"ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN THE WESTERN PART OF PUNE DISTRICT (MAHARASHTRA)".

Abstract

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1. Introduction:
Recognising tourism strength in the form of employment and business opportunities, it has secured status of largest industry in the world. The thrust on economic opportunities has overridden the sustainability of the local environment and cultural aspect. It has created issues of threat to local environment and cultural dilemma among the local community. It is the vital point of concern by geographers and environmentalists whether this progress would continue for longer period of time or not. The geographical perspective has been applied to understand the physical and socio-cultural scenario as the strengths and needs of the study area. Similarly, the studies have been carried out to understand nature of present tourism in the study area and role and ways of functioning of the stakeholders in comparison with those according to the principles of ecotourism and environmental management.

2. Study region:
The hilly areas of the western part of the Pune district form the present study region. The study area covers some part of the Junnar, Ambegaon, Khed, Mulshi, Mawal, Haveli, Velhe, Bhor and Purandhar tahsil of the Pune district. Thus, the focus is kept on the related circles of the tahsil. The selected area is a part of the western ghats, high rainfall Zone, one of the natural heritage sites in the world and has good potentials of tourist location with respects to natural and cultural phenomena. Apart from few exceptions, the area is potentially underutilized from tourism point of view. The socio-economic condition requires an alternative for raising standard of living with maintaining harmony of the environment of the study region.

3 Hypothesis:
It may be hypothesised that environmental management for sustainability of ecotourism development could be possible in the region, if appropriate plan is formulated
for the conservation of rich biodiversity and well being of local people. As tourism could be useful for community development to raise their standard of living and balance regional development.

4. Objectives:

The major objective of the present work is to carry out the assessment of the present tourist centres in the study region and to find out geographical feasibility of potential tourist sites. Following specific objectives have been considered in the proposed study:

1) To study the present tourist places in the study area and to assess their status in the context of principles of ecotourism.
2) To identify and examine various potential tourist sites with the perspective of ecotourism.
3) To assess potential and geographical feasibility of the selected potential tourist sites
4) To understand the socio-cultural and economic status of the potential areas.
5) To find out the strengths and initiatives of the local peoples for the participation and development of the ecotourism.
6) To suggest a sustainable plan for development of ecotourism in the study area.

5. Methodology:

The present investigation is mainly based on the field data. The purposive random sampling method has been adopted for the collection of first hand information of the present and potential tourist sites. For this, >50 per cent of such sample points have been randomly selected from the study region. The methods have been used for the study includes a continuous dialogue process with the villagers, the questionnaire method to collect the socio-cultural and economic profile of the area. Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) technique for understand, the status of tourism. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) technique for understand positive and negative aspects of tourism in the villages around the tourist centres. It facilitated to identify the problems and prospects of tourism. The secondary sources are mainly collected from Survey of India (SOI) (toposheets), District Census Handbooks, Governmental departments, nongovernmental agencies and private tourist institute, trekking club, etc.

Usual computer techniques have been employed for compilation, analysis and presentation of the data collected from the primary and secondary sources. GIS technique
has been used for preparation of thematic maps. Statistical technique like percentage, 
Average, Score etc. also used to summaries the quantitative data.

6. The text:

The present work has been organised in eight chapters. In the first chapter the 
objectives, hypothesis of the study, methodology and technique used in the present 
research and review of the previous literature have been discussed. A brief introduction of 
the study region has also been made. Environmental Management for sustainable 
development of ecotourism is the central theme of the study. Thus, the concepts have been 
discussed briefly.

In the second chapter it has been attempted to understand the natural factor like 
physiography, geology, climate, flora and fauna etc with perspective of ecotourism 
development. The study has shown that in the study area tourism potential is significant. 
Thus, the aspect of the study would not only be helpful to know characteristics of the 
natural factors but also to recognise the potential for the development of ecotourism in the 
study area.

The feasibility development of ecotourism depends on need of the region on one 
hand and available infrastructure on the other. Therefore the third chapter has studied the 
population resource, landuse pattern and infrastructure to understand the need of 
alternative economic activity like ecotourism. The study may be stated that study area has 
offered a good potential for ecotourism and socio-economic environment has put forth the 
need for the same. It may further be stated that it is necessary to improve level of human 
resources and infrastructure in the region. So that ecotourism activities may be developed. 
This may be useful to bring more share of benefit to the local people.

The study presented in the fourth chapter has been useful for critical assessment of 
the nature of tourism. The technique used to analyse data generated in the field study have 
been proved to be apt for understanding the nature of present tourism with help of aspect 
like age, educational status of tourist, purpose of tourist, relation between purpose and age 
and education, tourist expenditure pattern, source of information, tourist perception about 
problems due to tourism and preferences for development of facilities and services at the 
tourist places, responsible tourist, role of tourism in economic development, condition of 
infrastructure etc. through the perception of tourist and local people.
The nature of tourism can also be understood with the help of knowledge of attitude and ways of functioning of the stakeholders with the perspective of environmental management have been presented in the fifth chapter. The stakeholders include hotel owners, tour operators, government, local people and the tourists. The study has revealed that practices of hotel owner, tour operator, tourist with respect to environmental management and ecotourism is unsatisfactory. The study of government as a stakeholder has been reviewed of policies and plan provisions for ecotourism. It shows that initially thrust on economic development and focus on environmental and cultural harmony truly realised in ninth plan. In addition to this the constitutional support for ecotourism has also been evaluated and shown that it has enough support for the enforcement and promotion of ecotourism.

Issues related to diversification of tourists and development of the potential areas has been discussed in the sixth chapter. The issue of diversification of tourists has been attempted to resolve with the help of travel-circuit approach. The development of potential area requires responsible involvement of all the stakeholders. The suggestion to improve the participation of local people has been discussed in the chapter. The effective participation of local people has been studied by understanding the strengths and weakness of the local people. The geographical feasibility of ecotourism with the help of suggested travel-circuits and potential villages can be based on infrastructure and strength and weakness of local people.

With the understanding of problems and potential of tourism, strength and weakness of the local people and role of all concerned stakeholders, the seventh chapter has proposed to suggest planning strategy for sustainable development of eco-tourism in the study region. This would be useful to prepare rational guideline for eco-tourism development within the study region and outside as well.

7. Results and major findings:

7.1. The socio-economic condition:

The main features of population may be high proportion of non-worker in the male and female. Female as a human resource significantly underutilised except agriculture activity. Among the workers dominance of cultivators are high and very low proportion of agricultural labourer, other worker and house hold industry. Main economic activity is subsistence type of agriculture and almost negligible to nil area under irrigation, the high proportion of non cultivable area and higher area under forest. Poor education facility,
poor transport, limited power supply and facilities like telephone newspaper and 
magazine, co-operative credit society, regular medical facility are not available.

7.2. Nature of tourism with perception of tourist:

Tourism supports and helps the local economy, infrastructure development, 
development of standard of living of local people, regional development and revival of 
cultural aspects. Participation of local people in tourism activity related to services is 
higher but insignificant role in tourism planning. Factors related to conservation of natural 
environment and historical monuments and security and safety of the area, awareness 
about waste, responsible, knowledge about local culture and environment and role in 
conservation activity is insignificant to indifferent. The study has also been observed that 
“responsible tourism” has been insignificant in the region.

7.3. Study of the tourism villages with perception of local people:

The infrastructure of the tourism villages has opined not satisfactory. The tourism 
activity helps to business sector, services, standard of living and to development of 
infrastructure. However, the aspects of ecotourism such as environment and cultural 
prosperity and participation of local people in tourism planning and management has been 
shown insignificant. The problem of plastic accumulation has been noted as high intensity 
problem, followed by sprawling of farm houses, deforestation and water scarcity except in 
rainy season and lower intensity of problems like noise and air pollution. The main 
problem of Sinhgarh and Panshet area is exotic behaviour of tourists and nuisance due to 
shouting. Damage to heritage has been observed significantly at Sinhgarh fort. Problem of 
threat and beat, misbehaviour of tourist has been observed higher at Panshet.

7.4. Tourist profile:

The number of aspect about tourists have been observed. It has been noticed that about 70% of the tourists have age blow 40 years and majority of 
tourists belong to the age group 20 to 30 years. At Sinhgarh tourist visits mainly to get 
pleasure and relaxation and majority from the Pune city. At Bhimashankar majority of 
tourist visit for darshan of Jyotirlinga and tourists flow comes from other place of 
Maharashtra and other parts of India. The study reveals that there is no significant relation between education and purpose of the 
tourists and responsible nature of the tourists. About 70% or more tourists have occupation 
either service or business. The majority of tourists visit the tourist places in the rainy
season and the next preference is winter season and very low proportion in summer season. Majority of the tourists have received information about the tourist places from informal sources like family and friends. Public transport system has been averagely used as compared to the private vehicles. The major expenditure is on transport and next to it on food. The expenditure on accommodation, purchases, guide and others have been observed insignificant.

The ranking of the satisfaction index at Bhimashankar and Sinhgarh has been highest for the behaviour of local people, tourists and Businessmen. The lowest rank of facilities like basic infrastructure and harmony and safety of tourist places are either due to unavailability or their worst condition. In the perception study of the tourists, preference has given mainly to the development of the basic infrastructure, cleanliness, security of the area and availability of proper information. Majority of the tourists are not aware about local environmental and socio-cultural milieu. This ignorant attitude deteriorates the quality of tourist places.

7.5. The study of stakeholders:

a. Participation of local people and role of stakeholders:

In small hotels participation of local people both as owner and as worker is significant. These are positive sign with the perspective of ecotourism. In the resort category has contrast situation. The majority of the hotels do not have policy regarding employing local people in the hotel industry. However, the employment is temporary.

The hotels owned by outsiders give significant preference to outsider as compare to own by local person.

Aims as well-being of local and environment harmony and the availing facilities by tour operator about stay, food and guide service provided by local people have noticed insignificant.

The majority of hotels have shown that they carry out less than 50% of the given practices of environmental management and whatever practiced observed either not scientific or below the standard. Maximum practices are observed energy conservation and afforestation. Big hotels are comparatively more or less have similar situation. The practices of environmental management in the activity of tour operator has shown that disposal of carried material has scored higher, followed by awareness of tourists about local environment and culture. The other factors have fairly considered.
b. Promotion of culture:

In overall situation attitude of the hotel owner about promotion of culture through traditional architecture, material used in construction and food, folk based cultural programme of local people are insignificant.

c. Motives of stakeholders:

The basic motive of the stakeholders is profit instead of promotion for environmental excellence and protection of local cultural. The objective about sustainable development, awareness and practices of nature conservation and aspects related to well-being of local people are almost ignored.

7.6 Diversification the tourists:

Diversification of tourist towards underutilised and potential tourist places could be achieved by implementation of travel-circuit concept. The numbers of present and potential travel-circuits have been observed in the study region The circuit approach can be useful for concentrated and focused attention on the potential tourist sites and associated villages instead dispersed and haphazard approach of development.

7.7. Development of potential villages:

Prior knowledge of strengths and weakness of local community is prerogative for development of any business enterprises. The local community has basic behavioural qualities like hard work, perseverance, honesty, cooperation; humbleness, hospitality are the inherent traits of the local community.

They also have rational attitude and logical method for adjusting with surrounding environment. i.e. practices of Rabni, Deorai, Padkai system of co-operative agriculture religious and economic value of trees, etc The government has been supporting to co-operative activities i.e. Bachat gat, dairy, Gram samiti, and other co-operative societies.

The study region has rich tradition of culture likes festivals, fairs and cultural tradition. Handicrafts are made more to fulfil the need in the house than aesthetic purpose. Majority locals have shown positive response for development of tourism in their areas. But almost all have expected direct participation and benefits from the tourism with the support of professional training and required capital from the government.

7.8. Problems of the study area:

Agriculture a significant economic activity has been rain fed and subsistence type. Unsatisfactory conditions of available public facilities and lack of necessary facilities,
geographical limitations, bribery practices and ignorant attitude of government authority, lack of publicity, lack of political will are the primary reasons for less development of tourism in potential area of the study region. Heavy rainfall, forest fire, disturbance of wild pig in agricultural field, stray cattle grazing after rainy season and illegal forest cutting for fuel and commercial purposes leads to loss of vegetative cover.

The social problem of the potential area has been narrated here. Addiction, blind faith on local worshipper or exorcist has been responsible for health and psychological problems, which leads to reluctant attitude toward progressive change. Inflexible attitude, lack of professionalism and entrepreneurship, ignorant about outside changing world are problems of the local community.

7.9. Ecotourism in the five year plan period:

The present study has taken a review of provisions, objectives and policies during different five year plan (FYP) with perception of development of ecotourism. The main emphasis was on the development of accommodation, transport and recreational facilities at selected tourist centres for economic development and generating employment till fifth FYP. Thus, it indicates that government emphasis was more on economic benefits than conservation of natural resources in the early years after independence. In the sixth plan the government was realised the importance of conservation of natural environment and cultural heritage of the country. In the year 1998 in 9th plan has set guidelines and strategies for development of ecotourism by formulating the policy. The focus on ecotourism has also observed in tourism policy of the year 2002 and 10th plan period.

7.10. Constitutional strength for ecotourism development.

The constitution of India is a fundamental guideline for framing the policy. The objective of participation and well-being of local people could be strengthen with the help of fundamental rights in part III to ensure his liberty, equality, protection of culture and the like. The ethics of responsible tourist or ecotourist could be promoted by taking support of corresponding fundamental duties. Finally, it is also observed that government have several guidelines in part IV of Directive Principles of State Policy to promote ecotourism.

7.11. Planning strategy:

The planning strategy suggested in the study has been based on the understanding problems, potentials and strengths of the study area and role of the various stakeholders in the tourism activity. While suggesting planning strategy priority has been given to the conservation of resources, well being of local people diversification of tourist and
development of potential areas. It has been also suggested that while implementing the development programme emphasis has been given on participatory approach and thus, strength of local people such as traditional knowledge, good traditions suggested to promote with strengthen the local government institutions. Similarly proper policy formulation, awareness among all stakeholders, promotion of tourist places and proper training to the stakeholders about practices of environmental management have essentially emphasised. Government strength and support is essential to promote positive aspect of ecotourism and regulate problem of mass tourism. Government must formulate appropriate policies to strengthen the activity and co-ordination between private, NGOs and various departments of the governments and deal the issue of resource management to support the conservative practices.

8. Relevance and applicability of the study:

Ecotourism is a good supportive and alternative economic activity to the local people of the study region. Considering dilemma of environment and development, ecotourism is a good option to mitigate and wipe out the problem related to mass tourism and promote participation and development of local people. It helps in development of socio-culturally, economically and environmentally sound tourism.

9. Concluding remark:

The study has analysed the present nature of tourism in the study region and also found out strength and the constraints for the development of eco-tourism in the western part of the Pune district. The planning strategy suggested in the study is based on the potential strength of the local people and participation of all the stakeholders utilised on the principles of sustainability for the development of ecotourism. Similarly, it has been proposed that selected travel circuits and related lead villages should be promoted for the development of ecotourism with effective implementation of suggested planning strategy. If the strategy is employed with honesty and dedication and all the stakeholders are motivated with priority of conservation of natural resources and well being of local people, the development of ecotourism in ecologically sensitive area of the Pune district will become reality in near future.

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