

Chapter 3: Ecotourism: Initiation, Growth and Marketing of Ecotourism in Sikkim

3.1. Introduction

In the present day eco-tourism has gained significant prominence and is turning out to be a fast developing segment in the existing global tourism industry. The issue has assumed magnanimous proportions especially in several developing nations, including India. As a matter of fact, India is attempting to utilize the medium of eco-tourism as a dynamic instrument that will help the nation to achieve sustainable development. The origin of sustainable development can be traced back to the 1970s when for the first time a pressing need was observed for conserving the environment. The close association between eco-tourism as an accountable tourism and sustainable development is deep rooted simply because eco-tourism advocates sustainable tourism by integrating environmental, social and economic ramifications with an objective to cater to the requirements of humans as well as the environment (Yogi, 2010). Ecotourism has emerged as an offshoot to the domain of sustainable tourism. Considering the impact ecotourism can have towards the sustainable development of the nation, it is being largely adopted by several developing nations. Developing nations are actively including ecotourism as an integral aspect of their strategies for conservation and economic growth. The concept of ecotourism has emerged as an effective platform that offers alternative tourism wherein people tour natural regions with an objective to execute eco-friendly activities, to learn and research about their environment. Simply said, ecotourism enables people to witness first-hand the beauty and bounty of their natural environment, study the flora and fauna, learn about people living in such naturally endowed regions, and know about their culture and their cultural heritage (Kiper, 2013).

During the course of human history it has been noticed that nature played and continues to play an important role. It is nature that is responsible to provide humans with the requisite raw resources and even provides an apt stimulus that fosters human existence. In fact, nature is attributed with providing humans with sustenance that includes the most elementary human requirements such as air to breathe, food to eat and water to quench thirst. In addition, nature is also responsible to provide raw

materials that enable humans to mold their individual life styles like human symbols, behaviors and meanings that establish the distinctness of human culture. As a matter of fact, the very conception of humans is facilitated largely through and by nature (Wearing & Neil, 2009b). Right from the early days of humans, artists and poets have depicted nature in diverse ways; through cave paintings at Lascaux in France, indigenous art conventional as well as modern, even romantic poets have actively utilized the medium of nature to portray everything that is considered human. Nonetheless, the Scottish empiricist philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) had concisely depicted the contemporary inheritance of the natural environment by voicing the opinion that everything in nature was waste unless humans modified it into valuable things that could be effectively utilized by them. This concept has been ardently adopted by western societies (Wearing & Neil, 2009b). The changing climate, rapid reduction of rainforests, a substantial increase in the number of species termed as 'endangered' and growing instances of degradation of land has spurred the need for conservation amongst the general populace. Thus, the increase in interest and development of ecotourism is not a coincidence (Wearing & Neil, 2009a).

3.2. Ecotourism around the World

3.2.1. Costa Rica

From the 1980s, Costa Rica has been successful in altering their economy that was largely agriculture-driven to an economy that was increasingly service-based and industry-oriented. Most of their economy was based on foreign-exchange earnings that resulted from advanced manufacturing and tourism exports that largely dwarfed their traditional agriculture-based exports. As a result, tourism ranked first as a reliable source that considerably augmented their economy (Miller, 2012). The Costa Ricans were supported in this endeavor through developmental assistance provided by a variety of international organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development [USAID], the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund [IMF]. With the support of these agencies, Costa Rica was able to develop their ecotourism industry that nurtured entrepreneurship amongst rural and local communities, facilitating trips to their wealth of natural destinations. The idea behind establishing this ecotourism industry was multi-faceted. One was to augment the economy and the other

was to prevent instances of deforestation and protecting the natural resources. Another objective of ecotourism was to promote international trade and enhance foreign direct investment (Gunter *et al.*, 2015). With the significant growth of eco-tourism in Costa Rica, in the 1970s and 1980s, the policies established by the Costa Rican government to promote ecotourism revolved around two basic facets: steps to promote the establishment of commercial activities required for eco-tourism like the decree of incentives to develop tourism and an array of cohesive policies that boosted the development of a national park system. The focus on the two primary developmental facets was instrumental in leap-frogging Costa Rica as the most favored ecotourism destination on a global level (Miller, 2012).

3.2.2. Malaysia

As a nation, Malaysia holds tremendous promise to emerge as one amongst the choicest locations for eco-tourism. As a matter of fact, Malaysia features as one amongst the globe's 12 mega areas that offers vast diversity. The nation is endowed with varied ecosystems that boast of swamps, coral reefs, mangroves, caves, mountains and limestone. Despite this diversity, the Malaysian ecotourism industry is yet to develop in its entirety owing to the competition it is confronted with concerning use of land for mining and industrial agriculture. Simply said, Malaysian ecotourism largely refers to tourism that is based on nature and the focus here is not exclusively on the responsibility factor (Marker *et al.*, 2008). Destinations within Malaysia that offer a substantial scope for ecotourism would include the Danum Valley on Borneo that is a preservation wilderness preferred by a large number of tourists with the objective of trekking, bird watching, enjoying the natural habitat and swimming in the sparkling rivers. To facilitate the stay of ecotourists, several comfortable accommodations have sprung up that varies from convenient lodges, to camping sites, to basic dormitories. Moreover, it also houses the world's oldest rainforest, the 'Endau-Rombin State Park' in mainland Malaysia. To heighten the spirit of adventure, tourists prefer to stay in their natural habitat and largely seek accommodation in dormitories or prefer to rough it out in camps rather than staying in modernized lodges. In addition, tourists are also presented with an opportunity to climb the famous Mount Kinabalu in Borneo. As per available reports, it was reported that in 2002, ecotourism emerged as a rapidly progressing sector in the Malaysian tourism industry and reported a growth of 35 per

cent per annum and ecotourism comprised of 10 per cent of the tourism ratio within Malaysia (Jaafar & Maideen, 2012).

3.2.3. Australia

Recognizing the significance of tourism on the economy of Australia, the Australian government is keen to initiate several steps that would enhance tourism within the country. This is due to the fact that there has been scant progress in the Australian tourism sector in the past decade. Available data reveals that the tourism industry within Australia generates around \$94 billion in expenditures. As an integral industry segment that fosters economic growth, the contribution of Australian tourism towards their GDP is \$34 billion which amounts to 2.6 per cent of the nation's overall GDP. The level of international competitiveness in Australia has not matched pace with global developments which has caused a drop in their international market share within the past decade. The number of visitors in their domestic tourism sector has substantially dwindled with more domestic travellers preferring to travel abroad than explore the wonders of their own nation (Dixon, 2011). However, in spite of this downturn, the country has witnessed a marked increase in eco-tourism and indigenous tourism. In fact, these two aspects of tourism -- ecotourism and indigenous tourism have now been widely recognized by the Australian government as one of the core tourism aspects (Tourism Australia, 2015). In order to promote tourism in the country, Australia is now largely depending on ecotourism, indigenous tourism and several other aspects of cultural tourism as an integral factor that promotes the key authenticity of Australia as a preferred destination for ecotourism. Though this trend is driven on a global level, it is in tune with the growing concerns about nature conservation (Ecotourism Australia Ltd, 2012).

3.2.4. Brazil

Brazil has emerged as one of the foremost destinations for ecotourism on the face of the planet owing to the presence of the Amazon River. However, tourists are not just attracted to Brazil by the presence of the Amazon alone but they are also drawn by the intense jungle surrounding the river. In fact, the region witnesses tourists' footfalls in thousands each year. Tourists to this region are accorded with ample options that include carefully planned hikes during the day to adventure sports. Tourists also have

the option of staying in jungle lodges in the midst of wilderness while experiencing nature first hand. Considering the increasing number of tourists that throng the region, the government of Brazil is leaving no step unturned to conserve the natural state of the environment. The Amazon region offers the adventurous tourists with a bevy of options. Since the Amazon is one of the pristine and ecologically diverse forests on the face of earth, the region is home to several species of flora and fauna and wildlife, with new species of animals and plants being discovered every day. The unspoiled condition of the nation's beaches, rivers, forests and rural villages are an added impetus to the ecotourist and is a far cry from the highly populated cities that outline the region. Though Brazil as a nation boasts of a diverse cultural and ecological background, the Amazon region forms the crux of their ecotourism industry (International Wild Life Law, 2015). Moreover, the region also is home to several indigenous tribes. As of today, the region has around 240 diverse indigenous groups that collectively have a total population of around 900,000. Along with enjoying the natural habitat, tourists to the Amazon also get an opportunity to study such indigenous groups (Ecotourism, 2014).

3.2.5. India

The concept of ecotourism has assumed widespread popularity in recent years, especially in developing nations. From a layman's perspective, ecotourism can be referred to effectively managing tourism while preserving nature in a manner that helps to create an equilibrium amongst the needs of tourism and ecology on one hand while maintaining the requirements of the local populations which would relate to creating jobs, new skills and better living conditions on the other hand. This is supported by a robust tourism policy and planning. A robust tourism policy offers the framework, aims and objectives whereas the tourism planning identifies objectives and determines assessment. Nature and cultural events are promoted through the medium of ecotourism in India. Some of the prominent ecotourism categories that exist in India today would include green tourism, ecocultural tourism and heritage tourism. The origin of ecotourism in India can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s. On a global level, ecotourism serves bi-dimensional goals that involve conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development. Ecotourism and sustainable tourism are wider concepts that include nature tourism. As a nation, India is considered as a land of diverse cultures and

geographical distinctions and presents several interesting ecotourism hotspots which not only helps people to unwind but also help them to understand the local cultures and provides them with an insight into their customs. Some of the widely preferred ecotourism locations within India would include Kerala, the Himalayan region, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, North-East India and Lakshwadeep Islands. These are some of the regions within India where tourists can enjoy the enormous natural wealth and learn about local cultures and customs (Resmi, 2014).

3.3. Ecotourism in Sikkim

Ecotourism is considered as a priority segment by the government of Sikkim. As a preferred destination for ecotourism in India, the state of Sikkim boasts of a vast natural richness in comparison with their adjoining states and nations like Nepal and Bengal. The state of Sikkim is situated in a hotspot of biodiversity within the Eastern Himalayan region. As a state, Sikkim is endowed with an opulent biodiversity that boasts of species of flowering plants in excess of 4,500, 550 bird species, 154 species of mammals, more than 50 species of fish, 690 species of butterflies and 16 distinct species of amphibians. As a result, Sikkim has emerged as an exclusive ecotourism destination on the global map. Moreover, the region is also blessed with vast landscapes, thick forests, rivers, streams, lakes, glaciers and snow-capped mountains. In addition, the said natural richness is enveloped with varied flavors of indigenous social practices, rich traditions and ethnic cultures (Ecotourism Society of India, 2011). Sikkim is also home to the third highest mountain in the world which is the mighty Khangchendzonga. The mountain presents a beautiful backdrop and offers a healthy and refreshing atmosphere. Sikkim also emerges as a melting pot of diverse cultures that along with its natural wonders becomes an essential aspect that promotes ecotourism. Snugly ensconced amongst the mountains and hills, Sikkim is gaining widespread recognition as a preferred destination for ecotourism within India. Sikkim perhaps has more to offer than all other ecotourism hotspots of India. It is considered as the land of elaborate festivals and fairs, snow-capped mountains, lakes, religious hubs, hot springs and offers tourists with an opportunity to enjoy nature while tickling their adventurous side (Bhattarai & Pandey, 2012, p. 43–46).

3.3.1. General background of Sikkim

Sikkim is one of the newer States of India, as it was an independent country under monarchic rule till 1975, after which it merged with India to become its twenty-fifth State. Being a border State it shares boundaries with China in the north, Bhutan in the east and Nepal in the west (Choudhury 2006 p 1-2). It is connected to the Indian mainland to the south where it borders the State of West Bengal. As it is a small State (7096 sq. km) it has only four districts and 9 sub-divisions. Its administrative capital is at Gangtok in East district and district headquarters are at Mangen, Namchi and Geyzing for North, South and West districts respectively.

Sikkim's geographical features mostly consist of high mountains and deep valleys with exquisite eastern Himalayan flora and fauna which makes it part of the eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot zone (Conservation International of USA). The State's culture reflects this natural beauty and variety of the mountains and is many-faceted – as diverse as the ethnicity found in it. The post merger period of Sikkim's history is characterized by high levels of in-migration associated with the socio-economic development of the State (Subba 2008 p 93) which has diluted the culture of the State (Subba 2008 p 140) to a considerable degree.

3.3.2. Political history

Sikkim came into existence as “The Greater Sikkim” in 1642 AD (Subba, 2008) with distinct identity of its own as a Himalayan kingdom after signing the tripartite treaty of “Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum”. Since then, the Namgyal dynasty ruled the country till 1975. Sikkim was much larger in the time of the first Chogyal than it is these days. The frontiers of the kingdom were “Dibdala in the north, Shinsa Dag-pay, Walung, Yangmag, Khangchen, Yarlung and Tamar Chorten in the west, down along the Arun and Dudh Kosi rivers, down to the Maha Nodi, Nuxualbari and Titalia in the south, on the east Tagong La and Tang La on the North” (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908: 30; Risley 1894: 1-2; Subba 1999: iv). There were a number of autonomous Chieftains belonging to the Lepcha, Tsongs (Limboos) and Mangar community and they ruled parts of this territory of “The Greater Sikkim”. Many of these Lepcha and Tsong (limboo) Chieftains accepted the supremacy of Namgyal Dynasty in 1642, and signed the tripartite treaty of “Lho-Mon-Tsong-Sum” to integrate their land resources with the

migrant Bhutias. Sikkim emerged as a country called “Mayel” and later on “Renjong” by the Lepchas, “Yioksom” (fort or a fortified place) by the Limboos and “Deyjong” by the Bhutia. It was later on named “Song Khim” (new Home or Palace) by the Limbooni Queen Thungwamukma of TensungNamgyal, second Maharaj of Namgyal Dynasty and then corrupted to “Sukhim” and again to “Sikkim” (Namgyal & Dolma, 1908: 27; Riskey, 1984: 1-38; Chemjong, 1967: 162-164). Sikkim became a protectorate of British India under the Treaty of Titalia in February 1817 and later, of independent India under the Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950 (Singh 2001 p 3).

3.3.3. Geographical features

Sikkim lies between 27°04'46” North to 28°07'48” North latitudes and 88°00'58” East and 88°55'25” East longitudes and has a rectangular shape with a length of over 112 km from north to south and a width of 64 km from west to east (DESME 2008 p 35). High mountains on the north, west and east borders of Sikkim give the whole State the shape of a basin sloping southwards towards the Darjeeling district of North Bengal. On the northern border the high mountains of the Greater Himalaya, on the eastern border the Chola and on the western border the Singalila Ranges, cut off access into Sikkim from anywhere except the southern side (Choudhury 2006 p 2).

The terrain of Sikkim is very rugged with steep mountains and deep valleys. This is due to the fact that the mountain rivers are active and erode their banks at a rapid pace causing landslides and modifying the landscape regularly (Choudhury 2006 p4). Karan (1987) states that the rugged terrain, heavy rainfall and instability caused by road construction have resulted in many landslides affecting the State.

The land can be divided into 5 classes based on the elevation. They are as follows:

1. Lower hills – altitude ranging from 270 m to 1500 m
2. Middle hills – altitude ranging from 1500 m to 2000 m
3. Higher hills – altitude ranging from 2000 m to 3000 m
4. Alpine Zone – altitude above 3900 m

5. Snow bound land – very high mountains with perpetual snow cover (DESME 2007 p 35)

The high mountains of the Singalila Range are characterized by several mountain peaks which have both spiritual and aesthetic values. These peaks also bestow tourism values, which is the reason for ecotourism development (mostly trekking and wildlife watching tourism) in villages located close to these mountains in their lower reaches. These peaks are:

Table 1: Peaks with Heights

Name of Peak	Name of Range	Height (in feet)
Mt. Khangchendzonga	Singalila	28156
Mt. Kabru	Singalila	24215
Mt. Talung	Great Himalayas	24200
Mt. Siniolchu	Singalila	22600
Mt. Simvo	Singalila	22476
Mt. Pandim	Singalila	22100
Mt. Rathong	Singalila	22100
Mt. Paunhri	Chola	22000
Mt. Kokthang	Singalila	20162
Mt. Lamaongden	Chola	19366
Mt. Masunyang	Chola	19300

Source: DESME (2008, p 36)

The main river of the State is River Teesta which originates in north Sikkim and runs down to the south of the State receiving many rivers along the way. The Teesta has a steep gradient as it drops by several thousands of metres within a few kilometers of its origin. The two main tributaries of the Teesta are River Rangit flowing from West district and River Rangpo flowing from East district to meet the Teesta near the border of the State (Karan 1987). The tributaries of the eastern side carry less water than the tributaries that originate in the western part of the State (Choudhury 2006, p 7).

Choudhury (2006) classifies climate types into six classes: sub-tropical humid, semi-temperate, temperate, snow forest, tundra type and arctic type. The humid and semi-temperate are characterized by warm summers and moderate winters, the temperate by cool summers and very cold winters and the other three pertain to alpine altitudes and are therefore very cold throughout the year (Choudhury 2006 p 11-13)

3.3.4. Forests and wildlife

Forests and wildlife are important elements in ecotourism promotion as most ecotourism spots are located in and around pristine wilderness areas. The area under forests in Sikkim has increased from 36% of the total land area of the State in the 1980s to 46% in 2009 (Forest Survey of India 2003-2007) and this compares favourably with the average forest cover for the whole country which is less than 20% (Lama 2001 p 55). In Sikkim, the forests can be divided into 5 broad types. The lower valleys have tropical deciduous dry and wet forests up to an altitude of around 1500 metres. The middle hills have temperate oak forests with associated species such as the Himalayan alder, cherry and chestnut and the upper hills are dominated by michelias and associates like alder, walnut, maples and prunus. The conifer forests extend from 3000 metres to 4500 metres and consist of fir, hemlock and spruce with its broad-leaved associates birch, maples, willows and larch. The sub-alpine areas are characterized by rhododendron forests (Forest Working Plan 1952).

Wildlife is equally diverse and there are 155 mammals, more than 550 species of birds, 400 species of butterflies and many species of moths and 35 species of reptiles. Many of these are rare and endangered animals and are protected by special laws in protected area networks in the State. Sikkim has many protected areas including one National Park i.e. Khangchendzonga National Park, which covers an area of 1784 sq km and eight wildlife sanctuaries and a fairenium orchid conservation area, all occupying as much as 42.54% of State's total geographical area under the wildlife protected area network including a Biosphere Reserve. This is the highest coverage amongst other States in the country. The State has been able to set aside 51.68 % of the State's forest land area under the wildlife protected area network including Biosphere Reserve for the protection and conservation of State's rich wildlife and biodiversity resources. According to the Forest Department Administrative Report of 2010-11, the following wildlife areas are notified in the State.

Table 2: Detail of Wildlife Areas

Name of Wildlife Area	District	Area (in Sq. Km)
Khangchendzonga National Park	North & West	1784
Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary	North	43
Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary	East	128
Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary	East	31
Fambonglho Wildlife Sanctuary	East	51.76
Kitam Bird Sanctuary	South	6
Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary	South	35.34
Barsey Wildlife Sanctuary	West	104
Faireanum Orchid Conservation Reserve	South	0.06

These wildlife areas are major ecotourism sites and receive a lot of visitors during the tourist season. The Khangchendzonga National Park and Barsey sanctuaries are the main centers but other spots are also catching up with the development of more and more facilities (Lachungpa S.T. pers.com)

3.3.5. Socioeconomic parameters

Sikkim has many ethnic communities because different groups migrated into the State at different times throughout its past. Most villages and towns have mixed social groups and therefore multi-cultural in character but some groups are concentrated in certain parts of the State, for instance the Lepchas and Bhutias in North district and the Subbas in West district. The main urban centres like Gangtok, Singtam, Rangpo, Jorethang, Namchi, Geyzing, Naya Bazar have also witnessed the migration of traders and businessmen from the other States of India and so have a sizable population of in-migrants apart from local groups.

3.3.5.1. Population

Ives and Messerli (1989 p 35) estimate Sikkim's population growth rate between 1951 and 1981 at 129.21% - the highest anywhere in the Himalayas. The population of the State is small, constituting only 0.05% of the country's population (Lama 2001 p 6). This growth of population is not just the result of increase in local population but is also due to development-related migration from other Indian States

and from Nepal. Between 1971 and 1981, there was a substantial increase in population (at a rate of 5.07 per cent per annum), especially in the urban areas which is attributed to the merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union and the subsequent in-migration triggered off by large-scale development activities in the State (Lama 2001, p 6). The main demographic statistics are indicated in Table 1.

Table 3: Demographic information on Sikkim (Census of India 2011)

Description	2011	2001
Approximate Population	6.07 Lakh	5.41 Lakh
Actual Population	607,688	540,851
Male	321,661	288,484
Female	286,027	252,367
Population Growth	12.36%	32.98%
Percentage of total Population	0.05%	0.05%
Sex Ratio	889	875
Child Sex Ratio	944	938
Density/km2	86	76
Density/mi2	222	197
Area km2	7,096	7,096
Area mi2	2,740	2,740
Total Child Population (0-6 Age)	61,077	78,195
Male Population (0-6 Age)	31,418	39,842
Female Population (0-6 Age)	29,659	38,353
Literacy	82.20 %	68.81 %
Male Literacy	87.29 %	77.38 %
Female Literacy	76.43 %	59.63 %
Total Literate	449,294	318,335
Male Literate	253,364	189,060
Female Literate	195,930	129,275

Source: Adopted from Envis Centre Sikkim (2011),

http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/censusinfodashboard/stock/profiles/en/IND011_Sikkim.pdf

The Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute 37.38% of the population, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) 6.66%, the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) 23.45% and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) 23.20% of the population of the State (Government of Sikkim 2006, p. 3).

North District is the least populous district in Sikkim despite being the largest one with 7.58% of the total population of the State. This is explained by the vast areas of this district that are uninhabitable due to harsh weather conditions. East District with 45.30% of the total population of Sikkim has the highest population of all districts, as the capital city and most commercial towns are located in this district. The South and West Districts have 24.32% and 22.79% of the population of the State (Government of Sikkim 2006, p. 5).

3.3.5.2. *Ethnic groups of Sikkim*

The ethnic groups in Sikkim belong to four major stocks, the Lepchas, Limbus (or Tsongs), Bhutias and Nepalese (Choudhury 2006, p. 23). British explorers and officials believed that the Lepchas were the first inhabitants of Sikkim. The Lepchas believe themselves to be a common stock, descended from Fodong Thing and Nazong Nyu-Nyu, whom God had created from the untrodden snows of Mt. Kanchanjunga and later became the progenitor of Lepcha race (Sprigg, 2005:83). Lepchas were originally close to nature and lived by hunting, gathering and swidden farming of forests (Bhasin and Bhasin 1995 p 39) but gradually they lost their forest-dwelling habit (Choudhury 2006, p 25). Gowloog (1991 p 88) thinks that the loss of the hunting-gathering occupation is related to the thinning out of forests at places where they were located. The Limbus (or Tsongs or Subbas) consider themselves an indigenous race that inhabited West, South and a part of North Sikkim (Subba 2008, p 297). Under the influence of the migrant Nepalese, many Limbus have converted to Hinduism (Choudhury 2006 p32). Some anthropologists consider both Lepchas and Limbus to be migrants.

Mon-pa refers to non-Tibetan dwellers south of the Himalayas and around the border of Tibet or people that resided (and continue to reside) in the Greater Sikkim prior to migration of the Tibetans, namely the Lepchas, Tsongs/Limboos and Mangars. While, Rong-pa refers to the steep country, it is used occasionally to describe the Lepcha inhabitants (Risley, 1894: 39; Mullard, 2005: 39). Santosh Alle (2003: 44-69) in his book claims the presence of Mangars in the various Jongs of Sikkim. The Bhutias migrated to Sikkim in the middle of the seventeenth century and was the dominant ethnic group for over three centuries during which the Bhutia rulers belonging to the

Namgyal dynasty ruled Sikkim (Bhasin & Bhasin 1995 p 40-41). They migrated from Tibet and by occupation were primarily nomadic cattle herders and traders. The Tibetan migrants namely Lachungpas and some Lachenpas of present Sikkim migrated from Har-Timpoo area of Hah Chu Valley (Namgyal & Dolma, 1908:10; Chand Raghbir, 2007; Eden Ashley, 1863-64: 55-113). The landmass lying between the Arun River and the Teesta River was known as “Limbuwan” (Pallo Kirat) by the Nepali natives of this area (Chemjong, 1976; Sanyal, 1979; Shresta, 1985; Subba, 2003; Risley, 1894; Pradhan, 1991). According to Rose (1984), the Nepali people were settled in India by the first British Political Officer in Sikkim, Claude White, to mainly counter the attacks of the Tibetans from the north as well as to neutralize the Chogyal’s affinity towards Tibet. This was also a measure adopted by the British to settle the land and raise revenue for the kingdom.

3.3.5.3. Main occupation of people

The main occupation of most people in Sikkim is farming consisting of growing of traditional crops like maize, rice, wheat, buckwheat, millet and barley (Bhasin and Bhasin 1995, p 90). Livestock-keeping is a common practice among villagers and horticulture has recently been picking up in rural areas of Sikkim due to the favourable ecological conditions existing in various altitudes of the State (Subba 2008, p 81-82). Cash crops like cardamom, ginger and orange are being cultivated by big landlords. There are serious constraints on farming as the per capita availability of land for farming has decreased from 0.31 hectares in 1976-77 to 0.12 hectares in 2001 (Subba 2008 p 79-81). This is mainly due to the fact that more than 80% of the land area of the State is statutorily declared forest land where no agriculture is permissible (Forest Department Administrative Report 2010-11). Livestock rearing is an important allied activity and while many farmers rear cattle, goats, pigs and chicken as a supplement to agriculture, some semi-nomadic tribal people who live in high altitude areas keep yak and high altitude sheep as their only means of livelihood.

The main reason for the people relying on agriculture and allied activities is that the industrial sector of the economy of Sikkim was poorly developed till recently. During the first five year plan mining was introduced in Sikkim (Karan 1989), but this did not produce good results. A few industries like distilleries and breweries came up

during this time and absorbed some employment, but all four districts of Sikkim were declared industrially backward districts in 1976 (Lama 2001 p 69-71). This was mainly due to lack of raw material within the State, improper communication and remote location from the mainland of India. During the last ten years, there has been more stress on infrastructure and industrial development in all the North-eastern States of India including Sikkim leading to the establishment of many types of industries. Government and non-government agencies also provide employment to many people living in the cities and towns.

Tourism, a thrust area of development in Sikkim, employs a large number of educated, skilled and unskilled people in such jobs as tour operators, travel agents, tour guides, taxi drivers, porters and hospitality-related employment in hotels (Choudhury 2006, p 68).

3.3.6. Ecotourism Policy of Sikkim

Sikkim has abundance of biodiversity and beautiful Himalayan landscape, which makes it a perfect ecotourism destination. Because of these factors both domestic and international tourists visit the state. The government of Sikkim realizing the potential of ecotourism has taken up many measures through its forest, environment and wildlife management department to conserve the natural heritage of the state. Since the government of Sikkim addresses ecotourism as a priority sector, it has developed a comprehensive ecotourism policy. This policy is an effort to strike a balance between growing ecotourism and conservation of biodiversity of the region. The ecotourism policy of Sikkim aims to establish Sikkim as a unique ecotourism destination by providing the visitors a memorable experience and at the same time contributing towards poverty alleviation among the local community as well as promoting nature conservation.

Following are the main objectives of Sikkim Ecotourism Policy

- Bring all stakeholders on a common platform of understanding of ecotourism.
- Promote ecotourism in a sustainable manner based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC).

- Generate incentives to local communities for nature conservation through alternative income sources and livelihood, and empower local communities to manage ecotourism with the emphasis on economically disadvantaged people.
- Conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystems and religious monuments of the state of Sikkim as well as Sikkim people's culture and tradition.
- Offer memorable and high quality learning experience to visitors, thus encouraging their responsible behaviour during their visits and their collaboration for nature conservation efforts.
- Facilitate local children as well as visitors to enjoy and appreciate excellent nature- based activities.
- Encourage people in Sikkim to increase their pride and appreciation of local natural and cultural values.
- Ensure that local communities have a role in determining the appropriate presentation of their cultural values.
- Regulate the high influx of visitors in heavily visited areas, thus reducing negative impacts of tourism.

3.3.7. Ecotourism in Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap

The Yuksom region in Sikkim is situated at an elevation of about 1780 metres and is cradled in the midst of the Himalayan Mountains. The region provides a sacrosanct atmosphere owing to the presence of several monasteries and serene mountains. The sanctity of Yuksom is further cemented as it is considered as the third eye of Sikkim. Yuksom was also bestowed with the honor of being the ancient capital of Sikkim. The region is also considered as a location that is akin to heaven or a place from where people can see heaven. The region officially finds mention as the 'Gateway to Khangchendzonga' (Tour my india, 2015).

The region of Aritar is situated in the east of Sikkim and is soaked in natural splendor and history. Aritar also presents tourists with a spellbinding view of the Khangchendzonga that contributes to enhance the overall attractiveness of the region. Moreover, the region boasts of lush green forests, vast stretches of paddy fields and placid lakes that are ensconced within the deep forests. The region is also home to the Aritar Gumpa that is considered as one amongst the earliest monasteries in Sikkim that belongs to the Karma Kagyu ancestry of Tibetan Buddhism (Sikkim Tourism, 2013).

Another pristine region of Sikkim is Kewzing which stands at an altitude of 1700 meters and its highest point happens to be the Maenam Hill that slopes down to River Rangit and stands opposite Tashiding. The meaning of Kewzing in 'Bhutia' language literally translates to the 'Land of Wheat Fields'. It is also sometimes termed as 'Sosing' which means 'Land of Chestnut Forest'. The sparsely populated village comprises largely of people from the 'Bhutia' community and is endowed with nature's richest bounties. With close to zero pollution levels, the area boasts of vast green forests and is an abode to exotic plants and animals (BON Farmhouse, 2010).

A region that boasts of a vast cultural diversity is Darap in west Sikkim. The region has a mixed population of people of Limboo, Bhutia, Gurung and Rai community that coexists in mutual harmony. The region is abundant with mildly slanting terraced fields and also assures a scenic view of snow-peaked mountains, lush greenery and a varied plant and animal species (India Mike, 2014). Being only 12 km away from the popular tourist hub of Pelling it provides a good village tourism site for tourists residing or based in Pelling. It is the take off point to Yambong area of Khangchendzonga National Park and is therefore a fast developing ecotourism centre in West Sikkim.

Considering the vast natural richness offered by this region and the ethnic diversity, the said four regions of Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap within Sikkim offers tremendous opportunities for ecotourism.

3.3.8. Initiation of Ecotourism in Sikkim

As a region that is endowed with an opulent natural biodiversity and exquisiteness, Sikkim has emerged as a major tourist destination and attracts tourists both domestic and international, in hordes. In view of the favourable circumstances, the Sikkim government has framed adequate policies and implemented several initiatives that leverage the potential of Sikkim as a destination for ecotourism thereby, generating revenue for the local populace and conserving the environment at the same time. In order to achieve this objective, the government of Sikkim has initiated and executed several programs and projects. The culmination of these programs led to the region of Sikkim emerging as the most favored destination for ecotourism according to a survey conducted by the 'Lonely Planet' tourism magazine. As a favored destination for

ecotourism, Sikkim is receiving global exposure. Thus, the government of Sikkim was able to achieve its objective of putting Sikkim on the global map as a preferred destination for ecotourism. The key idea behind this objective was not only to promote the region as an ecotourism destination but also offer ample prospects that nurtured community based ecotourism. This move utilized the most recent techniques of participatory management to facilitate sustainable development of existing resources while generating revenue and employment for the state (Pandey, 2014). Moreover, this move by the government to promote eco-tourism in Sikkim has also established congruence amongst people, environmental development and conservation. Sikkim's natural milieu and its opulent cultural diversity and biodiversity present the region with affable circumstances that foster ecotourism. The significance of ecotourism for the overall economy of the region is clearly recognized by the state government. Critical evaluation of the trends of tourist inflow to the region indicates promising trends and offers ample scope for the overall development and growth of ecotourism. As a matter of fact, it is projected that tourist footfalls to the region will be significantly augmented in the coming decade (Joshi & Dhyani, 2009, pp. 33–41).

3.3.9. Growth of Ecotourism in Sikkim

The state of Sikkim is poised to emerge as the first amongst India's state that is entirely organic. The state is also on a progressive path that will help them to eliminate poverty. To enable Sikkim to achieve these objectives, the state is banking heavily on eco-tourism. The fact that renders their approach unique is their strategy for growth. Further, the state has also accorded priority to several sectors that would foster growth in the state. These sectors would include; horticulture, hydro power, floriculture, organic agriculture and eco-tourism (Civil Society Online, 2011). As a matter of fact, the state of Sikkim has undertaken several initiatives that fostered the growth of ecotourism in the state. The latest statistical figures reveal that more than Rs.2.5 lakh domestic visitors visited Sikkim. At the same time, the figure for international visitors to the state stood at 17,000 which happens to be a sizable number considering the various ecotourism hotspots that India offers (Tambe *et al.*, n.d.). The government of Sikkim is leaving no stone unturned to promote eco-tourism and educate the people about the importance of conserving the environment. It initiated a 'Green Revolution' program that was aimed at protecting the flora and fauna and the birds and animals with

an objective to create congruence amongst humans and their environment. Another initiative by the government was the ‘Smriti Van’ program which is largely operated and executed by the villagers and local governing bodies (gram panchayats). The program is run in all the villages of Sikkim. In this program, anybody can plant a tree in ‘Smriti Van’. The governing bodies maintain a record of who planted the tree and when and the growth of the tree is monitored and the progress is recorded (Civil Society Online, 2011).

3.3.10. Ecotourism Marketing

Marketing is a vital aspect that would help the state of Sikkim to promote ecotourism. However, there are several sub-components to an effective ecotourism marketing program. These sub-components would relate to:

- Setting up an exclusive ecotourism marketing chamber that would be wholly responsible for the overall development and sustenance of ecotourism within the state of Sikkim. Further, it would also require skilled, experienced and full-time staffs who are extremely dedicated to executing the marketing activities.
- The next component would involve structuring and executing a robust marketing strategy for short intervals. For example, to start with, the marketing chamber can create a cohesive marketing strategy for an initial period of two or five years. The marketing strategy would outline the activities that would be conducted to promote ecotourism within the state of Sikkim. Comprehensive marketing activities that would be executed by the marketing chamber would relate to organizing a string of ecotourism festivals, events and exhibitions that will be implemented throughout the state.
- The marketing chamber would also be required to decide and determine an appropriate scheme for funding the above said activities. They also need to ensure that a preset budget is fixed for the activities and all the activities are executed within the budget.
- Further, the marketing chamber would also be responsible to undertake activities that would help them to identify and connect local tour operators with existing local communities with a view to offer exclusive ecotourism services.

The outcome of the said marketing sub-components to promote ecotourism within the state will help the marketing chamber to create an enhanced awareness about the potential of Sikkim as a preferred destination for ecotourism. It would not only impact the domestic market but would also focus on Sikkim being reckoned as an ecotourism site in the international market. These activities would not only tend to augment the number of tourists who are keen to immerse themselves in the pristine location and partake in adventure tourism activities but it would also help the state to generate sizable revenue and offer significant employment opportunities to people from the local communities. The strategy for marketing ecotourism should also essentially include all tourist hotspots in the state such as Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap amongst other locations (Forests bfp, 2014).

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