

## **Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion**

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### **7.1. Summary**

Tourism has claimed a position as one of the most significant sectors in the present world economy. It constitutes a key economic activity for developed as well as developing nations. Since tourism as a sector is vital in contributing to the global economy, it has achieved an unparalleled significance of late. Recognizing the tremendous potential of this sector, most nations throughout the world have initiated steps to nurture tourism at a rapid rate. A World tourism organization report elucidates the fact that tourism has the inherent ability to enhance trade and investment which can sizably contribute towards developing rural areas, transform the agricultural scenario, enrich the community and facilitate social empowerment(United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization, 2005). However, it is essential that a balance is maintained to sustain the immense pressure on natural, cultural and socio-economic environment offered by popular tourist spots. The origins of tourism can be traced back to several thousand years (Shackley, 2007)and has thrived from the time humanity has come into existence. Interest in tourism can never cease as people exhibit an inherent tendency to spend their free time in travelling and exploring new places of interest. Travel could also relate to people traveling from one location to another to meet their friends and acquaintances or to conduct business. Hence, peoples' tendency to travel also facilitates economic and social exchanges of tourism. As a key sector, tourism has spurred the economic growth of several developing nations such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Bali amongst various others. In the Indian context, tourism has emerged as particularly beneficial to certain areas as compared to others.

Existing statistical data pertaining to tourism reveal that tourism has emerged as one of the largest sectors in the world and has been attributed with generating a projected 11% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while providing employment to around 200 million individuals and facilitates travel for almost 700 million international tourists each year(Roe & Urquhart, 2001). Though nations that are still in the process of development have a small share in the international tourism market which is pegged at around 30%, this figure is gradually rising. The number of international tourists visiting developing nations has increased by an average of 9.5%

each year since 1990 as compared to 4.6% throughout the world. India, as a matter of fact has experienced a growth in the rate of international tourists visiting the nation to the tune of 3.92 million in 2005 which indicates a rate of growth of 13.2%. Considering these factors, it is clear that tourism as a sector has the potential to alleviate poverty within developing nations. The three major pathways through which tourism can alleviate poverty would include; tourism is a labor intensive industry and offers employment to a large number of people, tourism impacts other sectors like food and beverage, construction, transportation, logistics and several others, significantly impacts the livelihood strategies of local population and offers a conducive business environment for small enterprise development.

Of late, the concept of ecotourism has gained substantial prominence. Ecotourism emerges as a unique kind of tourism that varies from conventional adventure travel and nature tourism. Ecotourism is more focused on conserving the existing natural resources like land and water and supporting the social and economic development of local communities. Ecotourism reduces the environmental impact, integrates architecture that is ecologically sensitive and extends the local communities with ample opportunities for sustainable economic development. Ecotourism in its true form comes across as a preservation strategy that significantly differs from conventional methods to protect the environment and ensure a healthy future for diverse cultural and natural resources. A key facet of ecotourism is to actively involve local communities with an objective to help them benefit from such conservation initiatives, facilitate economic growth and education. Though setting up parks and protected areas directly impact local residents, they also stand to gain significantly by the promotion of ecotourism in such areas. Involving local communities within the ambit of ecotourism not only help local communities to satiate their economic requirements but it also enables them to maintain and enhance the sense of place that is vital to ensure long-term conservation. Aiding local communities to nurture ecotourism is a robust manner that facilitates their growth since they are increasingly endowed with extensive local knowledge and truly appreciate their natural and cultural heritage.

The natural environments in most developing nations offer significant economic advantages as it attracts both domestic and international visitors who are keen to experience natural serenity and cultural diversity. India for instance, witnessed a

growth in the number of tourists visiting the Himalayan region for ecotourism objectives lately. Though the data available on tourist inflow within the Himalayan region are not appropriately documented, its insinuations and contributions to the economy of the region have been quite substantial. Apart from international tourists, the number of domestic visitors thronging the region has also increased. As a matter of fact, the western, central and eastern regions of Himalaya reported that out of the total tourists visiting the region, 96% of them happened to be domestic tourists(Punit, 2014).The number of tourists to the said areas helped the region to generate around Rs.200 to Rs. 250 crores in annual profits to the state. Ecotourism activities in the region have sizably increased and include trekking, mountaineering, river rafting, studying the local communities and several other activities. The objective of this study is to comprehend the significance of ecotourism as an alternative source of income for people in rural Sikkim, to assess the impact of ecotourism on the economy of the region, to scale the impact of ecotourism and to understand the role of eco-tourism towards conservation. The study was executed utilizing a descriptive research methodology wherein a survey was carried out amongst a sample population from the region. Data were collected using questionnaires, face to face and telephonic interviews.

It has been argued by Heywood (1990) that since ecotourism depends on the environment for its existence and success it has the potential to remain a comparatively clean industry. The additional benefits presented by ecotourism would relate to conservation of natural regions, archeological sites and historic monuments. Irrespective of the fact that ecotourism is a potent tool to enhance economic growth in developing and developed nations, environmentalists, academicians and policy makers are more focused towards the socio-economic and environmental impacts offered by this industry. In the context of sustainable development, eco-tourism is construed to be associated with ecological and economic sustainability, long-term prospects of tourism and its acceptance as an aspect of overall strategy for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. This warrants a more suitable and meticulous approach that can endow ecotourism as a viable medium for environmental protection and sustenance of biodiversity.

Several academicians and authors are of the opinion that ecotourism not only enhances the economic growth of the region and provides alternative source of livelihood to local communities but it also goes a long way in conserving the natural resources and habitat. They have also indicated that the market for ecotourism has been developing since the past two decades and the market is poised to sustain the rate of growth in the coming years. Chamy (2007) is of the opinion that environment has emerged as vital aspect for today's traveler. Though in the past, the focus of a traveler was more towards comforts and luxury during their travel, the focus has now shifted to environment. As a matter of fact, tourists are eager to contribute towards conservation efforts of the areas they intend to visit. According to Syamala (2002), ecotourism has emerged as a major requirement for people who are keen to de-stress the rigors of the fast paced life of the present day. Such people are increasingly lured by the prospects offered by ecotourism wherein they can de-stress while relaxing in the lap of nature. Most eco-tourists from India head to exotic locations that facilitate ecotourism with a singular objective of rejuvenating themselves while enjoying natural bounties. Syamala in 2002 states that "instead of waking up with the alarm we can wake up with chirping of birds, we can have healthy and timely food rather than having fast food – fried stuffs". Band (2005) defines ecotourism as managing tourism appropriately to facilitate humans to gain most advantages from nature without upsetting its inherent balance. Ecotourism facilitates people to connect with nature and makes sure that the requirements of local people, cultures and customs are fulfilled and are not disturbed. In her book titled 'Eco-tourism, Perspectives and Experiences', Ranade (2008) evaluates various issues in order to define the tenets of successful ecotourism and balancing conservation with development. She also makes an attempt to highlight broad issues related to the concept and principles of ecotourism. In a case study pertaining to the 'Impact of Tourism on Biodiversity', Chetri (2002) has successfully evaluated the overall impact of tourism in Sikkim Himalaya. Through the findings of the case study Chetri (2002) emphasizes that conservation activities have been enhanced with the local communities actively keeping a watch over natural resources and wildlife.

Case studies have also tried to indicate the impact of ecotourism in creating awareness about nature and aided protecting species that are endangered. A study

conducted by Clem Tisdell and Wilson (2005) reveals that turtle based ecotourism has been substantially beneficial in enhancing environmental knowledge and conservation initiatives aimed at protecting sea turtles. They also believe that ramifications of sightseeing-focused ecotourism are magnanimous as tourists are willing to pay towards environmental conservation. Such initiatives can also be instrumental in strengthening environmental education and augment focus on wild life conservation. Dam (2013), in her paper titled 'Issues of Sustainable Ecotourism Development in Sikkim', has specifically discussed about the various facets of ecotourism sustainability in Sikkim. As per the study, a large number of tourists to Sikkim are unaware of sustainability as an integral aspect of ecotourism. Ecotourism in Sikkim is more concentrated in secure areas which enable tourists to witness the natural and untouched beauty of the region. The study also indicates that sustainability as an aspect should be accorded adequate importance while developing ecotourism in Sikkim. In the event that sustainability is not viewed seriously, it might lead to degradation of the region owing to the heavy influx of tourists.

While conventional mass tourism negatively impacts the environment, ecotourism is more sensitive to its surroundings and offers tangible benefits to the local communities. In the present day several nations have actively adopted ecotourism to sustain their environment while augmenting their economy. Some of the nations that have adopted and promote ecotourism would include Costa Rica, Malaysia, Australia, Brazil and India. Costa Rica has successfully transformed their economy which was mostly driven by agriculture into an economy that was industry-oriented and service based. Through ecotourism, the nation was also able to foster entrepreneurship amongst local communities in rural areas. As a nation, Malaysia is positioned as one of the world's 12 mega regions that offer massive diversity. It is blessed with diverse ecosystems that include swamps, mangroves, coral reefs, mountains and limestone caves. However, the nation is yet to completely harness the full potential of ecotourism. Irrespective of this fact, the nation offers various ecotourism hotspots like the Danum Valley on Borneo, Endau-Rombin State Park and Mount Kinabalu amongst several others. Existing reports indicate that ecotourism is quickly developing in Malaysia with a growth rate of 35% per annum. Similarly, Australia has recognized the potential of ecotourism and is leaving no stone unturned in developing this sector. As a result,

Australia has experienced a sizable increase in ecotourism and indigenous tourism. Australia now considers ecotourism and indigenous tourism as key aspects of tourism. The presence of the Amazon River in Brazil has rendered the nation as a most preferred destination for ecotourism in the world. The Amazon region is particularly favored by adventure tourists and since the Amazon offers a vast diversity, the region is home to several species of flora, fauna and wildlife, with new species of plants and animals being discovered every day. The pristine condition of the Brazil's beaches, forests, rivers and rural areas are an added attraction to the eco-tourist. Since India boasts of a diverse culture and geographical distinctions, the nation has emerged as one of the hotspots for ecotourism. Through ecotourism, tourists are presented with an opportunity to enjoy the natural bounties while also learning more about the various cultures and traditions that exists within the nation. 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. In the Himalayan region, Sikkim has emerged as the favored destination for ecotourism. The state of Sikkim presents an opulent natural richness as compared to its neighbouring states and nations like Bengal and Nepal.

The state of Sikkim presents eco-tourists with a bevy of natural richness that includes more than 4,500 flowering plants, 550 species of birds, 154 species of mammals, more than 50 species of fish, 690 species of butterflies and 16 unique species of amphibians(Subba, 2008). Moreover, the natural richness is complemented by diverse social practices, rich customs and ethnic cultures. 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. To say the least, Sikkim possibly offers more to the eco-tourist than what is offered in other ecotourism locations within India. The government of Sikkim has understood the implications of ecotourism and has initiated several activities through its forest, environment and wildlife management department to preserve the natural heritage of the region. A survey executed by 'Lonely Planet' tourism magazine indicated that Sikkim is the most favored ecotourism destination within India. This can be attributed to the various activities initiated by the government to promote ecotourism in the region. Also, the Sikkim government considers ecotourism as a priority segment and

with this objective has established an extensive ecotourism policy. The key objective behind this policy is to maintain equilibrium between developing ecotourism while conserving the region's biodiversity. Recent statistical data indicate that the number of domestic tourists to Sikkim stood at Rs.2.5 lakhs whereas the total number of international visitors was pegged at 17,000. Other initiatives by the government to promote ecotourism in Sikkim include the launch of a 'Green Revolution' program that intends to safeguard the flora and fauna and the wildlife with a view to maintain a balance between humans and their environment. They also commenced the 'Smriti Van' program that is monitored and implemented by the villagers. This program enables any visitor to plant a tree in 'Smriti Van' and the details about the event are recorded and its progress periodically monitored.

Marketing is an intrinsic aspect that enables Sikkim to enhance ecotourism and involves several sub-components which include: establishing a chamber for ecotourism marketing, outlining and implementing the marketing strategy, define schemes that fund ecotourism activities, initiate steps to connect tour operators with local communities etc. These marketing sub-components will help to create awareness about Sikkim as an ecotourism destination in the domestic as well as international market and at the same time enable the region to enhance their economy while providing a livelihood source for the local population. The focus of ecotourism in Sikkim is concentrated on four key regions viz., Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap. By initiating ecotourism in Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap, the region has experienced a marked change in the overall economy, helped in environmental conservation and offered the people in these areas with an alternative source of livelihood.

The region of Yuksom has developed as a preferred ecotourism destination that presents people with a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere that helps in rejuvenating them from the rigors of the fast-paced city life. Apart from domestic tourists, the region also hosts visitors from the UK, the US, Switzerland, Australia, Netherlands, France and Germany. With a view to enhance eco-tourism in Yuksom, the Department of Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management [DFEWM] has initiated a conservation project in association with Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA]. The idea behind this initiative is to strengthen activities that preserve the biodiversity of the region and

enhance the forest management capacity. The initiative also aims to augment the livelihood of local communities who otherwise rely on the environment for sustenance. Tourist attractions in Yuksom include: Norbugang Coronation Throne, Dubdi Monastery and Phamrong Water Falls among others. The introduction of ecotourism in Yuksom has substantial socio-economic impacts which sizably enhance the employment prospects of the local community, help to generate foreign revenue that can be used towards local and regional development, an increase in the spending power of people from local communities, improve the scope for local micro, small and medium businesses and amplify the market and scope for local products and services.

Similarly, the region of Aritar is referred to as the gateway to the famed 'Silk Route'. Though as a village Aritar is comparatively small, it has a rich history and is bestowed with an inimitable natural beauty. The village boasts of a rich green cover and is surrounded with paddy fields and calm lakes that run through deep forests in the region. The village of Aritar offers several tourists hotspots that include: the Lampokhari Lake, Dak Bungalow, AritarGumpa, Mankhim, Phursey Lake and various other attractions. The Lampokhari Tourism festival that is held between March and April offers tourists with a plethora of activities which involve leisurely boating, horse riding, archery and other competitions, flower exhibitions and cultural shows that present the cultural ethnicity of the region. Ecotourism also has a socio-economic impact on Aritar and enables the region to attain an economic viability, nurtures sustainable development, improves social cohesion, augments environmental awareness and helps to conserve natural and cultural heritages. By adopting ecotourism, the local community has been significantly able to enhance their livelihood that otherwise relied on cattle rearing and farming. Local communities have come forward and offer home stay facilities to tourists which augments their income. As a result, the local communities are able to afford a good living, ensure the provision of quality education to their children and contribute towards environmental conservation. The increasing number of tourists also presents them with immense business opportunities wherein families have setup small businesses like restaurants, curio shops and other relevant establishments.

Likewise, Kewzing village is set against the backdrop of snow-peaked mountains that accords an aesthetic quality to the region. Kewzing comes across as a

very peaceful village that outlines a rustic simplicity in all its glory. What draws tourists to Kewzing is the pollution free environment, enriched with elaborate green forests that house a large variety of exotic plants, animals and birds. Other than the scenic beauty offered by the village, it also presents a tranquil environment that is a far cry from the hustle and bustle of city life. Tourists to Kewzing are presented with an opportunity to participate in village festivals that familiarize them with the rich traditions and customs of the village, enables them to enjoy organic food and experience hot stone baths. The socio-economic impact of ecotourism in Kewzing has been tremendous. Local people who are dependent of traditional sources of livelihood like farming and cattle rearing are now presented with an opportunity to host tourists and earn additional income. This has been instrumental in upgrading their lifestyles and supplementing their overall incomes.

The village of Darap clings to the Sikkim Himalayan foothills and basks in the shadow of the Khangchendzonga. The population of the village is largely dominated by people from the Limboo community and is also home to various other communities like the Bhutias, Tamangs, Chettris, Gurungs, Lepchas and Rais. The strategic placement of the village offers significant opportunities for tourism, especially for ecotourism. Tourists to the village are presented with diverse opportunities that help them to relax and enjoy village life. Activities that tourists can indulge in include: milking cows, undertaking gardening activities, processing butter and cheese, nature walks in the village and trekking, interaction with local population and visiting the 200 year old Limboo traditional house. Prior to the introduction of ecotourism, local communities sustained themselves through traditional means of livelihood like cattle rearing, breeding poultry, extracting medicinal herbs, felling timber for construction, charcoal and firewood. The villagers were also involved in farming and cultivating crops like rice, maize, millets and specific varieties of vegetables and spices. Nonetheless, the yield was just not sufficient to meet their individual requirements and was far less for trading purposes. As a result, the economy of the region was consistently low and the people faced extreme poverty. The introduction of ecotourism facilitated the villagers with a range of opportunities to enhance their livelihood via direct and indirect sources. Ecotourism was instrumental in significantly modifying the lifestyles of the local community.

For the study, a total of 146 respondents were selected out of which 36 (24.7%) respondents were male and 110 (75.3%) were female. Since the region selected for the study involved more women who were directly involved in ecotourism, the number of female respondents was more than the number of males. As a matter of fact 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the respondents in this study were female. As far as the age of the respondents was concerned, the minimum age recorded was 21 years and the maximum age was 75 years. The average age of the respondents was 48 years and the sampling was done with the objective to comprehend the effect of ecotourism on various age groups. To execute this study, data were collected from respondents belonging to the villages of Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap, the four key ecotourism areas in Sikkim.

The various factors influencing ecotourism in Sikkim are richness of environmental resources and biodiversity, and at the same time, underdevelopment and backwardness of village economy. Though there is an urgent need to develop economically, concern for conservation of the environment has prompted the people of Sikkim to resist mass tourism. Instead, they are opting ecotourism in small scale. The impact of ecotourism in Sikkim has been assessed with the help of various demographic (age, sex, occupation, education) and economic indicators, (livestock, agriculture, household amenities and participation in ecotourism-related activities). Questionnaires were circulated to 146 respondents and data related to the socio-economic characteristics were gathered. Though agriculture was the major occupation of Sikkim, ecotourism has captured its place in economic development. Sikkim has started to increase its involvement in tourism activities majorly after 2002. The popular tourism activities were offering home stay and other associated activities.

As the primary occupation of Sikkim is agriculture, all the respondents owned a piece of land. Data collected through questionnaire revealed that majority (84%) of the land-owners had cultivable land and only 16% of the respondents had non-cultivable land. The crops cultivated in Sikkim are maize, wheat, rice, cotton, vegetables and few others. The livelihood of the people in Sikkim is further supported by livestock. Majority of the people possess cow, the other livestock are hen, chicken, pig, poultry, goat, and sheep. The earnings through livestock is in the range of Rs. 6000 to Rs. 10000 per month which indicate that livestock cannot be the major source income in Sikkim.

The occupational split of respondents involved in ecotourism activities in the sample villages is as follows: 73 (50.00%) respondents offered home stays, 32 (21.92%) respondents owned shop/restaurant, 20 (13.70%) respondents owned lodges, 18 (12.33%) respondents were tourist guides, 2 (1.37%) respondents were drivers and 1 (0.68%) respondent worked as manager in hotel. Majority of the respondents owned hotel services and the remaining respondents had taxi or animal, tents, restaurant and others. This estimate represents that offering accommodation is the prominent business related to ecotourism in Sikkim. Since Sikkim is a hilly terrain transport based on animals also gains interest along with taxi services. Almost half of the respondents owned car even before entering tourism activities. Owning two wheelers, TV, cable connection and refrigerators did not have much impact since they are considered as basic amenities of an individual.

The analysis of year-wise involvement in ecotourism-related activities reveals the fact that the year 2002 has been a trend setter for ecotourism activities, and after 2002, there has been a steady increase in the number of people involved in ecotourism every year. A consistent increase in ecotourism is visible from the year 2000 to 2010, but the years 2011 to 2014 have not registered much increase in involvement of respondents in ecotourism. This may be either due to adequate number of people already persisting in ecotourism related activities or ecotourism may not be a fruitful career for others since it does not ensure round-the-year activity. The peak tourist seasons in Sikkim are March to June and September to October. This shows the fact that peak tourist season lasts for only 6 months in a year. The season may be extended up to maximum eight months in a year, and the minimum available period may be just four months.

The respondents' family background and access to other basic needs, such as education, water supply, medical help, etc. were also analyzed. Majority of the respondents had young children and it was witnessed that the awareness of education has gained significance only in recent years after adopting a better lifestyle through the earnings obtained from tourism. As for the basic need of water supply, Sikkim being a mountainous region has adequate supply of water resources. The respondents' visit to government medical centers show that 124 (84.9%) respondents accessed the medical facility provided by the state whereas 22 (15.1%) respondents did not avail of any

government medical assistance. Over-dependence on government medical facilities shows that the economic status of the people was not very high.

The data regarding respondents' exposure out of the state shows that majority of the respondents did not frequently travel outside of Sikkim. The need for moving frequently outside the state was not witnessed since for the majority of the respondents' source of living was in the state itself which gained importance during tourist seasons.

The study also reveals that the respondents had substantial earnings from ecotourism related activities and few depended on government schemes e.g. NREGA Scheme. People of Sikkim are self-supportive in nature and many are oriented towards ecotourism than government jobs. Self-employment and independency factors are dominant amongst the chosen respondents.

The respondents' history of employment is also analyzed to ascertain whether they worked in government. The analysis showed that only 4 respondents has worked priory under government. This indicates that the respondents were reluctant to work for government and were more interested to work on self-employment. The prior occupations of the respondents were teaching and in police department.

The aesthetic value of Sikkim is growing day by day and the financial status of the state is accelerating through ecotourism. The study elaborates the potential influence of ecotourism in the villages of Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap. A number of factors were evaluated to analyze the influence of ecotourism in these areas. After careful analysis the study infers that ecotourism has substantial influence on people living in the four districts. It has been proven that ecotourism has empowered people with a solid income who did not have a steady income source previously. For those who pertain to conventional occupations such as farming and cattle rearing, ecotourism provided ample opportunities to generate additional supportive income. Even the lifestyle of people living in these regions have changed and people transform their living trend by comfoting their lives with modern appliances such as refrigerators, television with cable connection, educating and securing their children's future etc. People have started preserving the environment which actually pays them with its aesthetic value and this is a good sign of ecotourism impacting people in a positive manner. An analysis with the respondents on the number of factors influencing

their income through ecotourism was made and the results illustrate the considerable increase in their income after undertaking eco-tourism. It is stated that the occupational involvement of the respondents was minimum 2 months and maximum 60 months (average 8.3 months). The positive impact of ecotourism is evident where the income earned in a year was minimum Rs. 200 and maximum Rs. 400000 (average Rs.31179.45), income earned through conventional occupation was minimum Rs. 300 and maximum Rs. 100000 (average Rs. 18850) and income after undertaking ecotourism was minimum Rs. 500 and maximum Rs. 70000 (average Rs. 23462.32).

The people of the four villages of Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap were noteworthy for their passion towards ecotouristic activities.

Aritar is known for its ravishing beauty and pristine ecosystem. The income of the respondents from this village ranges from Rs. 10000 to Rs. 50000. The village is surrounded by mountains which supports domestication of livestock. Hence, cattle's rearing was the primary occupation and people yielded an income of minimum Rs. 5000 to a maximum of Rs. 20000 out of it. A total of 33 respondents actively participated in the study where 39.4% (13) and 30.3% (10) respondents were owners of a hotel and a restaurant, 12.1 % (4) were owners of a taxi 18.2% (6) of pack animals.

Darap village is rich in its cultural and traditional heritage but still requires infrastructural development. Respondents from this village hold an income range of minimum Rs. 30000 to maximum Rs. 50000 through village home stay facilities. The primary occupation of the village is poultry farming and agriculture with an income range of Rs.10000 to Rs, 30000 excluding ecotourism activities. From the active participation of 35 respondents, it was found that 34.3% (12) respondents were owners of taxies, 22.9% (8) owners of restaurant, 31.4 (11) owners of hotels, 8.6% (3) owning a tent and 2.9 % (1), owned an ecotourism facility.

Kewzing village is a tourist spot with well-organized tourist facilities. People had occupations such as farming, cattle rearing and dairy farming but none was as prominent as the rich tourism activities. The income range of the respondents through tourism activities varied between Rs. 10000 and Rs. 50000 and income from other occupations varied between Rs.10000 and Rs. 20000. Out of 43 respondents from Kewzing village 34.3% (24) respondents and 23.3% (10) respondents were owners of

restaurants and hotels respectively, 14.0% (6) had pack animals to assist their business, 4.7% (2) owners of tents and 2.3%(1) owned a taxi.

Yuksom has number of tourist places to visit, like monasteries, trekking spots and a wildlife sanctuary. Though the predominant occupation of people at Yuksom was tourism, the income ranges varied from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 50000 and above, based on the type of tourist facility offered. Some provided home stay facilities whereas others provided wild life park amenities. Before undertaking tourism as the main occupation, the village entirely concentrated on raising Yak. Income earned from occupations other than tourism ranged from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 20000. Out of 35 respondents, 25.7 % (9) were owners of taxies, restaurants and hotels, 14.3 % (5) owned of pack animals and 8.6 % (3) owned tents.

## **7.2. Major Findings of the Research**

Nature of benefits from ecotourism to local people is of different kinds such as improvement in living conditions, acquisition of assets, improved housing and so on. Local people provide accommodation, food, shopping facilities, guidance, etc. to the tourists. There is considerable increase in the income of local people after ecotourism development. Similarly, the man-days of employment increased after the development of ecotourism projects.

Climate change has direct as well as indirect impact on ecotourism. These impacts are due to changes in temperature, extreme weather events and other climatic factors, transformation of the natural environment, etc. Ecotourism promotional activities by the government were inadequate in attracting tourists. Organized development of tourism in a rural area will create many jobs such as information assistants, drivers, guides, escorts, security staffs, food production staffs, food service staffs, entertainment performers, developers and many other businesses. All these provide a continuous source of income to the rural community. From this study, it can be concluded that Aritar, Kewzing, Darap and Yuksom villages have immense tourism potentials for unique development of its ecotourism sector in future. This study reveals that the major factor which attracts tourists to these villages is the natural beauty and pristine environment of these areas. But development of ecotourism is required to be

done in a phased manner so that it is in tune with the carrying capacity of this territory and it is not detrimental to its ecosystem. Ecotourism plays a vital role in the development of tourism in Sikkim. Many families depend upon the tourism industry for their livelihood. And the local people benefit from ecotourism both directly and indirectly. In terms of the number of ecotourism destinations, Sikkim occupies one of the top positions in India.

The economic benefits of ecotourism to the service providers are well established as is evident from the findings of this research. Ecotourism is a rather recent development in the villages studied (except in Yuksom, where mass tourism has been going on for quite some time much of which has now transformed to ecotourism); there are hardly any adverse environmental impacts visible in any of them. Preservation of the natural elements is vital to the long term success and sustainability of ecotourism. There is no organized effort in the community to keep the environment neat, clean and green except at Yuksom. How well the ecotourism service providers can organize themselves to provide a mechanism for environmental sustainability is therefore a critical factor.

Further, the impact of the improvement in the general well being of the people and their increased purchasing power as can be inferred from an increased human development index is also a factor that has not been considered within the scope of this study. Sikkim is one of the fastest growing States of India and the poverty level has been lowered in recent years. Hence even if ecotourism has brought with it economic benefits to the people there is every possibility that while asset-holding ecotourism service providers such as hoteliers might continue to be in ecotourism others could be attracted to other forms of vocation. The research findings point to the direction of the villagers taking ecotourism as a seasonal employment rather than a full time engagement. Many respondents were continuing with their traditional engagements such as agriculture or government jobs while doing ecotourism during the tourist season only. While this provides economic security, the seriousness with which ecotourism needs to be carried out for its sustainability may perhaps be lost with resultant recession in ecotourism to the studied villages.

The competition from newly developing ecotourism sites both within Sikkim and outside it is also an important factor. Joint forest management has now been established in several parts of India such as in North Bengal where most wildlife areas have joint forest management where community development through ecotourism is being vigorously pursued. The more the competition from neighbouring areas, that much harder the ecotourism service providers of Sikkim will have to work to attract ecotourists to their villages. These are challenges that will emerge for the Sikkim ecotourism providers in future to which they will have to respond.

The literacy level of the villagers who engage in ecotourism is also critical to introducing modernization in ecotourism services. Being a rapidly evolving enterprise which caters to elite ecotourists who live mostly in developed urban locales, the introduction of digital services and modern amenities on regular basis is also important. The study revealed that the existing tourism providers were mostly not those with college degrees but school pass outs. Some of them were not aware of the benefits of having web sites. Though they were sending their children to schools and wanted them to do well in life they themselves were not very informed of latest developments.

Recently government took many measures to improve ecotourism development and the tourists are satisfied with the facilities provided to them at the destination. The analysis revealed that age, education and gender of tourists occupy important place in determining the satisfaction level of tourists. The educational level and age of tourists are the major factors in choosing tourist sites. It should be mentioned here that some domestic and foreign tourists visited Sikkim more than three times. Both tourists and local people mentioned that they do not face any pollution problem in Sikkim. The respondents felt that tourism has a positive impact on preservation and spreads awareness about natural environment. Regarding the respondents attitudes towards ecotourism development, the result shows that they have consistently positive attitudes towards ecotourism.

Ecotourism leads to community development and improves the life standard of local people. It is evident from the present study that the ecotourism development in these villages plays an important role in the economic development mainly through an improvement in the income and employment of the local people. The number of tourist

arrivals (both domestic and foreign tourists) in the ecotourism destinations in Sikkim is increasing day by day. These increasing tourist arrivals raise optimism among tour operators, agents and others involved in tourism industry. The most serious problem in these areas as revealed from this study is infrastructural problem.

### **7.3. Suggestions for Future Management of Ecotourism**

Though ecotourism is being executed in impressive manner in the present day, more is needed to manage ecotourism activities in future. Some of the recommendations for effective future management of ecotourism would include:

- State administration should deploy adequate staff that can oversee, monitor and manage ecotourism initiatives in the said regions.
- It is imperative that appropriate training be provided to local communities to educate them about the various facets of ecotourism and to ensure tourists visiting the region have a largely positive experience. Training can be provided to village leaders, guest house / home stay operators, guides, cab operators etc.
- Considering the magnanimity of the Indian tourism market in general which is expanding with each passing day, it is essential that adequate marketing strategies are adopted and implemented to promote ecotourism within the said regions. Marketing activities should be focused both on the domestic as well as the international market.
- Entry fees to conservation parks and spots of tourist interest should be restructured to make it more rational and should be ploughed back for conservation.
- Ecotourism should also include in its ambit religious tourism which will offer specialized tourism packages that facilitate tourists to visit local temples and monasteries.
- A schedule of cultural programs and regional festivals should be published and presented to tourists which will enable them to plan their visits and facilitate a more enriching experience.
- Training programs should also be conducted for tourists that would emphasize upon them the need to conserve the environment.
- Tourists and local communities should be educated about waste management.

- Action groups can be formed involving members from the local communities and government bodies who can deliberate and decide upon the future course of action and outline ways that would enhance the overall ecotourism experience both for the tourists and the local communities.
- An information center can also be established that would present tourists with adequate information about the local communities, tourist attractions, options for accommodations and other relevant information (Resmi, 2014).

In the light of the findings of the study, observations made during the period of the survey and discussions made with experts in the field of study, the following recommendations have been put forward:-

### **7.3.1. Infrastructural Development**

It is revealed from the survey that domestic tourist is coming more than foreign tourist. This is mainly due to lack of adequate infrastructural facilities. The government should plan to build world-class infrastructural facilities to attract foreign visitors and to increase the wealth of India. More infrastructural facilities should be started to attract more tourists. The state can welcome investment in infrastructure sector from International Funding Agencies. Banks and other financial institutions should extend financial assistance for infrastructure development associated with ecotourism. Improvement of the telecommunication system, information technology system and the banking services in the tourist destinations for the development of tourism facilities is of paramount importance. Laying of trails, transport arrangement, interpretation skills for guides and basic facilities development are important steps for ecotourism development.

### **7.3.2. Accommodation**

Tourism can be promoted in a big way by establishing tourist resorts at strategic locations. Unfortunately, neither the government nor the department of tourism has done anything worth mentioning in this respect. Resorts can be built under the public-private participation. Proper accommodation centers with modern amenities suitable for stay of the international tourists must be constructed. Construction of day shelter is another step for ecotourism development.

### **7.3.3. Marketing**

There should be some improvement in marketing facilities for ecotourism promotion. Steps should be taken to market tourism potentials of Sikkim in India and abroad. Ecotourism marketing is different from traditional marketing as it involves the marketing of products and services with positive ecological outcomes to environmentally concerned consumers. Effective marketing is necessary for ecotourism development. The Khangchendzonga National Park is set to be nominated as a World Heritage Site by United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on mixed criteria basis i.e. on nature and culture criteria (Chandy pers. comm.). The State has also been declared as 100% organic farming State. Both of these add to the environmental values of the State and will attract foreign high end tourism if properly marketed.

### **7.3.4. Publicity and Information Measures**

Tourism product, whether natural or man-made, should be publicized for encouraging the flow of tourists. In order to provide proper information and education for the visitors, tourist information centers are necessary. In order to earn foreign exchange, proper publicity should be made to attract foreign tourists towards ecotourism. Ecotourism exhibition is an important tool for the ecotourism promotion. Brochures and guidebooks can also be used as a promotional method. Advertising and mass communication media can be used for the promotion of ecotourism. Picture CDs can be used for promoting ecotourism. It is recommended that the internet be better used for information exchange. Qualified websites with useful information is necessary. Ecotourism industry should also be made as an IT-enabled tourism industry. Mobile based and IT-based services for ecotourism promotion should be taken up. Internet and social networking sites for marketing Sikkim Tourism will be helpful.

### **7.3.5. Waste Management**

Waste management is an important aspect for promoting ecotourism. The tourist spots should be 'plastic free'. Adequate waste bins should be kept in all tourist areas to keep the surroundings clean. These wastes should be collected and disposed in a scientific manner. Burning of waste should be done in safe places under controlled

conditions. Hi-tech pollution control equipments are in continuous operation to ensure and improve the efforts of the Government in preventing pollution. Continuous R&D efforts should be carried out. Focusing research efforts for developing comprehensive technology support system, which will help to achieve maximum resource end-use efficiency, minimizing wastage of resources and pollution emission and enhance total productivity in all sectors of the economy.

### **7.3.6. Evolving Ecotourism Plan**

A separate policy for ecotourism has been formulated in Sikkim to distinguish it from mainstream (or mass) tourism operations. However, still a lot needs to be done to provide the environment for ecotourism to thrive as defined in the policy documentation. The Government and other agencies should examine ways to provide assistance to ecotourism operations research. A holistic and integrated development of the ecotourism sector would require significant funds in creation of supporting infrastructure and in capacity building amongst the local community to manage and operate the sector. In order to develop the ecotourism destinations in the state, there should be a different plan for each tourist destinations. Specific plans and actions can increase benefits from tourism and decrease the gravity of a negative impact. Active implementation and management of plans and prompt attention to emerging tourism issues will maximize positive and minimize negative effects. Good monitoring efforts can identify trouble areas. Development of ecotourism should be considered as a management tool for natural resource protection and bio-diversity conservation.

Voluntary codes of conduct to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism and improve environmental quality have been developed by government, private sector, and non-governmental organization. These codes of conduct cover a wide range of the stakeholders in tourism including the private sector, government, local communities and tourists. These codes must be strictly followed.

### **7.3.7. Other Recommendations**

In the light of the results found in this study, the following are some of the other recommendations, which may be given for the improvement of ecotourism:

Motivate the local community to increase their involvement in sustainable tourism activities.

- Provide training programs to local people and communities.
- More education and guidance must be provided for the stakeholders involved in ecotourism in order to secure better participation of local communities in ecotourism.
- Improve livelihood options of local communities through ecotourism activities.
- Participation of women self-help groups in the conservation programs will help in ecotourism development.
- Local handicraft, cuisine, folksongs/music to be encouraged and local economic earning activities should be promoted. Creation of local committees is required for this.
- The central and state governments should allocate necessary funds from time to time for the purpose to improve roadways, transportation, ensure clean and hygienic environment and provision of safety and security conditions at tourist spots.
- Every year, give separate budget for ecotourism development programs.
- Protection and conservation of total bio diversity and implement animal welfare programs for wildlife protection. A separate protected area tourism plan is required.
- Public participation is essential in protecting the fauna and flora from wildfires.
- To maintain sustainability of the place, the physical, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of the carrying capacity should be kept in consideration.
- Strictly reducing the number of visitors admitted to certain sites on the basis of carrying capacity of the place.
- Human resources play a crucial role in the success of a service industry like tourism. The quality and quantity of human resources is equally important.
- Proper facilities for training and development of staff should be provided by tourism industry.
- Construct more ecotourism facilities by using eco-friendly techniques like solar energy, capture and utilization of rain water, recycling of garbage, natural cross ventilation

- A high level self-sufficiency in food generation through orchards, ecological farms, aquaculture.
- Conduct scientific studies on the impact of ecotourism on income and employment. State must enact tourism friendly legislations.
- Tourism is a service industry and multiplicity of taxes exists in this sector. The quantum of taxes also varies from place to place. This makes tourism product expensive.
- Tourism contributes a lot the Indian economy. To attract more skilled persons into this sector, tourism based knowledge is necessary. So it is recommended to include more tourism and ecotourism based courses in curriculum.
- Tourism clubs should be organized in School/ colleges to create awareness about ecotourism among the youth. Environmental Education Centre and an Interpretation Centers should be set up in Sikkim. Steering interest amongst youth towards ecotourism through school activities. Promote and develop - educational programs to awareness about nature conservation
- Plantation tourism is given necessary support as it can complement the effort in the ecotourism activities being taken up in the National Parks and Sanctuaries.
- There is also need to involve private sector in tourism development. Public private partnership can do a lot in this area.
- Besides the above, proper utilization of existing resources available in Sikkim facilitates effective functioning of ecotourism projects.
- Strengthening of the Directorate of Ecotourism by providing it with the material and manpower resources to fulfill its role under the ecotourism policy of the State as an agency that promotes ecotourism in the State (Resmi, 2014).

#### **7.4. Scope for Further Research and Policy Implications**

Nature-based tourism is undoubtedly one of the most significant areas of research in tourism studies today. Ecotourism is viewed in many parts of the world as the next wave of community and regional development. In order to maintain ecotourism site as a popular destination, it requires a detailed study of individual preference pattern; motivating forces etc. should be carried out. Ecotourism acts as a tool for sustainability. A detailed examination of ecotourism activities would require more information. Because of personal limitations and also the limitations of time,

resources and data, this study is limited to four field areas. Comparative study of other ecotourism destinations in Sikkim would be an interesting area and we can understand the regional variations. Researcher can make inter-destination comparisons by applying more advanced statistical tools. There is ample scope for further research in this area and will be helpful for the growth of domestic ecotourism market and making awareness on environmental protection and preservation of nature for future generation. More studies can be conducted about the ecological aspect of tourism. There is also extensive research possibility for more theoretical studies associated with ecotourism. Ecotourism will require careful planning in the future to avoid further negative impacts on biodiversity. More research is needed to help to formulate policy. This study would help policy makers, planners, educationists and environmentalist to formulate new policies associated with ecotourism. The result of this study will help the administrators' to change the approach towards ecotourism. The outcome of the studies can be used for further improvements in this area, since Sikkim has a large potential for developing ecotourism market. If the government takes proper measures to rectify the important problems revealed from this study, Sikkim will become an important ecotourism destination in the world.

### **7.5. Contribution of the Researcher**

The detailed study about the impact of ecotourism opens new areas of research. This study explores the challenges and opportunities presented in ecotourism destinations. A serious attempt has been made to make an in depth analysis of the satisfaction level of beneficiaries and evaluate literature on ecotourism. The researcher has also tried to analyze the working of ecotourism projects in Sikkim. The policy implications as well as the areas that need to be further improved in order to strengthen its effects on economy were analyzed by the researcher. This study would be helpful to the Government in making certain decisions associated with ecotourism. A detailed evaluation about ecotourism in Sikkim will help to understand the importance of local people in ecotourism projects and the scope of ecotourism in the economic development of Sikkim.

## **7.6. Conclusion**

It has been clearly established that ecotourism relates to accountable travel to pristine areas with natural richness and an activity that helps the local community to conserve the environment while also improving their overall socio-economic condition. Through the practice of ecotourism it is possible to not only preserve the natural environment but it also enables the sustenance of indigenous communities and cultures. Though ecotourism draws parallels with nature based tourism and sustainable tourism, it is not the same. Actually, sustainable tourism would relate to a more controlled type of tourism that does not drain out the existing resources and does not hamper the scope for future travellers to enjoy the same resources. Contrarily, tourism that is nature based would relate to a reasonable wider perspective that would involve a travel based activity with a specific focus on nature which may or may not be sustainable in the long run. Though ecotourism may exhibit some of the characteristics of sustainable and nature based tourism, the larger focus of ecotourism is on community development and environmental conservation. Moreover, the restricting factor of scale sizably distinguishes it from the other two types of tourism. The key principles that render any travel activity as sustainable ecotourism would include; minimizing the adverse effect of tourism on culture and nature, disseminating awareness about environment and culture, presenting an affirmative experience for tourists and service providers, raising income that enables conservation initiatives, guaranteeing the socio-economic development of the local community and accent on the infrastructure that has been established in agreement with the local environment. Hence, ecotourism initiatives on the basis of these principles cannot emerge as mass tourism initiatives although ecotourism can be effectively managed if it is planned and executed in a manner that is being done in other nations that have initiated ecotourism. Therefore, ecotourism initiatives are the most appropriate mode of tourism that can be practiced in the identified regions of Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap. The methods applied in this study included an evaluation of the status of the local communities in the designated areas prior to adopting ecotourism activities and post adoption. It also appraised the level of economic growth after adopting ecotourism. The evaluation process of ecotourism activities in the said areas was done through a detailed study that involved a total of 146 respondents collectively from the four villages of Yuksom, Aritar,

Kewzing and Darap. Respondents were quizzed about the socio-economic impact of ecotourism on their villages, its impact on their personal lives, impact on their standard of living, sources of livelihood other than ecotourism and the income generated through ecotourism.

From a socio-economic perspective, it was noticed that the income generated from ecotourism was instrumental in enhancing the local economy on the whole while supporting local administrative bodies and the local communities to enhance the physical infrastructure that facilitated ecotourism and also improved the social well-being of the local communities. It was noticed that families that had no known source of income were able to sustain a decent livelihood through ecotourism while those already having a sustainable source of income were able to substantially augment their income. The unavoidable facet of assessing sustainability levels of ecotourism in any region would relate to learning about the overall economic impact created through ecotourism. However, it was imperative that all members of the local community were benefitted by it irrespective of the social fabric consistently to render the initiative viable from a socio-economic perspective and feasible in the long-term. With regards to the four key areas; Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap, it was noticed that women and younger people were more engaged in ecotourism activities as they functioned as cooks, guides, drivers and managers within home stay facilities. According to them, the extent of annual revenues generated through ecotourism had been rising on a progressive level each year. Subsequently, more and more members from the local community were evincing interest and actively participating in ecotourism ventures which rendered the initiative as a key source of livelihood. In addition, ecotourism initiatives presented significant multiplier effect on the regional and local communities by augmenting the per capita income, enhancing the purchasing power of the local communities and more significantly improved the socio-economic capital for infrastructural development. Through this study, the complexities and actual ground realities of ecotourism were explored on the basis of case studies pertaining to the said four key regions. The findings of the study revealed that the ecotourism has steered economic growth within the local community and has boosted the local economy. Ecotourism also has had a sizable impact on the local communities from a social perspective. Ecotourism has facilitated an enhancement of social contact amongst

tourists and the local communities which resulted in mutual appreciation, understanding, tolerance, awareness, learning, family bonding, mutual respect and liking. On one hand, people from the local communities get to know about the outside world without even having to travel out of their villages and on the other hand, tourists to the region are presented with an opportunity to learn about local traditions and customs. Ecotourism also impacts local communities when the revenue generated from ecotourism is utilized to enhance the social infrastructure like schools, healthcare institutions, libraries, cyber cafes etc. Further, the richness of the natural environment and the ethnicity of the region are what attract tourists to a region and it enables the conservation of local customs, art forms and handicrafts which faced the danger of gradual extinction. Tourists to the region spend money on food, accommodation, entertainment, transportation and shopping. This kind of expenditure has been instrumental in generating direct employment opportunities for people from the local communities in hotels, transport and travel agencies. However, the indirect economic impact that has been witnessed in the form of multiplier effect is significantly higher. For instance, the commercial activities of local suppliers of vegetables, meat, eggs etc. to hotels and restaurants during peak tourist seasons have increased. The existing natural environment in the said four areas and its cultural diversity presents a favorable condition for the progress of ecotourism. The economic impact of ecotourism is now highly acknowledged. Evaluation of the influx of tourists into the region indicates amicable trends and a liberal state of development for the growth of ecotourism. Further, the region is projected to witness a marked increase in the number of tourists thronging the area in the coming years.

Ecotourism has the potential to decrease the dependence of the local community on their natural habitat for their day to day sustenance. Ecotourism offers them with an alternative source of livelihood and engages them as active stakeholders in the overall process of development. Tourists to the region create a much needed market for non-timber forest products like honey and local artistic endeavors like handicrafts and embroidery products. In fact, ecotourism can also be utilized as a highly potent tool for communication which will help to convince the local community about the advantages of preserving the forests and natural habitat. People from the regions of Yuksom, Aritar, Kewzing and Darap understand the implications of ecotourism and have actively

adopted and engaged in ecotourism initiatives and have utilized it effectively to enhance the local and individual economies.

Ecotourism has expanded fast and in a revolutionary way. It is an offshoot wave of environmental awareness. Due to tourism's strong role in the nation and economies of the world, the need for tourism research is imperative. The movement towards ecotourism in India is at once a threat and an opportunity to create more sustainable tourism. By diverting tourist traffic to ensure that the carrying capacity of any destination is not exceeded, by planning for regeneration of natural resources, and by generating awareness in the host community whereby they are prepared to deal with the negative impact of mass tourism are the ways of attaining sustainability.

There is a considerable scope for research on the evaluation of ecotourism projects in Sikkim. International tourists would want to travel in environmental friendly ways to environmentally sound destinations. As ecotourism grows in popularity there are a number of challenges that need to be faced. For eliminating weaknesses mentioned in this thesis, a planned approach is needed and thereby Sikkim can attract more and more eco-tourists and create an image of one of the world's best ecotourism destinations. Sikkim has a vast opportunity in this area. Ecotourism has the capacity to deliver a lot of economic benefits to traditional cultures. However, whether those benefits are realized depends on how well the ecotourism is managed. There is an urgent need for improved analysis of ecotourism issues as part of the ecotourism planning and development process. The growth of tourism without proper control and supervision will endanger the environment. Tourism in ecologically sensitive areas needs close monitoring. In Short, tourism in nature-based areas should be ecologically sustainable. There should also be provision for learning process for a visitor. Ecotourism could be a tool for environmental conservation, local empowerment, poverty alleviation and so on. So it requires good planning on the basis of regulations. This study reveals that tourism has a positive impact on the social aspects as it provides better and higher quality of services.

The economic benefit of such an activity should accrue to the local population to ensure sustainability. Ecotourism enjoys a significant superiority over general tourism with regard to tourist arrivals and economic, social and environmental benefits.

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that ecotourism development and protection of environment can be made possible with the careful planning and execution of projects by the government departments, tourist officials along with the co-operation of the public. In future, ecotourism will continue to grow in several parts of the world as a profitable way of life.

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