



EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL AND USEFULNESS OF ECOTOURISM IN MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT : Ecotourism includes environmental, social, economic, occupational and infrastructural aspects which will ultimately lead to sustainable development of tourist destination. Madhya Pradesh with its landscape sites has got tremendous potential in terms of promoting Ecotourism. Ecotourism is a source of direct and indirect employment of the Madhya Pradesh. In this paper out of the five identified circuits, i.e. Panna, Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Pachmarhi the first three were chosen as they were found to be representative of the area. It was also found that there is a need to increase coordination between the forest department and the tourism department for enhancing ecotourism activities such that the forest department manages all the natural resources and the tourism department does all the marketing associated to it.

KEYWORDS: ecotourism, potential, madhya pradesh

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is derived from two words – ‘Ecosystem & Tourism’. Ecosystem is the system in which we live – the system which include the earth, the water, the sky and of course the living and the nonliving objects in all these systems. It is a dynamic complex of plant, Animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit Tourism means – the practice of travelling for pleasure thus a tourism which contains a visit to an Ecosystem is known as Eco-tourism. But that is

not all. Ecotourism is not only travelling to such Ecosystems, but also conserving them. Basically, Ecotourism means –

“Tourism involving travel to areas of natural or ecological interest, typically under the guidance of a naturalist, for the purpose of observing wildlife and learning about the environment and at the same time focus on wildlife and promotion of understanding and conservation of the environment.”

Ecotourism, a unique subset of the tourism industry, is focused on the enhancement or maintenance of natural systems through tourism. Ecotourism means different things to different people. To some, it is the general term that encompasses nature based, adventure, soft adventure and cultural tourism. The term ecotourism was coined in 1988 by Hetero Ceballos Laseurain a Mexican environmentalist, and was initially used to describe nature – based travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education. Ecotourism guarantees the sustainable use of environmental resources, while generating economic opportunities for the local people.

Fundamentally, eco-tourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous population, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible from of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural products in every aspect of life. it is also the key to sustainable ecological development any disturbance in the natural environment will be challenging for the local population as its revival back into the same shapes is virtually impossible.

2. ECOTOURISM IN MADHYA PRADESH

There has been a significant growth in nature tourism are over the world. Tourism has attained new records with half a billion-tourist arrival all over the world in spite of the recession in the previous years. Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) with its landscape, bio-diversity, heritage sites and adventure sites has got tremendous potential in terms of promoting Ecotourism.

Most of the Ecotourism under whatsoever name has been practiced in M.P. has invariably been practiced in the protected Area. Madhya Pradesh recently announced state Biodiversity strategy and action plan 2002, which underlines the need of ecocodevelopment in the state to conserve its Biodiversity heritage. The government of Madhya Pradesh had also announced its new Eco and adventure tourism policy (2001-2002). These policy initiatives provide a consistent frame work to explore possibilities in the Ecotourism sector. Ecotourism has become very important for the areas having rich cultural and biological heritage.

Out of the five identified circuits, i.e. Panna, Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Pachmarhi the first three were chosen as they were found to be representative of the area. A total of 31 sites (existing and newly identified) were assessed for ecotourism potential.

Most of the sites that were evaluated had good Ecotourism potential like Panna National Park, Bhopal, Mandu which had a blend of both cultural and Natural resources and also had opportunities to develop a

good interpretation and educational programmes which become an integral part of Ecotourism, only a few had lower potential due to their susceptibility to impacts and lack of proper infrastructure, e.g., Maihar which is subjected to high pressure from the religious tourism. It was also found that adventure aspect of Ecotourism is completely lacking in the state barring a few sites like Bhopal.

It was also found that there is a need to increase coordination between the forest department and the tourism department for enhancing ecotourism activities such that the forest department manages all the natural resources and the tourism department does all the marketing associated to it.

3. TOURIST CIRCUITS IN MADHYA PRADESH

In this study we take only their important circuits of Madhya Pradesh they are follows:

3.1. Panna Circuit

3.1.1. Maihar

Maihar is a small town 40km South of Satna. It is already known for its religious importance as it has the famous Sharda Maa Temple. It is believed that the great legendary figures Alha and Udal still come to the temple to worship the Goddess. At present there are no ecotourism activities going around in the place. Maihar has got some lakes around it, which can be used, for activities going around in the place. Maihar has got some lakes around it, which can be used for activities like boating. Also, there could be an Alha trek made on the same route on which the legendary figures supposedly come every morning. An education programme with the help of slide shows, posters etc. can also be developed which would make people aware of the degradation of Sharda hill due to the growing tourist pressure.

3.1.2. Chitrakoot (Botanical Excursion)

Chitrakoot is also famous for its religious importance. It is at a distance of 80 km North East of Satna. Chitrakoot is at the borders of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Both the domestic and the foreign tourists visit the place for religious and cultural tourism respectively. It is known that the forests around Chitrakoot are very rich in medicinal herbs that are used in Ayurveda. It is unique in the sense that it has herbs of all the ten root types (das mool), which is rare. This uniqueness of Chitrakoot can be harnessed for its educational value and a Botanical Excursion could be planned for tourists that are interested in it. Trained and learned officers could be appointed in Chitrakoot who can take people on a Botanical Excursion and make them identify the various kinds of herbs present in the wild. Also, Chitrakoot has Arogyadham, which treats people with the help of Naturopathy and Ayurveda. There is a growing demand for Ayurveda and Naturopathy. Thus, this aspect of Chitrakoot could be linked with the excursion and marketed well on the lines of Kerala Tourism by the Tourism Department. There could be centers opened

for tourists to come and enjoy the healing power of Naturopathy and Ayurveda and thus diversity of tourism activities.

3.1.3. Ken River (Kayaking/Boating)

Ken River is one of the unpolluted rivers in India. The main reason is that it does not pass through any city or town. Ken River forms the lifeline of Panna National Park. Kayaking or Boating activities can be promoted in the Ken River as the velocity of the river is not very high and there are long stretches of river without any hurdles like protruding rocks or whirlpools etc. Care should be taken here that the kayaking and boating activities do not disturb the habitat of the gharials in the river. Local people can also be involved and their capacities can be developed which could thus help us in promoting ecotourism activities in the area.

3.1.4. Rane Falls (Rock Climbing)

Rane Falls are falls situated on the river Ken. Rane Falls are only 17 km from Khajuraho and come in the Ken Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary. The fall has protruding rock faces that become challenging for rock climbers. There are variety of rock faces that provide opportunity to climb both for young and for experienced. The sites could be promoted by inviting various adventure clubs, which are involved in such activities. Since the adventure club would get an access to a good site and the forest department will get tourist, hence both the players would get benefited. Also, the Tourist would be able to get a new experience. These could be promoted under supervision of trained manpower.

3.2. Bhopal Circuit

3.2.1. Ginnor Garh

Ginnor Garh is a fort in the Ratapani WLS. It is about 55 km from Bhopal and is situated about 6 km. inside the forest. The fort has been built by the Gond King and has got great architectural relevance as it has 6 stories and is a complete establishment with its well and water reservoirs and huge gates. At present it is laying in ruins and there is nobody to take care of the area. The location of the fort is on the top of the highest peak of the Ratapani area. The fort is surrounded by beautiful landscape all around and looks beautiful during the rainy season.

3.2.2. Bhimbetka (trekking)

Bhimbetka lies 50 km South of Bhopal near to Obedullahgunj. It is known for its primitive rock paintings. There are around 600 rock shelters in and around the area spread over an area of 400 hectares. The area has got good forest. Also, an important observation here is that Ginnor Fort and Bhimbetka are linked with continuous dense forest. This is a good combination and a trek could be proposed from Bhimbetka to Ginnor Garh fort where the tourist can come and enjoy the trek which moves through forest, allows the trekkers to see all the caves that are spread around and then move to Ginnor Garh fort, which will give a

unique experience of a historical architecture. Local staff/people could be used to guide the tourist and reach the fort safely.

3.2.3. Salkanpur

Salkanpur is again an old temple of religious importance placed on the peak of the hill. It is about 75 km. South of Bhopal and about 20 km ahead of the Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary. More than a lakh people come to visit the place during the Navratri, to get the blessings of the goddess. It is geologically placed at the end of the range, beyond which there is a long stretch of plains. This feature can be used for hand-gliding which is an adventure sport usually practiced in the northern States. Thus Salkanpur apart from religious tourism and cultural tourism can also provide adventure tourism to the interested tourists. Activities like hand gliding could be promoted in close coordination with some experts from Adventure clubs. As such activities would be unique in central India; these would get a lot of support from the adventure enthusiasts.

3.2.4. Rock climbing sites

There are several rock climbing sites in and around Bhopal. The main rock-climbing sites include the rock climbers a good opportunity to test their skills. Also, there are good rock faces enroute to Ratapani near village Geeta Colony. There are also potential rock-climbing sites where tourists can go and enjoy the sport. In fact, the rock sites near the village Geeta colony can also be associated with the trek could be started from Bhimbetka moving along the forest, the people who are interested could reach the Ginnor Garh fort by moving across hills going rock climbing.

3.2.5. Kayaking in all major water bodies

There are number of water bodies in and around Bhopal. Most of these water bodies can be used for kayaking and other water sports, e.g., kayaking activities can be taken up in the river Narmada. Also kayaking can be done in the Dam, Kerwa Dam and the Kaliasot Dam. These activities would create awareness among people about the adventure activities and make them more interested in these.

3.3. Indore Circuit

3.3.1. Rala Mandal WLS

Rala Mandal WLS is situated only 12 km South of Indore. It is a hill with average density forest. It was earlier used by the King Holkar who used to come here for hunting. The King had also built a big Hunting Lodge where they used to stay in while at their hunting trip. At present the Sanctuary has got a good number of Herbivorous and also there are a few sightings of Panthers reported. The hunting lodge is well maintained and could be used to develop a Interpretation Centre. The proximity of the Sanctuary is also an advantage for attracting the local tourists. The Lodge could also be used for attracting the local tourists. The Lodge could also be used or Tourist to stay there for a night or two and enjoy the natural beauty.

3.3.2. Dudhia Khoh

Dudhia Khoh is a waterfall situated about 3 km north-east from Indore in the Double Chowki Range. It is considered as the Dhan Dhar of Indore. This waterfall is having a height of more than 100 feet and has got a beautiful landscape. At present there is no infrastructure available there. The waterfall is at a distance of about 35 km. from Indore. The area has got a good forest. Greenery and quietitude of the place can be harnessed for ecotourism.

3.3.3. Kharmor WLS

Kharmor WLS is situated only 14 km from the Agra-Bombay National Highway near Sardarpur. This sanctuary is completely on the plain grasslands. The sanctuary has got one more feature added to it, it is home to the migratory bird Kharmor (lesser Frigatebirds) which comes there to breed and grow their young ones. Since the sanctuary is very near to the highway hence its accessibility is good and people can come and stay there for a night or two and enjoy the beautiful landscape that the plain grassland offers. An Interpretation centre can also be developed to educate the tourist coming for sighting the Frigatebirds.

3.3.4. Bagh Caves (Buddhist Sites)

Bagh Caves are situated near the town Bagh that is about 50 km from Dhar. These caves have been carved inside the hill. There are seven caves out of which three caves have big Stupa's built inside the caves. There are beautiful paintings done inside the caves, which date back to sixth, seventh century. The Archaeological Survey of India has also developed a museum where information about the paintings and various sculptures are kept the caves are situated just adjacent to the Bagh River, which flows for most of the months. The Bagh Caves can be considered equivalent to the Udaigiri and Khandgiri Caves.

3.3.5. Katthiwada (proposed WLS)

Katthiwada is a tribal dominated area, which is situated 90 km from Jhabua. It forms the border of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The area is a hilly area covered with dense forest. The forest density in the open areas is reported to be .6 and in the closed areas the density is about .8, which indicates a very good forest. The area has got beautiful climate even in the dry season due to the forest. The hills along with the forest give a very beautiful landscape. Katthiwada has also got a proposal for the sloth bear sanctuary. All these factors make Katthiwada a good destination for the nature tourist. Trekking inside the dense jungle and reaching the highest points in the Katthiwada region can be a great experience for the nature lovers. The tribal culture associated with Katthiwada is also unique and the foreigners do come to visit the place to see the culture of the tribes during the month of March and April when the melas are organized.

3.3.6. Alirajpur

Alirajpur situated in Jhabua district is also known for the tribal culture and there are melas. There are people coming from all around the world to see the unique culture and the various activities that are happening

during the mela season which is the month of March or April. Although the area is a bit far from the highways but it becomes a experience worth moving to the place.

3.3.7. Omkareshwar-Maheshwar Kayaking

Omkareshwar is situated at the banks of the river Narmada. It is a beautiful site to see. The river further moves around 30 km to reach Maheshwar. The course of the river throughout is very light. There can be kayaking started where people can row their kayaks from Omkareshwar to to Maheshwar and in between stop at various places to have snacks etc. this can give boost to the local trade as well. After reaching Maheshwar the tourists can visit the Devi Ahilya Bai's Place. Thus, this kind of kayaking would be unique and could provide an enriching experience in which the tourist has a adventure experience followed by a visit to a historical monument.

3.3.8. Wanchu Point

Wanchu point is the highest point the Manpur Ranges situated to store water that is brought from Narmada to a height so that it could be supplied to Indore by the gravitational force. The point is at a height and after this there are plain lands for more than 15 km. In the night Wanchu point gives a unique experience. This is because in the night the lights of all the village below could be seen which give the impression as if all the stars have come below and we are standing above the stars. Moreover, the landscape during the sunrise and the sunset is beautiful. The point is frequently visited by the local tourists.

3.3.9. Kheoni WLS

Kheoni Wildlife Sanctuary is about 90 km from Indore and Bhopal. The Sanctuary in the earlier time was used as a game park provided by the Holkar Kind to the local population. It comes under the Dewas division. The sanctuary has got a good dense forest. There is good herbivorous population. The sanctuary has got a lot of area, which has got hilly terrain this area could be used for the trekking purpose. The sanctuary has got a rest house where tourist can come and enjoy the nature.

4. BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM IN MADHYA PRADESH

There are some benefits from ecotourism in Madhya Pradesh as follows:

4.1. Economic Benefits

Benefits of Community:

- Continued tourist purchases, direct and indirect employment, foreign exchange income of country
- Preservation of the Natural environment employment
- Guide services, entertainment, hotels and restaurants, local tour operator, suppliers, educating tourists, local skills, crafts, security at destinations.

4.2. Social Benefits

- Improved infrastructure
- Improved facilities
- Varied Employment Opportunities
- Improved transport and services
- Improvement in quality of life
- Stronger community feeling
- Community Partnership in Policymaking
- Indigenous knowledge registration
- Consensus and decision making
- Providing entertainment, handicrafts
- Souvenirs educating, publicizing etc.

4.3. Environmental Benefits

- Conservation of Natural resources
- Protects areas of outstanding natural beauty
- Erected structures are eco-friendly
- Contribution in developing social change through conservation habits
- Increasing awareness on nature conservation

4.4. Benefits for preserving culture and Heritage

- Appreciation to preserve culture for perpetuity
- Heritage sites and structures to be restored and preserved
- Education and awareness

5. CONCLUSION

There has been a significant growth in nature tourism over the world. Madhya Pradesh with its landscape sites has got tremendous potential in terms of promoting Ecotourism. Ecotourism is a source of direct and indirect employment of the Madhya Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh Government can be located as the best ecotourism sites on the tourist map of India.

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