LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS

THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF TOURISM IN INDIA AND ITS DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS ON THE NATURAL RESOURCE USAGE WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON COASTAL REGIONS

Saudamini Marici
Natural Resources and Governance, Tata institute of Social Sciences (TISS)- 2017
Corresponding author: Email-saudamini.marici@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Everyone is chasing that one most wanted thing: Time. We live in a hustling world where time is continuously on the run. Its feet are soaked tied in the chains of our "developing" nation. People have become slaves to the monotony of technology, machinery and entertainment which in turn leads to planned and organized 'relaxing time' (vacations) at peaceful, pristine locations. Many pristine pockets across our country have been a hub for recreational activities and weekend getaways.

India's vast expanse allows a home to beautiful coastlines, virgin forests and the mighty Himalayan range. The traditional culture and ecology of these places lay untouched for quite a while before people searching for quiet getaways discovered inexpensive liquor, delicious seafood, meditative environments and cool climatic conditions. With the discovery of these unadulterated areas, tourism has become an ever-emerging sector with more and more tourists visiting every year in search of a peaceful and clean place to escape their strained work life.

Key Words: Footprints, pristine pockets, ecotourism, coastal regions

INTRODUCTION

As India is gradually opening up its tourism industry, the negative and positive impact on the environment and local communities is becoming more and more vivid. Manickavasagam (1991) gives emphasis to environmental problems associated with tourism and how human influences have an impact on terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

Tourism is an upcoming industry in the world today. It has led to high revenue generation in a number of countries around the world. It has also encouraged the process of globalization and westernization. While every country is leaning more and more towards this source of income they have failed to foresee the other side of the coin. Tourism draws a number of natural resources in order to support the industry. By doing so, it exploits local resources, both human and environmental. "The absence of a widely accepted definition of ecotourism has in turn led to a lack of both current and reliable statistics" De Vicente (2004).

An important note on the perspective of tourism is that the local population of the area perceives tourism in a completely different light. It is intrusive on their home; their homes which are cocoons filled with traditions and culture.

Tourism, while on one hand provides large sums of revenue and exposure to global cultures, also extracts a generous amount of resources from the locals in order to provide comfort and entice tourists. In an excuse for "development" and "investments", electricity, fresh drinking water, fresh local food and land resources are taken away and given up to large private companies and agencies for the purpose of tourism.

Ecotourism, while being the recent upcoming trend used to entice unaware tourists, is a concept that has been exploited and misused by industries for their own benefit. Pseudo ecotourism, Alenton (2015-2016) is a recent concept, where marketing and promotions have been talking about ecotourism as a reference to nature and do not mention conservation and environmental protection in any way. These practices are referred to as eco tourism.

This paper contains a review of existing literature on tourism and its positive and negative impacts on the area, as well as impact of increasing tourists on the resource use patterns...
and whether the current forms of governance play a role in managing the distribution of resources among tourists and local residents living in the area. With special focus on coastal regions.

**Coastal Regions**

Orans (2003) in his article 'Sandy beaches as a tourism attraction: A management challenge for the 21st century'. An elaborately written piece, describes how most of the world's urban population lives in the coastal areas. Tourism has become vital for most economies to survive in today's world. Rapidly increasing population mainly resides by the coast. Coastal systems are under great pressure, especially due to human invasion. With the purpose of recreation, the pressure on these ecosystems has quadrupled. Waste disposal is one major issue, as we are aware, all sewage lines pour out into the large water bodies, such as oceans and seas. These bodies have a method of self-cleansing even so; there is a brink of this resilience too. Beaches close to urban areas are especially under pressure. An intriguing quote used in the article "Tourism carries the seeds of its own destruction".

They have explained this using an example of sea turtles and the problem of their nesting. Case studies done on the Caribbean islands and Hawaii talk about the harmful effects of urine on coral reefs are one major issue that our marine ecosystems are facing around the world. Direct trampling on benthic organisms by waders and snorkelers is another issue when it comes to promoting adventure activities. The case displays different beach management systems enforced by governmental authorities in order to protect the ecology and biodiversity in the area.

Garcia and Severa (2003) have beautifully analyzed the effects that tourism has on the environment. They have mentioned a number of ways, such as increased transport development, use of resources, and pollution. They have taken the case study of the Mediterranean coast, where bad urban planning has led to massive destruction of beaches in the area. They have talked about the history of the Mallorca Islands and how the tourism boom has impacted the resources in the area. Special focus has been given to the indirect impacts of tourism on a number of natural resources such as water resources and beach dunes systems in the area. Another case study presented by J. Mbaiva (2002) in Okavango, in Africa. This case study, similar to the previous one is based on the environmental impacts of tourism such as noise pollution and its role in causing disturbance to wild-life species, bushfires caused due to overcrowding of human beings, expansion of illegal settlements and the introduction of invasive species for aesthetic beauty or other such purposes, impacts on the sanitation systems and water resources. The third Case study on the rare and endangered Red billed Chough was conducted on a French Island to assess impact of anthropogenic forces or tourism on the population of these species. Even minor human induced disturbance such as scaring away the birds has a major impact on the populations indirectly leading to a change in the balance in biodiversity. During peak tourist season, prey availability is 50 percent less than usual.

Another let down of tourism is that it causes excessive human pressure, leading to a decline in the population of wader birds along the coastal areas in Malaysia. The percentage of hatching clutches and fledging chicks decreases with human interference. Increase in beach erosion rates due to the upcoming hotels and other tourist activity centers and converting medium leveled vegetation into tall monocultures has caused a change in the availability and habitat productivity of the Malaysian Plovers.

The article 'Impacts of marine systems on coastal and marine ecosystems', gives us a historical perspective of impacts of human pollution when it comes to aquatic habitats as evident from the example of the Malaysian plovers. As we are well aware, the environment has its breaking point or threshold after which ecosystem responses become strong and it is difficult to deal with the effects. This is called the point of resilience. Since most of the world's coastal areas have been damaged by pollution, affecting marine and coastal fisheries, it becomes essential to gain knowledge about these issues. Also written about, is the gap in scientific knowledge, causing a major problem when it comes to coastal habitats. It talks about disposal of different waste materials such as plastics, industrial sludge and more and its ecological impacts. Coastal pollution has caused drastic changes in phytoplankton, zooplankton and human health. Initiation of sustainable management of coastal ecosystems from a local to global scale is encouraged. (Md. Islam 2004)

Noronha (1997, December 20), a very famous environmental journalist talks about the changing environmental face of the topography in Goa. He gives an example of the hills in Calangute, which initially were green and laden with dense forests now lie barren and bare, he calls it a concrete jungle. Tourism is the backbone for Goa's income. It supports a
very large population of the local community. In recent years the pristine ecology has been disturbed by noise and pollution. He talks about how exposure to a number of national as well as international tourists in Goa has led to increase in many other crimes related activities such as drug abuse and child sex abuse. For the first time, local residents of Goa protested saying that due to the upcoming hotels, there is a severe water shortage problem, damaged electricity lines and high prices for local goods.

'Using integrated coastal management and economics to conserve coastal tourism in Sri Lanka', White, Barker, & Tantrigama (1997) talk about how coastal tourism has been generating welfare for local and national economies, and yet there is a major trade-off that we have to bear which involves beach degradation and ecological degradation. It may be redundant but the scale at which beaches are eroding is dangerous and therefore I feel it needs more than just a one-time mention. In this article, the 'Special Area Management' plan for Hikkaduwa is examined. This article analyzes the functioning of the Special area management program which promotes an agenda of sustainable development involving all stakeholders. The cost-benefit economic analysis conducted for the Hikkaduwa Sam plan and its positive environmental impacts represent a strong tool in developing polices for coastal management.

As human pressure on coastal areas is increasing the need to find a way to balance people's needs with sustaining the coastal environment is becoming vital. Reel, I. (2003, September). Since there is no common definition of what constitutes a coastal region it is difficult to calculate the exact population living in coastal areas. The reason why coastal areas are more preferable for residing communities is because they support the bulk of marine fisheries, they help prevent soil erosion, filter pollutants and provide home to a number of organisms, also provide opportunities to a number of industries due to easy access to water and a number of recreational places. The article talks about how demographic features should be taken into consideration while formulating policies and how this will help in management and safeguarding the world's coast and the resources they provide.

Tourism - global perspective

An article by Cabezas (2008) beautifully captures the area of political ecology, which talks about the direct impacts of tourism on the local communities on the Caribbean islands.

Tourism is the backbone of the Caribbean economy. On one hand, it supports the cause of poverty alleviation and globalization in the economy, while on the other hand, the article talks about tourism leading to ecological deterioration, loss of profits to external entities and changes in cultural patterns. The capitalist system has continually relied on cheap labor and access to resources, land and the market. This capitalist model runs the tourism industry as well; this includes hospitality and travel industries. This transnational industry clearly displays the asymmetrical distribution of power and economic resources. The article clearly indicates the influence of the structural inequalities and the capitalist global system. Cabezas talks in detail about the monopolistic nature of hotels and other hospitality agencies. He mentions how the number of times hotels have tied up with other multinational food chains in order to promote their brand, reducing opportunities and scope for local entrepreneurs. Another important issue is the leakage of foreign exchange while importing products in order to support the tourism industry. The tourism industry spends a large chunk of their country's funds and resources on good infrastructure, roads, electricity and all for the tourists but the infrastructure in the rest of the city remains chaotic.

Benckendorff, Edwards, Jurowski, Liburd, Miller, & Moscardo (2009) talk about the impact of tourism on the quality of life of the local communities. Research conducted on the quality of life studies the impact of tourism on different populations and how these impacts are internalized and influence an individual's 'life satisfaction'. The 2008 Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel Education think tank VIII discussed the impact of tourism as a positive relation between existential factors and well being of human beings. The change in quality of life as a result of tourism needs to be analyzed by looking at the past as well as predicting the future. The three major themes running through the discussion are the need for tourism as a phenomenon to take into consideration social and economic activities. This perception that tourism is not as effective as some other sectors such as Corporate Social Responsibility and last of all identifying and working with key stakeholders. In conclusion, it was stated that tourism as a catalyst to improvement in quality of life is either not being addressed or is facing a number of barriers to change and a solution should be derived soon before it's too late for us to overcome the upcoming environmental consequences of our current actions.
The International tourist research center in Botswana had set up a program to explore the development of African communities. This program included looking at tourism as an income earner as well as the distribution of costs and benefits associated with that income. The paper captures an essential aspect of the problem, which is for the researchers to be a partner with the specific businesses and incorporate their ideals instead of preaching to them. The paper elaborates on the characteristics of the African communities and the characteristics of the tourism sector. It identifies the main stakeholders, which are the government, the communities and local population, business and commercial sector, the academic world and developmental agencies. The paper studies the goals of each of these stakeholders in detail. The aim of this paper is to suggest a means where government agencies, the tourism industry and the local communities of Africa can get together and generate employment and income for the needy. Both the parties participating in the tourism related practices can mutually benefit this.

Tillotson (1988) in her article, talks about how the tourism industry is like any other industry guided by market forces and short term profits rather than long-term investments. She talks about how tourism can be seen as providing more use to some old buildings and in a way leading to the conservation of this ancient architecture. On the other hand, tourism provides new outlets for India's handicraft industry as well as local artisans. This may be helpful for the locals but the tourists also bring with them alien values straying the next generation of locals away from tradition and thereby having a counter effect on the tourism industry. Planned laws along with local enthusiasm are required in order to manage the ill effects of tourism. She talks about the necessity to stop the overload of tourist sites to decrease the pressure on resources.

On a different note, Rizal and Asokan (2014) have written an article where they have emphasized on how tourism is the backbone for many sectors such as hospitality, civil aviation and transport. The increase in the number of the foreign tourists over the recent decades has led to the generation of employment in a number of sectors. Their article weaves through the conflicting issue of this income and employment versus the loss of endangered species and a change in the balance of nature. Rizal and Asokan touch upon important topics such as tourism and it's direct relation with carrying capacity of an ecosystem, this envelops climate change, impact of exotic species, ozone layer depletion, depletion of natural resources. It talks about how every region requires its own customized management system in order to regain the balance in the system. It also mentions how funds are essential for research and to execute the sustainable tourism policy in India.

Emerging tourism and its impacts
In an article, Gormsen (1997) looks at the impact of tourism from three different perspectives, it highlights social and economic impacts of tourism for the local population, it's impact on culture and the environment. Even though all of these are interrelated, there is special focus on the ecological impacts of tourism. Tourism causes a whole stream of migrants which leads to population increase. A higher population means more houses and shelter and more mouths to feed leading to squatters and beggars around the area. Among the critical problems is the issue of water supply. Increased competition for water between use for agriculture, use for hotels and other tourist activities. This drastic increase in tourists leads to emission of excessive sewage and toxic wastes into the sea, which kills a number of corals and other species. People have been coming up with new methods called "soft tourism", a concept which allows tourism to be a major source of income as well as allows the environment to sustain.

An interesting piece of writing by Root-Bernstein, Rosas, Osman, & Ladle (2012) came up with an extremely interesting approach to conservation; it talks about the human wildlife conflict caused due to increasing competition for coastal area land resources. Human interference such as barriers, bridges, corridors and model predators has changed animal behavior over the past few years. This article uses a unique approach to talk about how collaboration with designers and architects will help wildlife adapt to this modified human environment. It highlights the importance of combining a number of disciplines. There are a number of approaches that can be used for managing coastal human wildlife conflict such as protected area formation to local zonation. An example of a case study in Chile has been given where together a number of biologists and industrial designers came up with product designs to prevent human wildlife conflict between sea lions and human beings. It also takes into account understanding values between humans and wildlife and society and nature.

This article focuses on the emerging concept of ecotourism. It clearly defines different terms such as the terms 'eco-tourist' and 'ecotourism'. It even gives a thorough critique highlighting the positives and negatives of the concept. His paper
mentions the principles of eco-tourism such as its educative nature and the fact that it's nature based and ecologically sustainable, locally beneficial and that it generally increases the satisfaction level for tourists. The next part of his paper discusses the relationship between the development of tourism and environmental quality. According to him, the environment mainly comprises the biotic, abiotic and the socio economic, here we read about the functions that the environment provides. The positives and negatives of tourism have been looked at in depth. The impact of the tourism industry on flora fauna, pollution, erosion, natural resources, cultural environment, visual impacts and built environment have been studied. This paper touches upon an important area, which is, the linkages of the tourism industry with development and projection of the area further leading to construction activities and clearing of trees and land in order to carry these out (Murugan 2006-7).

ANALYSIS

This analysis provides an overview of recent ecotourism research in India, assessing the social, environmental, political, and financial repercussions through many case studies and emphasizing the need for a re-evaluation of national policy on tourism. It also identifies research gaps, indicating what needs to be explored further in order to have a more full understanding of the realities of current ecotourism practices in order to improve them.

The literature on socio-ecological short term and long term impacts of tourism is extensive and covers a range of areas such as economic benefits, employment generation and cultural impact of local communities and livelihoods. Although covered in great detail, the existing research gives only a brief gist of the loopholes in the tourism policies laid out by the government. The literature requires a more solution oriented approach. For example, suggestions on what can be done to modify the existing policies to ensure long term sustainability of the environment and in turn the tourism industry or how to involve local NGOs and communities in the process of conservation.

A large percentage of today's population, especially the youth, are leaning towards sustainable brands and giving more importance to sustainable living. Businesswire, a press release company, in their GreenPrint survey found that nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans are willing to pay more for sustainable products but most (74%) don't know how to identify them. According to the findings, 78% of people are more likely to purchase a product that is labeled as environmentally friendly.

Ideas and solutions on how the local governments and companies could capitalize on this information is something that can be incorporated in a solution to the issue of pseudo ecotourism.

The literature on the subject could involve examples of tried and tested solutions, frameworks on how to curb destructive activities and 'green washing' practices. This would involve tourists in more interactive eco-friendly practices such as promoting sustainable brands, industries and companies that will not just further the cause of protecting the environment but also indirectly save their livelihoods from future damage. That also promotes local artisans without destroying the environment.

An aspect that has been addressed indirectly yet not talked about in greater detail is that tourism is limited to a certain section of society, the people who can afford it (which entails a very small upper middle class and elite population of our country) are able to enjoy this luxury. The other half of the population that is catering to this luxury is the one who will have to face the consequences of this in the long run.

As a suggestion, research on investigating the effectiveness of conservation practices using environmental impact assessment activities. Understanding the social and ecological 'carrying capacity' of the proposed ecotourism site in order to prevent tourism's hindrance towards the balance between conservation and development is essential. Apart from this, it is essential to monitor changing land-use and resource consumption patterns to ensure that ecotourism doesn't end up as an 'extractive industry' rather than something purely used for betterment of communities and livelihood generation.

Despite the recent research into the issues surrounding the practice of ecotourism in India, there are inevitably existing research gaps which hinder solutions to the negative socio-economic, political and environmental implications of ecotourism, as previously implied.

CONCLUSION

The paper captures the existing literature on tourism globally, in India, with special focus on coastal regions as well as short term and long term impacts of the same.

The practice of ecotourism is likely to become more of a major issue in the future. The Sustainable Development Goals make it more important than ever that ecotourism projects
work to save the environment and avoid future degradation of environmentally sensitive places, rather than hindering it. Unfortunately, a large sum of the research shows that most practices are of pseudo ecotourism which are causing more ecological damage and causing a negative change in socio-economic implications. Clear trends and examples of poor ecotourism practices have been revealed across India, and these "pseudo ecotourism" practices will continue to flourish unless national policy changes.

Tourism is a double edged sword, the discovery of a pristine and picturesque place invites a number of people searching for peace and recreation, and in turn the large number of people destroy the peace and beauty of the place.

Coastal Locations compared to mountainous or forest regions, have a much higher resilience when it comes to absorbing the ecologically destructive agents such as chemical wastes, plastic garbage and many other forms of pollution. This stems from its access to open channels into the Bay of Bengal, Arabian sea and Indian ocean. Oceans and seas are always an easy means of disposing of harmful wastes, but even they have their breaking point and will respond in time.

The various state governments in India have placed sole focus on promoting tourism in an unorganized manner, which entails prioritizing profit and development of the area for the purpose of high GDP and economic growth in the short term without taking into consideration its impacts on the future of the area.

This is carried out by attractive tourism packages such as exciting offers and discounts on hotels and travel, interactive local experiences and adventure activities for recreation open to tourists from all around the world. The concept of a peaceful, stress free vacation that involves walks along clean beaches, swimming in the sea and good fresh food, is one created by large tourism entities further encouraged by the government's tourism department.

In conclusion, the National Ecotourism Policy in India needs to be revised in order to prevent green washing from taking place on a large scale. Conserving ecological linkages, preserving livelihoods over a longer term and maintaining the pristine quality of the environment is essential for the world to move towards a more sustainable future.

SUGGESTED READINGS


