it will be possible for the generation to enjoy the natural scenic beauty and benefits associated with natural areas. Every tourist should keep in mind, ‘Leave only footprints, take only photographs’.

**IF U PROTECT NATURE**

**NATURE WILL PROTECT U**