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ECOTOURISM IN J&K: VEHICLE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The state of J&K is famous all over the world for its mountains, valleys, rivers and lush green forests. The eternal scenic beauty is found here in abundance hence it unfolds its self for rich resource availability which paves way for ecotourism. Ecotourism activities are listed as bird watching, hiking, diving, kayaking, participating in cultural events, photography, mountaineering, etc. The existing forest resources are the open treasures rich heritage of the state and constitute the most important sector of the economy. Besides being source of revenue, they maintain clean environment, provide employment opportunities to millions of people, potential for industrial development as well as promote tourism in the state.

KEY WORDS:

Sustainable Development ,Ecotourism , mountains, valleys, photography.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is ecological tourism where ecological has both environmental and social connotations. It focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures. Volunteering personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. It is typically defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna and cultural heritage are primary attractions. The concept of ecotourism evolved over last 20 years as it was born in the late 1980s and the United Nations celebrated the “International Year of Tourism in 2002. The ecotourism society (1991) defines ecotourism as “Responsible Travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the well being of the local people. Experiencing culture through museums and formalised presentation of music and dance, theatres, hotels or occasionally in communities themselves has led to commoditisation of culture adopted for tourist consumption, often resulting in degradation of the host’s cultural traditions. Ecotourism of ‘sustainable tourism’ can be considered as the greening of tourist industry. It is the fastest growing markets in the tourist industry.

During the year 2011, the number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) reached the level of 6.29 million, registering a growth of 8.9% over the FTAs of 5.78million in 2010. The growth rate of 8.9% in tourist arrival in India was almost double the growth of 4.4%in tourist arrivals worldwide. The tourism factor in India, therefore, has fared very well visa-a- Vis the world. Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism in India during 2011 were \$16.56 billion as compared to \$14.19 billion in 2010 showing growth of 16.7%. According to world tourism organization annual growth rate of ecotourism is 5% and consumer spending is 11.4%. Hence this market cannot be taken lightly. In the new millennium increasing awareness of forest, tourism reflects the popular impression. The remote areas of the earth are coming within the reach of the traveller hence is the fastest growing segment.

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The forests of Jammu and Kashmir are no exceptions in this phenomenon. The forest cover of the state based on interpretation of satellite data of October 2006-2007 January, is 22686sq. km. which is 10.21% of the State's geographical area. In terms of forest canopy density class, the state has 4298sq. km. very dense forest, 8977sq. km. moderately dense forest, and 9411sq. km. open forest. They are the open treasures rich heritage of the state and constitute the most important sector of the economy. Besides being source of revenue, they maintain clean environment, provide employment opportunities to millions of people, potential for industrial development as well as promote tourism in the state. For safeguarding the environment, we cannot afford to disturb the forest and fragile ecosystem akin to a place.

The Jammu and Kashmir state forest policy of 2011 mainly focuses on forest conservation, poverty alleviation and livelihood needs of the communities. Besides this, emphasis has also been laid on biodiversity conservation, people's participation and maintenance of ecological balance. The ecotourism has also been prescribed to preserve health, beauty and natural attributes of the forests besides providing livelihood to locals. The national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and their conservation receive utmost attention. Jammu and Kashmir has a long history of wildlife and forest protection. Some sanctuaries were established nearly 100 years ago to provide protection to catchments of the lakes and to provide hunting to maharaja.

STUDY AREA

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is divided into three distinct regions i. e. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. It stretches between 32- 17 N to 37-05 n latitude and 72-31 E to 80-20 E longitude. From north to south it extends over 640 kms. in length and from east to west over 480 kms in breadth. The total area of the state is 2, 22,236sq. Kms. But under actual control is 101387 sq. km. only. The state is drained by mighty Indus, Jhelum, Chenab and Ravi and their tributaries. The three divisions of the state have distinct agro climatic characteristics and cultural identity. Jammu region has two different climatic zones depending primarily on altitude. Lower plains and hills bear subtropical climate with hot dry summer followed by wet spell of monsoons. Winter is mild and in higher reaches climate is moist temperate. Kashmir valley with Pir Panjal Mountains on its south and Karakoram on its north experiences severely cold winters with temperature often goes below 0 c, summers are warm and dry. Ladakh is a cold desert with very little precipitation. Temperature remains below freezing point during winters. Drass, being the coldest place records a temperature of -50 c and summers are short. There is no natural forest. The area is quit rich in valuable medicinal plants and main flora is of desert type covering upper slopes of valleys.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the study is to understand the existing natural resources and sites suitable for ecotourism.

In 2007, Eco tourism practices were initiated in some areas of the state particularly in Hemis National Park and Tsomoriri wetland in Changthang Wild life sanctuary. Home stays have been created in Hemis National Park and Tosomoriri Wetland. In 2009 some initiative was taken in Avera Aru National Park Ralparian wild life sanctuary

METHODOLOGY

As an ecotourist pays to experience the biodiversity of a country or a national park and ecotourism is a means of gaining economic benefits from biodiversity and can help to meet the cost of conservation hence an over view of the existing National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries in the State have been analysed and the assessment of three reserves from three divisions of the state has been taken in the study. The study is based on secondary sources of information

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S.No	Name of protected area	Area	Wildlife Division
National Parks & Sanctuaries			
1	Kishtwar High Altitude National Park	425.00 sq.kms	Chenab Division Kishtwar
2	Ramnagar Wildlife Sanctuary	31.50 sq.kms	Jammu East Kathua, (taken over area 12.75 sq.kms only)
3	Nandani Wildlife Sanctuary	44.25 sq.kms	-do-
4	Jasrota Wildlife Sanctuary	25.75 sq.kms	- do-
5	Surinsar Mansar Wildlife Sanctuary	55.50 sq.kms	-do-
6	Trikuta Wildlife Sanctuary	27.75 sq.kms	(declared vide Government order FST/20 of 1981, dated 4-2-1981 but the area not taken over yet)
Wildlife Conservation Reserves			
1	Sudhmadev	142.25 sq.kms	Jammu East Kathua
2	Jawahar Tunnel Chakore Reserve	18.00 sq.kms	Chenab Division Kishtwar
3	Gharana	0.75 sq.kms	Jammu East Kathua
4	Pargwal	49.25 sq.kms	-do-
5	Kukarian	24.25 sq.kms	-do-
6	Nanga	15.25 sq.kms	-do-
7	Asa Chak-Sangral	7.00 sq.kms	-do-
8	Thein conservation Reserve	19.00 sq.kms	Notified, but not taken over control from Forest Department as yet. The Thein Dam Catchment area over three state J&K, Punjab and HP.
9	Bahu Conservation Reserve	19.75 sq.kms	Jammu East Kathua area Taken over from Forest Department and handed over back.

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S.No	Name of protected area	Area	Wildlife Division
National Parks & Sanctuaries			
1	Dachigam National Park	171.25sq.kms	Central
2	City Forest (Salim Ali) National Park	9.00 sq.kms	Central
3	Rajparian (Daksum) Wildlife Sanctuary	20.00 sq.kms	South
4	Overa-Aru Wildlife Sanctuary	511.00 sq.kms	South
5	Hirpora Wildlife Sanctuary	114.50 sq.kms	South
6	Baltal (thajwas) Wildlife Sanctuary	210.50 sq.kms	Central
7	Gulmarg Wildlife Sanctuary	139.25sq.kms	North
8	Limber Wildlife Sanctuary	43.75 sq.kms	North
9	Lachipora Wildlife Sanctuary	93.50 sq.kms	North
Conservation Reserves			
1	Khiram Conservation Reserve	15.75 sq.kms	South
2	Panyar	10.00 sq.kms	South
3	Khanagund	15.00 sq.kms	South
4	Shikargh	15.00 sq.kms	South
5	Khrew	50.25 sq.kms	South
6	Khonmoh	67.00 sq.kms	Central
7	Brain-Nishat	15.75 sq.kms	Central
8	Sharazbal	2.00 sq.kms	Central
9	Khimber/Dara/Sharazbal	34.00 sq.kms	Central
10	Wangat/Chatergul	12.00 sq.kms	Central
11	Ajas	48.00 sq.kms	Central
12	Naganari	22.25 sq.kms	North
13	Zaloor, Harwan	25.25 sq.kms	North
14	Achabal	0.50 sq.kms	W.L.R

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Wetland Reserves			
1	Hokera	13.75 sq.kms	Wetlands
2	Narkara	3.25 sq.kms	Wetlands
3	Malgam	4.50 sq.kms	Wetlands
4	Chatalam, Pampore	0.25 sq.kms	Wetlands
5	Manibund	0.25 sq.kms	Wetlands
6	Mirgund	4.00 sq.kms	Wetlands
7	Shallabugh	16.00 sq.kms	Wetlands
8	Ajaz Jheel	1.00 sq.kms	Wetlands
	Hygam	7.25 sq.kms	Wetlands
S.No	Name of protected area	Area	Wildlife Division
1	Hemis High Altitude National Park	4100.00 Sq.kms	Leh
2	Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary	4000.00 Sq.kms	Leh
3	Karakoram (Nubra-Shyok) Wildlife Sanctuary	5000.00 Sq.kms	Leh
4	Kanji Wildlife Sanctuary	100.00 sq.kms	Kargil (Govt. Order: FST/20 of 1981;Dated:04-02-1981)
5	Sabu Conservation Reserve	15.00 sq.kms	
6	Budhkhharbo Wildlife Sanctuary	12.00 sq.kms	
7	Noorichan Conservation Reserve	2.00 sq.kms	
8	Tsomsriri Wetland (The Wetland has been declared as Ramsar Site under Ramsar Convention)	-	Leh (The area of this Wetland falls in Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary)
9	Pangong Tso Wetland	-	Leh (The area of this Wetland falls in Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary)
10	Chushul Marshes (Wetland)	-	
11	Tsokar Basin (Wetland)	-	
12	Hanley Marshes (Wetland)	-	

Rare Mammals: The Rare mammals of the region include the Kashmir stag or Hangul (*Cervus elephus hanglu*), the Musk Deer (*Moschus moschiferus*), the Tibetan Antelope or Chiru (*Panthelops hodgsoni*), the Tibetan Antelope Gazelle (*Procapra picticaudata*), the Serow (*Capricorns sumatraensis*), the Markhor (*Capra falconeri*), the Amon the wild yalk (*Bos grunniens*), the Tibetan wild Ass, (*equus henionus kiang*)

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the Snow leopard, (*Panthera uncia*) and the Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*), Ibex (*Capra siberica*) to name a few. During the year 2002 the number of Hangul in Dachigam National Park has been reported as 483.

Rare Birds: Some of the rare and threatened birds found in the area include exotic species like the Himalayan Golden Eagle (*Accipiter chrysaetos*), the Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), the Monal Pheasant (*Lophophanes impejanus*), the koklas (*Pucrasia macrolopha*), the western Tragopan (*Tragopan malanocephalus*), the Black necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*), the Himalayan snow Cock (*Tetrogallus himalayensis*) and the Bar-Headed Goose (*Anser indicus*).

Migratory Water Birds: Migratory water birds include Ducks, Geese and Swans. The most common water birds which visits the state during winter months are Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Red Crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*), Greylag Goose (*Anser*), Wigeon (*Anas penelope*), Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*), Garganey (*Anas guerguedula*), Coot (*Fulica atra*) and Gadwall (*Anas critepera*). Peak Population of the migrants birds during the year 2002 in Hakoora has been reported as 3.82 lakhs.

In Jammu and Kashmir, 15 globally threatened species have been recorded (Bird Life International 2001). Recently 11 globally threatened species have been recorded from important bird areas of Jammu and Kashmir.

GHARANA WETLAND RESERVE

The Gharana Wetland is situated in Jammu district at an altitude of 400m (amsl.) and covers an area of 300 ha. It is important for migratory birds and more than 20 000 birds are seen during the winters. It is located about 30 kms from Jammu city extended to Pakistan border west of Gharana village. This wetland is 8 kms from Ranbirsing Pora town. Not much is known about bird life except that it is a good habitat for waterfowl. There is a need to conduct bird surveys. In 2004 more than 2000 birds were recorded. Among the other key fauna of the wetland includes Spotted deer or chital, Barking Deer, Nilgai and Wild Boar. Being located on the border shelling by security people across the border is a constant problem. Invasive species, poaching and Encroachment are the main threats and issues. Tourism is one of the industries which is dependent on forests

Many sites have eco tourism potentials in the state and number of eco tourism destinations has been identified. One such destination has been selected as Dera Ki Gali under Eco-Tourism development in 2010. The Ecotourism Wing in the state has also been established.

The potential of ecotourism and need for its regulation can be estimated from the following table which provides number of tourists particularly in selected protected areas for the period 2006 to 2009.

S.No.	Year	Number of visitors /tourists visiting protected areas of Ladakh	Number of visitors tourists visiting protected areas of the State
1	2006-2007	5107	15014
2	2007-2008	23977	47185
3	2008-2009	32037	50596

The above table indicates that 50% of the visitors visit Ladakh protected areas.

CONCLUSION

Poaching is a big problem in Dachigam National park especially People's participation is vital for success of any protected area be it the eco development in the fringe villages or organizing ecotourism, we need to culturally sensitise ourselves with the beauty and fragility of the nature. Let us not label Ecotourism as green friendly while behaving in environmentally irresponsible way. The cause of constantly reducing area of the Gharana is siltation, eutrophication, and weed growth.

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