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ECOTOURISM'S EFFECTS ON RURAL PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: CHHATTISGARH'S BASTAR DISTRICT

Hitesh Kumar¹ Dr K Padmawati²

Abstract

This research aims to comprehend the effects of ecotourism on rural residents and the environment in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district. Ecotourism is becoming more and more recognized as an important economic growth tool for local communities. The local economic growth of the study area's tribal communities, in particular, is examined in this essay. It demonstrates how local involvement in ecotourism has lessened their overly reliant reliance on natural resources. In the year 2016, the inquiry into the well-known waterfalls Tirathgarh and Chitrakote in the Chhattisgarh district of Bastar were finished. To get results, 200 tourists and shopkeepers were polled about their needs for infrastructure facilities and current ecotourism industry growth in the study area. The findings showed that locals in tourist areas have a positive attitude toward the growth of the tourism industry and that tourism has a significant effect on the destination population's economic well-being. The research also revealed that tourism officials have not been successful in educating the populace about the advantages of travel. It is recommended that the government move swiftly to implement programs of various kinds to educate the public about the advantages of tourism growth. Additionally, the government should create cooperative societies of educated and trained youth in tourist locations and offer assistance for running different types of tourism businesses.

Keywords: Bastar, Chhattisgarh, Ecotourism, local communities.

Introduction

One of the most significant economic, social, cultural, and governmental trends of the 20th century is tourism (Ceballos-Lascurian, 1996). Currently, according to the number of jobs it generates, the number of customers it serves, and its addition to the global GDP, tourism is considered the largest industry on the planet (GDP). According to data compiled by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 1999), tourism accounts for 11% of the global

¹ Assistant Professor, Pt Devi Prasad Choubey Govt College, Saja, Bemetara. Mail ID- hiteshverma849@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Govt V Y T PG Autonomous College, Durg.

GDP, employs 200 million people, and moves close to 700 million foreign visitors annually. By 2020, this number is projected to double. The size of the sector and its rate of expansion offer both opportunities and threats to the preservation of biodiversity. The tourism industry is a major part of the economy and has a significant impact on both the GDP and foreign exchange earnings of the nation (FEE). With its connections to other economic sectors like transportation, building, handicraft, manufacturing, horticulture, agriculture, etc., tourism has the potential to not only drive the economy but also serve as a powerful tool for reducing poverty and promoting development that is equitable.

A recently created state on the Deccan plateau in the center of India, Chhattisgarh is a portion of the Central Indian Plateau. Its 1,35,153 square kilometers are home to more than 2.554 crores of people (Census, 2011). To facilitate easier administration, it is split into 27 districts.

Chhattisgarh is a region of India that is rarely mentioned in travel guides, shielding its undiscovered natural beauty and rich cultural legacy from the prying eyes of a seasoned traveler.

In Chhattisgarh, contradictions coexist peacefully side by side, giving the state a charm all its own free from influences from the rest of India's quickly modernizing regions. This is the ideal setting for ecotourism, specialty tourism, ethnotourism, and, most importantly, sustainable tourism to flourish. In order to explore the pristine highlands of Central India and share how wonderful your travel experience was, Tourism of Central India provides specialized ecotourism packages for Chhattisgarh. 44% of Chhattisgarh is covered in the dense tropical jungle, which contrasts with the fertile plains of river valleys like those of Indrawati, Shivnath, and Mahanadi. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Chhattisgarh is home to 12 Animal Sanctuaries and 3 National Parks that are essential stops for anyone taking an eco-tour of the state.

Bastar is renowned for its natural beauty, diversity, and unique tribal traditions and cultures compared to other regions of the state. Additionally, your eco trip will be planned so that you can see a bit of tribal life without disturbing their daily activities. Indulge in walks, treks, rafting, parasailing, and the odd journey to the village market. As you enjoy Salphi or a beverage made from the Mahua flower, you can watch the tribe's most famous sport, cockfighting, in action.

Bastar's ecotourism also includes ethnic travel, where travelers can go to tribal dance performances, weddings, and regional celebrations. Bastar ecotourism is a low-impact and frequently small-scale alternative to conventional commercial tourism that involves exploring delicate, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas. Its goals may include educating tourists, raising money for ecological preservation, actively promoting the political and economic empowerment of local communities, and fostering respect for various cultures and human rights. Traveling on an ecotourism itinerary typically entails visiting places where the local flora, fauna, and cultural legacy are the main draws. Bastar ecotourism aims to provide visitors with knowledge about how people affect the ecosystem. The Tirathgarh waterfall in Kanger Valley National Park and the Chitrakote waterfall in Lohandiguda, both in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh state, are the focus of research on ecotourism. These waterfalls are also the subject of study on infrastructure development and sustainable management.

Materials and Methods

In 2016, the study was conducted at two well-known waterfalls in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district: Tirthgarh Waterfall (Kanger Valley National Park) and Chitrakote Waterfall (Lohandiguda). The status of ecotourism, the growth of its infrastructure, and its sustainable management are all topics covered in the study. The three agroclimatic zones in Chhattisgarh state are the Northern highlands of Sarguja, the Southern Bastar Plateau, and the Central Chhattisgarh Plains. The study locations are located in the state's Southern Bastar Plateau agro-climatic zone.

The first study location for our research is the Tirathgarh waterfall on the Munga Bahar river, which cascades down from a height of 100 feet in the form of several steps and is also home to a historic Shiv-Parvati temple. The waterfall is located within the Kanger Valley National Park, one of these botanically diverse protected areas, which is situated close to 39 kilometers southeast of Jagdalpur, the administrative center of the Bastar district, on National Highway No. 221 between Jagdalpur and Bhadrachalam. It has a 200 km² area and is located between 18045' and 1856'30 N latitude and 8151'30 to 8210'E longitude. The valley is actually one of the peninsular region's last remaining areas of nearly virgin forest.

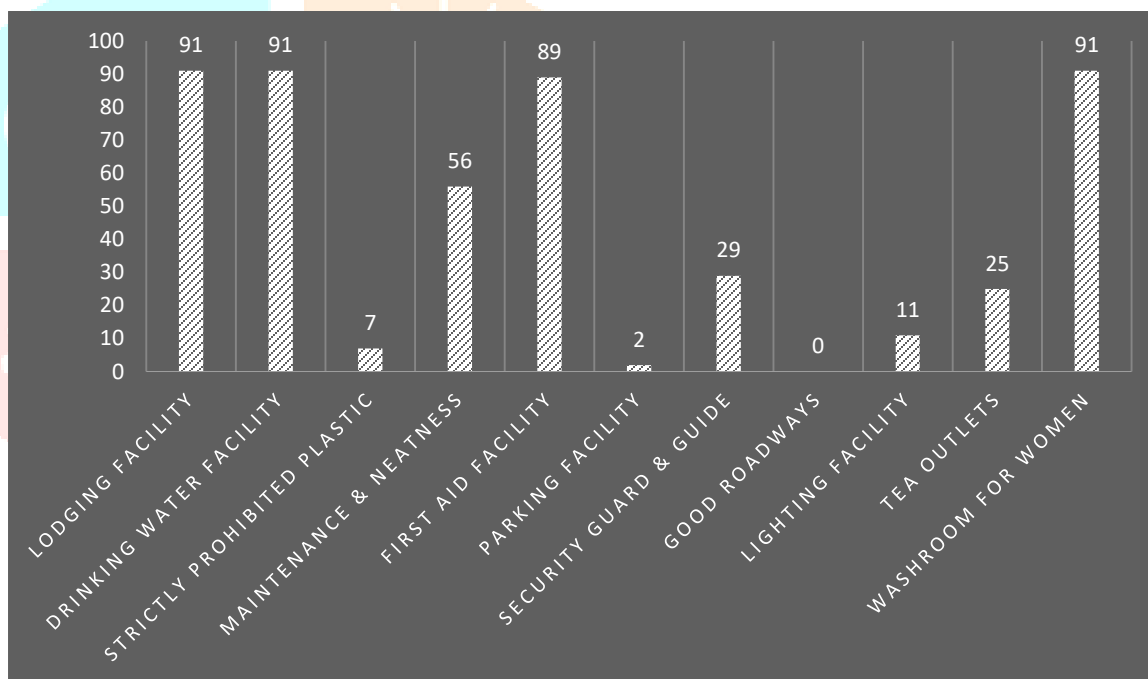


Fig 1. Tourist opinions and infrastructure improvements at Tirathgarh waterfall in Kanger Valley National Park.

The second location of our study is the Chitrakote Waterfall, which is both the pride of Chhattisgarh and India's best-kept secret. Chitrakote, known as the Niagara fall of India, holds the title of being the country's largest waterfall. 35 kilometers to the west of Jagdalpur metropolis is where it is situated, which is encircled by a thick forest and nourished by the Indrawati river. Numerous tourists are drawn to the sight of the waters cascading from a height of about 95 feet through thick vegetation. The monsoon, when the river flows furiously and touches both banks, offers the best view of the waterfall. The four seasons of the year—summer, rainy, spring, and winter—can be distinguished by the hot and humid climate of the Bastar region. 18.2°C is the mean annual minimum temperature, and 34.98°C is the mean annual maximum temperature. Geographically speaking, Bastar is situated at a height of 2000 feet plateau

above sea level in the southern region of Chhattisgarh. Maharashtra state to the west and Orissa state to the east form the boundaries of the Bastar district. Most of the areas are undulating with red sand soil, but some are rocky and boulder-filled.

The primary data was gathered through personal interviews, focus groups, and interview schedules. All stakeholders participated in a single interview process that included both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

We also conducted in-person interviews with marketers and store owners. There were exercises to get information from the villagers, including group talks. The main goal of this exercise was to understand what the locals expected from tourism and how they could help with environmental preservation. At the headquarters of the Jagdalpur district, secondary data was also gathered from the offices of the Tourism Department and the Kanger Valley National Park.

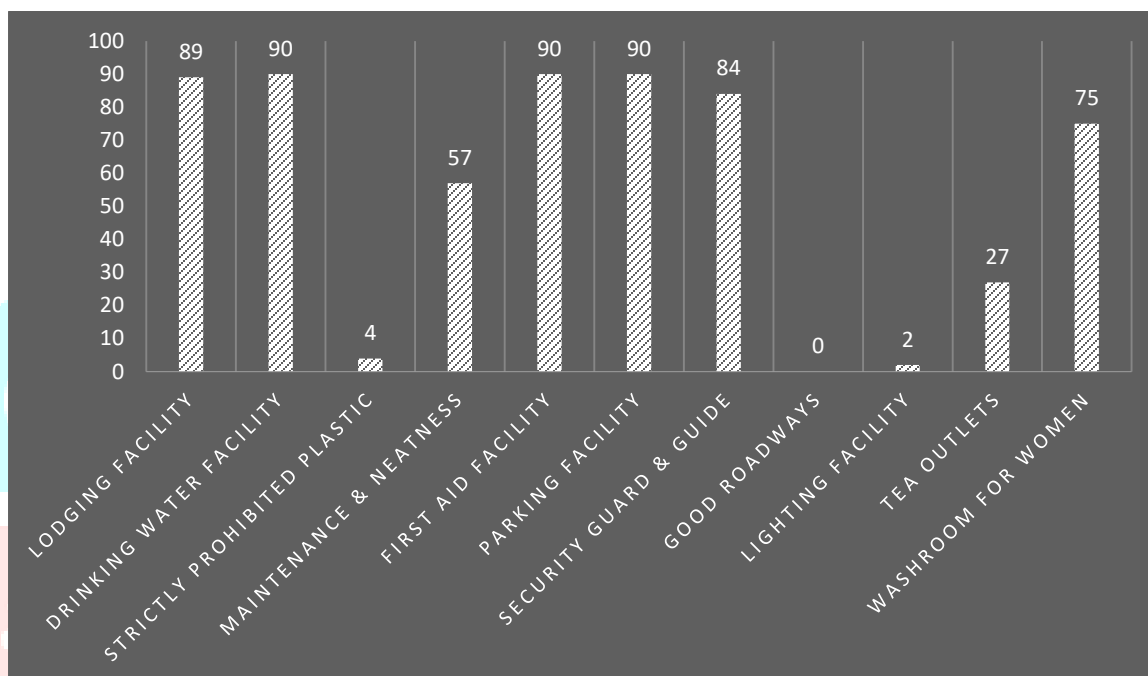


Fig 2. Tourist opinions and infrastructure improvements at Chitrakote waterfall at Lohandiguda.

The Findings and Discussion

In order to gather information about the effects of ecotourism on rural people and the environment, including the infrastructure development status of waterfalls, we visited and surveyed both study sites numerous times during the research process (Tirathgarh and Chitrakote). The current study has demonstrated that ecotourism in Bastar has needed a number of dimensional developments based on nature, minimal impact management, environmental education, contribution to conservation, and both direct and indirect contribution to the local community. Figures 1 and 2 displayed the percentage results of observations pertaining to opinions and infrastructure facilities of a total of 90 tourists at Tirathgarh and Chitrakote waterfalls, respectively. These figures showed the case of lodging facilities, drinking water facilities, strictly prohibited neatness, first aid, parking, security and guidance, good roadway, tea/tiffin, and washrooms for women. In people's opinions are more focused on accommodations, drinking options, first aid supplies, and restrooms for women—all of which are essential for any tourist destination.

Observations point to a lack of accessible accommodations, clean drinking water, medical care, good parking, security guard and tour guide services, lighting, restaurants, and restrooms, particularly for female tourists.

The government did not pay more attention to the opinions of the shop owners in both study locations regarding the parking lot, the security guard, the guide, and the good roads.

For the objectives of this discussion, both direct and indirect effects on the environment are taken into consideration. There are both positive and negative societal effects. It should be noted that the type of activity and the type of ecosystem affected both have an influence on how severe the effects are. With the exception of overt effects like trampled vegetation and altered patterns of animal behavior. By having less of an impact on the environment than other industries, by helping to raise awareness of conservation, by offering financial incentives to preserve habitat, and because it relies on the environment for its products, tourism can help promote sustainable development (WTTC and IHRA, 1999). Although it is applicable to an industry level, it is less applicable to a single operator whose company is impacted by seasonality (Buckley, 1995). Concerns about worldwide environmental degradation and solutions have arisen recently. Due to the fact that these are tourist attractions, tourism can justify, aid in funding, and contribute to the preservation of local natural areas, archaeological and historic sites, arts, crafts, and cultural traditions, as well as the general betterment of environmental quality. However, tourism can cause congestion, pollution, and other environmental issues if it is not correctly planned, developed, and managed (Bramwell, 1990; Buhalis and Fletcher, 1995).

Nature preserves and historic places may deteriorate as a result of tourists' unrestricted use of them. The area's cultural legacy may be harmed by the excessive commercialization of cultural practices (Bhattacharya and Banerjee, 2003). Environment and tourism are tightly related. Many of tourist attractions are found in built and natural environments, and the growth of the tourism industry can have both negative and beneficial effects on the environment. Protecting the tourism industry's environmental resources is essential for sustainable tourism growth (Boo, 1991; Butler, 1991). Tourism development, traveler socioeconomic and other characteristics, and the regional natural, socioeconomic, and institutional characteristics combine to produce different types and intensities of environmental effects. More and more people are realizing how important the ecosystem is to tourism. In the last decade of the 20th century, it was noted that tourism ultimately depends on the environment because it is both a significant tourist attraction and the setting for tourism activity (Holden, 2000). There are different levels at which the environment and tourism interact. Additional to the direct environmental effects of tourism, such as pollution, noise, and disturbance, indirect, long-term effects of tourism on environmental quality are defined by dynamic feedback mechanisms (OECD, 1980 and 1994).

Conclusion

Without a question, ecotourism is an important tool for rural areas' local growth and regeneration. The reality that indigenous peoples' habitats make up the majority of protected areas is crucial. The ecotourism initiative may create a sizable number of job opportunities for the local population. Numerous business efforts have been implemented for this reason in order to serve the destination communities. One of the most significant global sectors, tourism has a significant economic impact on all nations. Indian National Parks and landscapes are not popular tourist locations for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a plan for how ecotourism might be founded as a business on a long-term basis.

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