

DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN PANNA NATIONAL PARK (MADHYA PRADESH), INDIA

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ABSTRACT: Eco-tourism both at conceptual and empirical levels is significant in a number of respects. In the present scenario the ecotourism is a grooming sector in developing nations. However, its impact on wildlife and indigenous people has become a controversial issue. Over the decades numerous changes have been observed both in the content and context of eco-tourism. With globalization the processes of these changes not only widened and multiplied, but also gained in importance. Panna National Park explores the multitude of interactions that exist among the welfare of wildlife, conservation biology and socio-economy of the local people. It argues - and concludes by way of recommendations - that if eco-tourism is properly developed it can not only attract tourists from far and near, but can also generate more revenue for the inhabitants of the region and for the state.

KEYWORDS: Eco-Tourism, Panna N.P, conservation biology, wildlife tourism, regulations..

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the few countries of the world endowed with an array of tourism resources - from bio-cultural diversity to a wealth of histories and antiquities. These should have accelerated the growth of tourism in India at four times the world average (WTO 1994). In reality, smaller countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Maldives and Bhutan have proved more adept at promoting their national tourism as a successful industry. Tourism is one of the largest sources of foreign exchange in countries such as Costa Rica, Belize and Guatemala (Yadav 2002). In the Indian context, decades of dangerous development policies have threatened the integrity of the ecosystem - so much so that today, politicians, scientists, activists and local communities are struggling to balance the need for economic growth with the preservation of natural resources (Nilakantha Panigrahi 2005).

Madhya Pradesh, the heart of India, occupies the famous Central Plateau of the main and of India bounded, in the north by the great Northern Plains; by the great Thar Desert and the Sahyadaries in the west; and the great

tribal belt consisting of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and the Orissa in the South and the East. Madhya Pradesh is one of the largest states of India and boasts of the largest forest belt (94689.38 sq km or 12.44% of India's total forest wealth) and some of the most valuable, scenic and diverse forests in India.

THE CONCEPT OF ECO-TOURISM:

The concept of eco-tourism has been defined differently by the various national and international agencies. Conceptually, eco-tourism encapsulates a type of "tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery, wild plants and animals, as well as the existing cultural aspects (both past and present), found in those areas. Ecological tourism implies a scientific, aesthetic philosophical approach, although the ecological tourists are not required to be professional scientist, artist or philosopher. The main point is that the person who practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way most people cannot enjoy in their routine ." (Ziffer 1989, Boo 1992a,b, Lindberg 1996, and WTO/UNEP 1992).

The UN International Year of Eco-Tourism during 2002 reviewed eco-tourism experiences worldwide, highlighting three significant aspects: 1) nature, 2) tourism, and 3) local communities. Most of the studies relating to tourism emphasize the economic dimensions at international and national levels (Gray 1970; EIU 1973; Thuens 1976; Mathieson and Wall 1982), while very few have investigated local levels (Henderson 1975; Vaughan 1977; Singh 1981; Dube 1985; Chopra 1991; Srivastava 1992 and Singh 1992; further elaborated below). Likewise, there have been proposals to link cultural and eco-tourism into a more sustainable perspective which is able ' to acknowledge the natural environment, built environment, icons, and attractions of destinations as part of the cultural package' (Greathouse Amador 1997).

Other scholars have also used the term 'nature tourism' (Ceballos-Lascurain 1996) which is not necessarily

ecologically sound; while Cohen (1984) raised the issue of neglect of development in and around protected areas. The definition of eco-tourism has changed considerably from a descriptive concept in which there is no difference between nature-tourism and eco-tourism to today's usage: that is, the 'desired state' of development in reaching a balance between 'nature conservation', 'sustainable socio-economic development', and 'nature tourism' (Boo 1992b; Ziffer 1989). Most have emphasized the management of tourism and conservation of nature so as to maintain a balance between tourism and ecology on the one hand, and the requirements of local communities in terms of generating employment, enhancing their earning skill, and improving the status of women.

Different studies have highlighted various aspects of eco-tourism. Some have focused on the industry aspects, such as the nature and quality of provision and environmental attraction that eco-tourists expect (e.g. Khan 2003, Rudd Tupper 2002), while few have studied the relationship between eco-tourism and the local people's conventional livelihoods and forms of social organizations (e.g. Akram, Lant, and Burnett 1996; Belsky 1999; Medina 2003) and others have analyzed the motivation of the eco-tourists (e.g. Duffy 2002; Munt 1994). Only over the last decade have serious efforts been made to establish strategies that link eco-tourism and cultural tourism into sustainable 'pro-poor' tourism approaches (Poyya 2003).

Ceballos-Lascurain (1996:46-48) estimated the potential number of eco-tourists globally at between 157 to 236 million, capable of generating expenditures of up to US\$1.2 trillion, while Honey (1999:9) calculated it at US\$30 billion per year. In view of these estimations, it is understandable that the United Nations should have declared 2002 as the International Year of Eco-Tourism. Eco-tourism and eco-tourists are clearly significant to the tourism economy and the environment. In contrast to conventional tourists (Gossling 1999:309; Koch 1997:218) eco-tourists stays in facilities that are likely to be owned and managed by local people rather than multinational corporations, and often eat local food and consume local services (West and Carrier, 2004, 483-498). Honey (2003) thus defines eco-tourism as aimed to protect and benefit conservation; benefit, respect and help empower local communities; and educate as well as entertain tourists.

A review of the Indian case reveals that tourism has helped in maximizing economic benefits rather than ensuring social benefits. Eco-tourism as a concept centres on the nature of the tourism and with regard to local communities emphasizes conservation,

sustainability and biological diversities. In the Indian context all the Five Year Plans have built up infrastructure, including tourist circuits and centres, diversified tourism from the traditional sight-seeing tour, to non-traditional areas such as trekking, winter sports, beach resorts; restored and balanced development of national heritage of cultural, historical and tourist importance.

WILDLIFE TOURISM:

Nature tourism is the organized viewing of wildlife. Nature tourists pay a considerable amount of money to participate in viewing wildlife in their native countries and in foreign countries that promote nature viewing to attract the revenue of tourists (Moreno, 2005). The example of a sustainable use of wildlife in the Manu Biosphere Reserve and Puerto Maldonado National Parks of Peru in (Groom et al., 2000), recognizes the benefits of ecotourism as it helps to educate people on the importance of conserving wildlife. The monetary gain from this industry serves to benefit the conservation efforts to manage wild habitats and provides an income for local people. The study is to find key indicators and evaluate of ecotourism impact on wildlife of Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve, (Balendra and Ravi, 2011).

The wildlife tourism in Panna is subordinated to the main objective of wildlife conservation. The management believes that the visitors should be provided a meaningful exposure of the protected area so that they can appreciate India's magnificent natural heritage and conservation benefits.

The project Tiger objective "to ensure the maintenance of a viable population of the tiger in India and to preserve, for all times, such areas as part of our natural heritage, for the benefit, education and enjoyment of future generations" also sounds a similar note.

Wildlife tourism in Panna National park is a balance of conservation education and entertainment with the active participation of local people. The underlying principal is that the tourism should be ecologically and socio-culturally sustainable.

REDISCOVERING THE TOURISM OF PANNA NATIONAL PARK:

Madhya Pradesh, the very heart of India, abounds in wild life, thick forests, and pristine scenic places. Panna-Chhatarpur complex possesses some of the best forests of Bundelkhand - one of the six geographic-cultural regions of M.P. This park is the only protected area of Bundelkhand to be designated as a tiger reserve in 1994 and harbors some of the finest habitats of large mammals.

Tourism, in the form of 'Deshatan', or pilgrimage to religious/cultural places or visit to hill stations, has

always been known in our country. Traveling to protected areas is relatively a new trend. Still newer is the term 'Eco-tourism', which, in the context of Park areas, means travelling to undisturbed natural areas with specific objectives of studying, appreciating and enjoying nature's bounty without polluting or degrading it. Besides being ecologically sustainable, ecotourism must also contribute to protection and management of park area. An appropriate interpretive programme must, therefore, be integral to Park area management, so that the wilderness experience doesn't remain mere recreation, but serves the wider objectives of educating people and involving them in nature conservation.

The revenue earned by Panna National Park through wildlife tourism. Initially in the year 1996-97 the revenue earned was only 1.5 lakhs which grew continuously in coming years reaching to a maximum of approximately 46.5 lakhs in the year 2009-10.

Government of M.P. declared tourism as an industry in 1991, offering a package of incentive for hoteliers and developers. Two of the ten objectives of this tourism policy had a direct bearing on Park areas of the state, viz., generate employment, especially in the interior areas of the state, and protect its natural and cultural resources with integrated development in an ecologically sustainable manner.

Government of India has issued revised guidelines for wildlife tourism protected areas including Tiger Reserves. These guidelines forewarn that over and inappropriate use of a protected area for tourism can be responsible for degradation of protected area and dwindling of its wildlife. The guidelines recognize that protected areas are meant primarily for conservation of nature and of genetic and natural resources of India's national heritage.

REGULATIONS:

Regulations need to reflect the value of forests and wildlife while also considering the need to sustain lives of indigenous people. The regulations should also try to minimize the impact of ecotourism on the welfare of wildlife and native communities. Most developing nations are facing economic problems and civil and political strife. The fickle nature of politics in most developing nations (Zaire, Peru, Sri Lanka, India etc) together with a multitude of other problems makes forest and wildlife protection seem like a needless endeavour. Presently, conservation groups such as NGO's, UNESCO, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Sierra Club are trying to implement the conservation of priority species and ecosystems (Johnson, 1995). The scientific knowledge in wildlife welfare and ecosystems are

concentrated in educational institutions. Local governments have some regulations on protecting forests; however, most regulations are not implemented. Therefore, conservationists need to contend with the priorities of different groups together with funding problems when setting priorities to protect wildlife and their habitats.

TOURIST FLUX IN PANNA NATIONAL PARK:

Khajuraho alone receives, on average, between 1.5 and 1.7 lakh visitors every year, 40-50,000 of these are foreigners. Even if a small fraction, say 10 % of this number (15-17,000 people) get attracted to the park on a regular basis, it will be a sizeable crowd other visitors reaching the park directly for its wilderness are additional number. The data on the number of tourists visiting Panna National Park in different years from October to June in Madla region of Panna National Park. In the initial stages the numbers of visiting Panna National Park have been quite few. In 1996-97 the tourists visiting Panna National Park were 1782 out of which 1237 were Indian and 545 were foreign tourists and this was only 1.34% of the total 14 years that is till 2009-10. Then after the tourists visiting the park grew continuously 2000-01 witnessed comparatively good numbers of tourists. Maximum number of tourists visited park was in the year 2006-07 with a total of 15936 than the little fall in total number of tourists was noticed in year between 2007-09 a great fall of nearly 3000 tourists was witnessed in the year 2009-10.

Tourist flux visiting July to June in Pandav fall region of the Park. This region of the park appears to attract more number of visitors than Madla region of the Park. But the significant difference is that, in comparison to Pandav fall region of the Park Madla region attracts more number of foreign tourists. A continuous increase in the number of tourists in Pandav fall region of the park noticed from 1996-97 to 2009-10. The maximum number of tourists visiting the park was in the year 2009-10 with a total of 34112 out of which 33777 were Indian visitors and only 335 were foreign tourists and this is only 3.42% of the total number of tourists visiting the park.

The overall tourists visited the Panna National Park since 1996-97 to 2009-10. (Table: 01), shows the percentage of the tourist visiting the park in different years. It is evident from the data that the park is still failing to attract foreign tourists as the total number of foreign tourists is only 10.63% of the total tourists visiting the Panna National Park.

Table-01. Presenting Total No. of Visitors visited In PNP In Different Years.

S. N o.	Year	Indian Visitors	Foreign Visitors	Total	Percentage (%)
1	1996-97	25117	6118	31235	5.92%
2	1997-98	36814	1712	38526	7.30%
3	1998-99	39365	2329	41694	7.90%
4	1999-2000	36270	2130	38400	7.28%
5	2000-2001	37142	3497	40639	7.70%
6	2001-2002	30971	2903	33874	6.42%
7	2002-2003	36014	2626	38640	7.32%
8	2003-2004	36202	4803	41005	7.77%
9	2004-2005	26638	3755	30393	5.76%
10	2005-2006	28234	4768	33002	6.25%
11	2006-2007	29985	6070	36055	6.83%
12	2007-2008	31009	5679	36688	6.95%
13	2008-2009	35165	5089	40254	7.63%
14	2009-2010	42281	4600	46881	8.89%

Source: PNP, M.P, India

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The panna National Park can be a successful tourist destination if the industry is encouraged. Most important were litter, erosion and vegetation damage, all visual impacts with the potential to reduce the natural experience ecotourism offers. Greater visitor concern regarding potential impacts, compared to observed impacts, indicates a perception that social and biophysical conditions in the Park are likely to worsen in the future. The State Government has not given due and appropriate importance to develop and/or enrich tourism from an ecological and cultural point of view. For this reason, the following recommendations are made:

- Attempts should be made to conserve the physical ecology as well as the cultural ecology of the local communities by empowering them through a participatory protected area management approach.
- There should be a crackdown on illegal encroachments of the Park. Permission for construction of structures within these zones should be denied.
- Development of infrastructure and safety measures in the interior of the Panna N.P should be of prime importance in the intervention to establish eco-tourism in the State.
- Overall, the eco-tourism of the Park should effectively protect indigenous people and cultures from external threats; recognize their traditional rights on land and water; recognize their rights to control and co-manage these resources; allow participation of traditional institutions in the

management of natural resources; and recognize the rights of these people to determine their own development priorities.

- The development of an over-all eco-tourism strategy will incorporate of the Local participation, Sound environmental design, Visitor management , Conservation education, Training, Financial sustainability ,Monitoring and evaluation.
- The eco-tourism strategy should also address the Potential PA attributes via eco-tourism, Identification of sites and development of monitoring mechanisms for ecological impact of eco-tourism.

STEPS TO SUCCESS:

- Set biodiversity priorities that link with conservation goals.
- Clarify local, national and global bio-diversity conservation priorities.
- Involve those responsible for implementing conservation actions: Government agencies, NGOs, local universities and local communities.
- Give local people economic incentives to protect wildlife ecosystems.
- Involve government policy makers in conservation efforts to declare protected areas and enforce regulations.

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