

UNIT – 'B'

IMPACT OF TOURISM ON NORTH BENGAL

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SOME PROBLEMS OF TOURISM AND PLANNING MEASURES

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Prospects

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IMPACT OF TOURISM ON NORTH BENGAL

Considerable debate exists today over the nature and extent of the impact which tourist development may have on host societies and localities. Different writers have argued their views from their own particular standpoint in this case. Economists, in the 1960s, tended to emphasize the economic gains of tourism. Anthropologists and Sociologists, on the other hand, have generally been more pessimistic, stressing the socially disruptive nature of tourism (Doughlas Pearce, 1983). Again **Potter** (1978) has mentioned the environmental impact of tourism. In fact, tourism has a multi-dimensional effect on a region. These impacts are far-reaching. **Fuster** (1974) has pointed out that the effects of tourism may be felt not only in the tourist centres but also in neighbouring non- tourist towns and in the generating areas.

Here a general framework for assessing the impact of tourism on North Bengal is highlighted by considering three distinct areas.

Economic impact

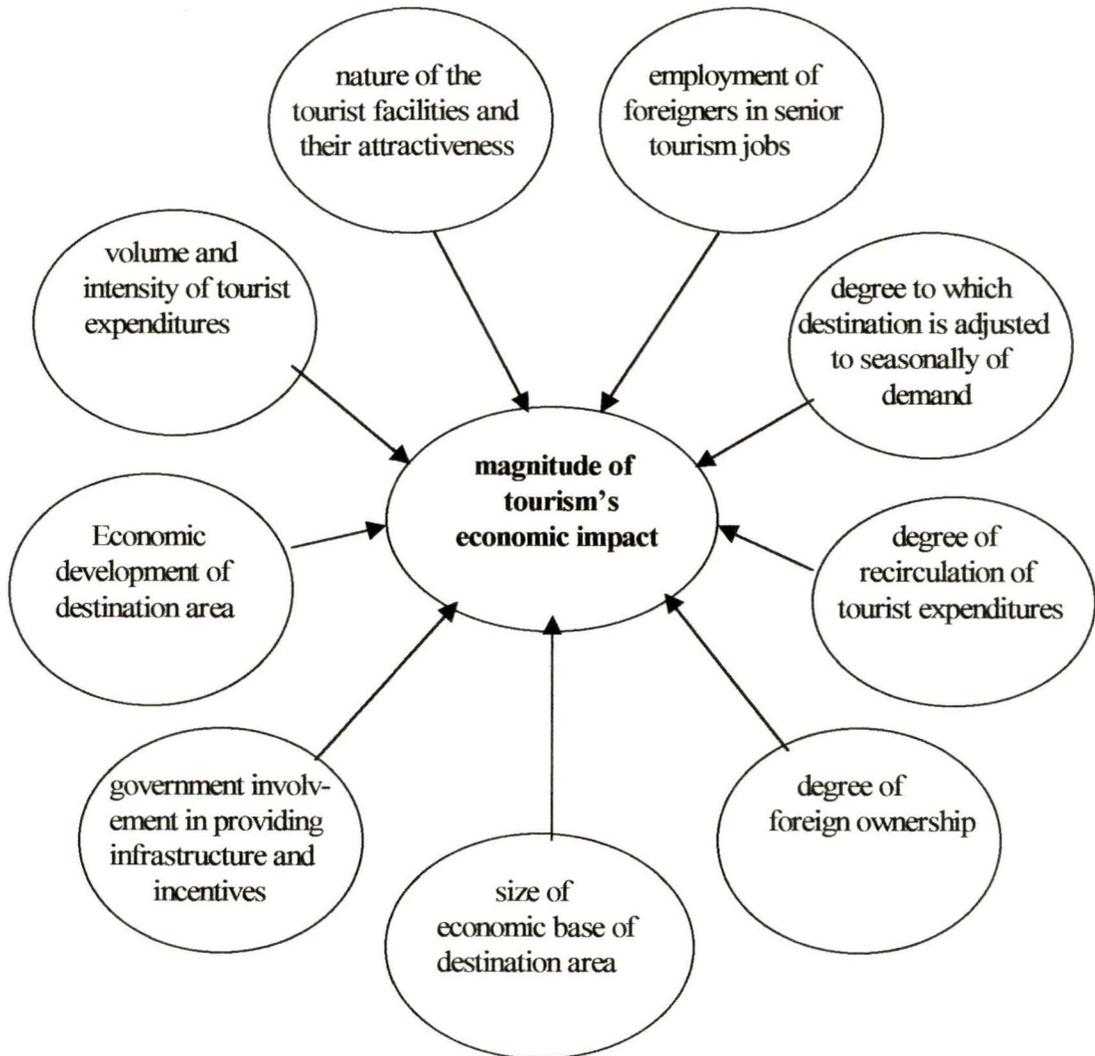
Socio-cultural impacts

Ecological-environmental impacts.

ECONOMIC IMPACT :

Economic transformation through tourism has now normally been accepted by all and accordingly tourism has been recognized as an industry. It invites foreign exchange earnings, accelerates employment and income potentials in almost every sector of economy at national, regional and local levels. Before entering into the deeper parts of the economic impact, some factors governing tourism's economic impacts are to be taken into consideration for the benefit of the present study.

Figure-30

FACTORS GOVERNING TOURISM'S ECONOMIC IMPACT

Source : John Lea, (1988) P.44

Although the objective and detailed evaluation of the economic impact of tourism is a long and complicated task, the following considerations can be highlighted—

1. TOURISM AS A REVENUE EARNER AND MULTIPLIER EFFECT :

Tourism is a vital source of revenue in North Bengal. In Darjiling areas, the most rich tourist nuclei of the study area about 1.5 lakh tourists visit every year. The total earnings from these tourists is more than Rs. 25 crores annually. This flow of money generated by the tourists filters through the economy stimulating other sectors through the operation of the multiplier effect. In fact the multiplier effect is an income concept which was emerged from the work of KAHN and KEYNES in 1930s. However the expenditures of tourists are normally expressed in terms of various sectors of tourism industry regarding accommodation, cuisine, transportation and entertainments etc. The money spent by the tourists goes to the local business in a number of ways. This money in turn is spent on salaries and on meeting the demands of the tourists such as food, drink, entertainment etc. Each time a tourist makes an expenditure, a ripple of additional spending is sent through the economy. This ripple is called a **Multiplier** (Smith Stephen—1983,p.171). Thus the expenditure incurred by the tourists supports not only the tourist industry directly but indirectly also supports a number of other activities which produce goods and services for the tourist industry. In this way money spent by tourists flows several times and spread in to various sectors of economy of the study area.

(2) TOURISM GENERATES EMPLOYMENT :

Tourism's contribution to creating jobs or reducing unemployment in the study area is very important. In fact tourism is a highly labour intensive

industry and thus is an efficient way to generate employment in North Bengal. This employment occurs in a number of ways, such as –

Accommodation Sector : In the hill tourist spots of North Bengal like Darjiling, Kurseong, Kalimpong and Mirik a large number of people are engaged in accommodation sector. The hotel , restaurant and entertainment sectors thus directly employed about 3000 people.

Transport sector : Besides accommodation, transport sector also generates employment. Transport services and trading activities mainly depend on tourist which employed about 20 thousand people in Darjiling and in other areas.

Souvenir Industry : Souvenir industry is another sector which engages a number of people in it. All tourists domestic or foreigners buy not only artistic creations but carry with them a symbol of Himalayan culture and tradition. The wonderful and fascinating handmade goods like woolen clothes, shawls, caps, copper ware, various woolen models, Tibetan curios are taken thus by the tourists. So there is a great demand of these souvenirs in the region and the local people are engaged themselves in such activities.

Apart from these hotel guides, tourist guides , tour operators are also benefited due to expansion of tourism in the study area. In all about 30 thousand people directly and indirectly depend on tourist trade for their living (Techno-Economic Survey, Darjiling hill areas).

(3) **DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT** : Tourism has been traditionally seen as an important tool for regional development. Early writers such as Selke (1936) and

Christaller (1954,1964) stressed that tourism tends to develop on the periphery and thus can stimulate economic activity in a region. So far as our study region is concerned, tourism definitely has opened a new vista for the development of the region.

The construction and provision of roads, rail lines, airports, buildings, hotels, electricity and gas supplies, sanitation, water supply and a number of many other things are undertaken in the Darjiling hilly areas to attract and facilitate tourists from outside. These infrastructural changes also benefit the residents of the region. Besides, the development of infrastructure has formed the basis for diversification of other economic activities such as small scale industries, horticulture, roads, ropeways and means of communication and hydel project etc. Again a number of Hill Industrial Estates have been established at various places to promote resource-based and demand- based small scale industries in the study area. Tourist development directly or indirectly acts as an effective means for revival of infrastructure and regional development. Thus the under- developed areas like Bijanbari, Lava, Lolaygaon, Sandakphu, Phalut, Gossanimari, Gour, Pandua, Jagjibanpur can greatly be benefited from tourism development.

(4) INFLATIONARY PRESSURE :

Tourists inject money (earned elsewhere) into the destination economy. While this increases the income of the region, it also causes inflationary pressures. Tourists typically have a higher expenditure capability than the residents do- either because tourists have higher incomes or because they have saved for the trip and are inclined to splurge while on vacation. Hence they are able to bid up the prices of such commodities as food, transportation, arts and crafts. This invites inflationary pressures and is detrimental to the economic welfare of residents of the host community (R. McIntosh, 1980). However this inflationary effect may occur during the

initial stages when the supply of goods and services can often not respond quickly enough to meet the increased demand. Besides this, as the tourist industry develops in an area land prices also rise sharply with inflation (Lundberg, 1981). Housing prices also run with this as the tourists seek holiday homes and external developers and employees look for rental or permanent accommodation. Thus Darjiling hilly region often suffers inflationary pressure. More over, the present land price in town ship area or peripheral area is sky rising and housing prices have also been accelerated with the advent of tourism in the area.

(5) BALANCE OF PAYMENTS :

The invisible earnings from overseas tourists of the study region have also a positive effect on the balance of payments as a whole. However, the relevant data for analyzing this are not available in the study area since balance of payments is measured in national level.

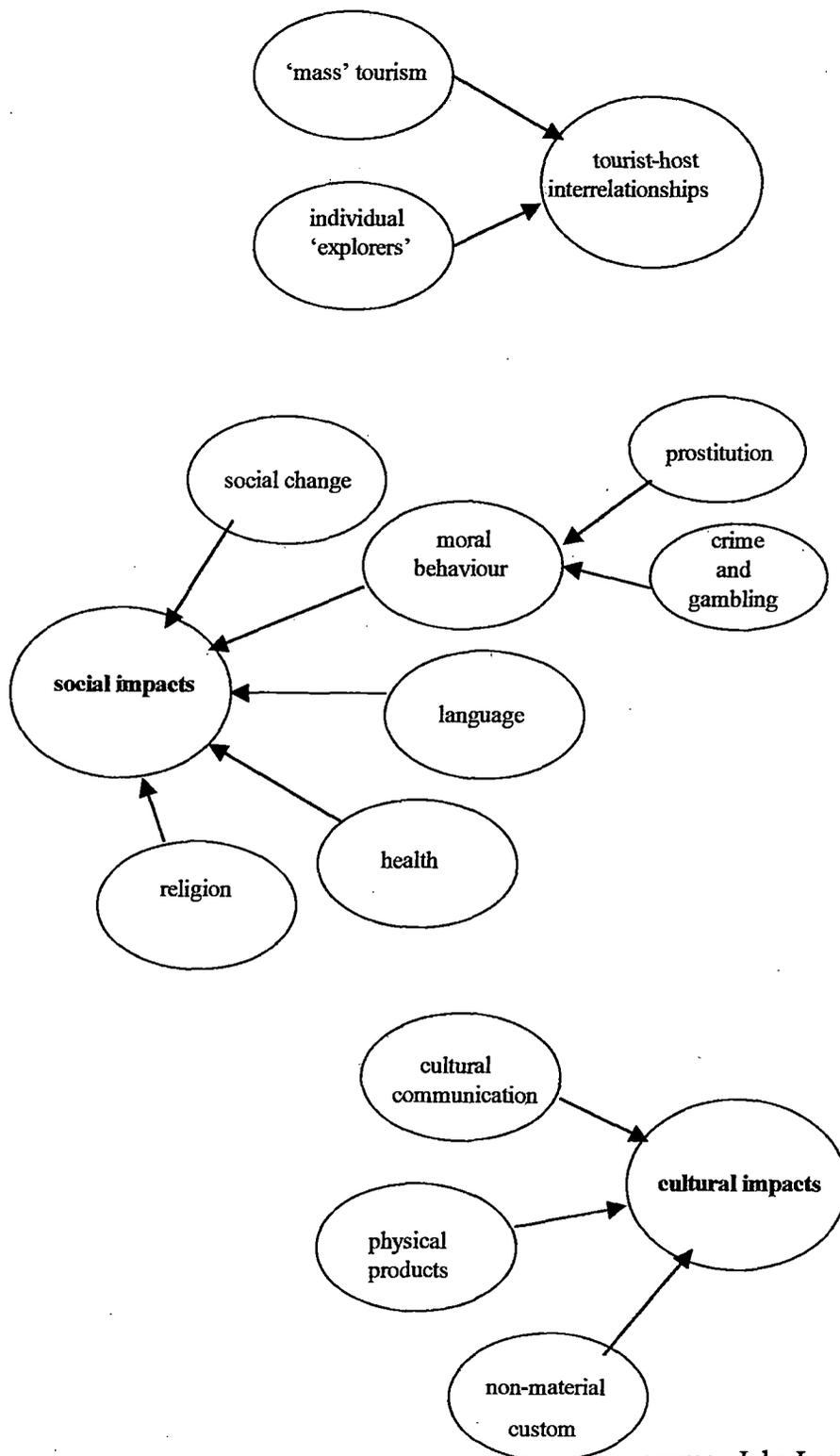
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS :

Besides the economic impact, tourism brings a number of positive and negative social and cultural changes in the present study area. **John Lea** (1988) in his famous book 'Tourism and Development in the Third World' has mentioned some aspects of Social and cultural impacts of tourism which can be refashioned for the benefit of the study area (Figure-31) .

SOCIAL IMPACTS :

Tourism has a great influence on society of the study area. These can be summarized as follows—

Figure--31

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM

source : John Lea (1988, P. 63)

1. CHANGE IN DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERN :

Tourism affects the demographic structure of a region. Development of the industry will usually increase the size of the resident population, as the creation of new jobs slows out- migration or attracts new workers to the area (Dumas, 1975). Ultimately this brings a significant change in the degree of regional urbanization. Thus since the first half of 15th century when the British introduced health resorts in the Darjiling Himalaya, the population have been continuing to rise and now the region is overcrowded.

2. LINGUISTIC CHANGES :

In a tourist spot different tourists gather from different edges of the world. Naturally their languages will be different. Residents have to face with these tourists in every moment. So they should know other languages in order to communicate with the tourists. Other wise tourist development will not be blossomed. In Darjiling areas even a coolie or a guide, a tour operator can speak different languages i.e. English, Hindi, Bengali etc. Thus with the advent of tourism linguistic changes also occur in 'host' countries.

3. EFFECTS ON MORAL BEHAVIOUR :

Due to contact with the tourists and local residents, the moral behaviour of the residents declines. Thus in the growing tourist spots of North Bengal we see a gradual increase of undesirable effects like drinking, gambling, drug addiction, crime, prostitution etc. Teenagers, thus in some cases have been the victim of these effects. These also destroy the creative expressions and family relationship of the local residents in the study area.

4. EFFECTS ON HEALTH :

Tourism has the dual effect of promoting the provision of improved health care in a region while acts as a vehicle to spread some forms of diseases. 'Hosts and guests' both can be affected by such diseases. The very

recent threat of AIDS, an incurable sexually transmitted disease is a living example of this.

5. XENOPHOBIA :

Xenophobia, the fear of strangers can also result from some typical social changes due to occurrence of the foreign tourists which are not easily acceptable to the residents. Overcrowding in the market, on roadways and at recreational spots may slowly increase the level of frustration among local residents. However, this sort of problem is not easily discernible in the tourist spots of North Bengal and the whole issue needs a purely clinical approach for its thorough investigation. These negative impacts of tourism development have begun to surface in academics only within the last decades.

CULTURAL IMPACTS :

The development of tourism in a region not only influences on its social life but also brings some cultural impacts in the region. These impacts can be shown in the following way--

1. INFLUENCE ON TRADITIONAL WAY OF LIFE :

Tourists in the study area not only bring money, they also import a strong visible life style with them. Their manners, dress and address, food habits and merry making- all bring some newness and uniqueness which attract the local residents. 'Democratization and modernization of attitudes' among the young, arising out of contact with youthful western tourists. Thus a new generation is being emerged out of this process. This generation tries to follow western cultures and life styles. JAFARI (1974) has mentioned this

trend as '**social hybridization**'. He has called such social hybrid as *marginal man*. This marginal man is a resident of the host country who has accepted the values and life styles of tourists and tries to achieve them. He is caught between the two cultures and lies on their interface. It normally yields to negative results. Thus the deterioration of traditional culture and life is gradually emerging in the tourist spots of North Bengal especially in the hills.

2. CULTURAL RENNOVATION :

Tourism brings a number of positive cultural changes too. In fact cultural consciousness, cultural re-awakening, cultural social renovation and preservation are the good symptoms of modern tourism (A. P. Singh, 1989). It has resulted in the restoration of architectural monuments, buildings and preservation of important landscape, traditional art, handicrafts and folk dances in the study area. So the people of the present study area have become fully conscious of such cultures and they are preserving it to harvest money and there by push their economy far ahead. Recent awareness of cultural renovation of Koch Bihar's '*Heritage Tourism*' is its living example.

3. CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING :

The interaction of a large number of people with the local people of the study area greatly enriches and promotes friendship and cultural exchange. People belonging to different countries, practicing different lifestyles and speaking different languages come together to make friends. The mingling of different cultures helps to break down prejudices, barriers and suspicions that exist between nations. The very best way of getting to know another country is to go there, and when vast numbers travel, the narrow rigid boundaries that keep people in compartments naturally tend to shrink and a positive move towards better understandings begins to operate.

This also helps to keep national integration. In fact “ **Tourism, a passport to World- peace.**” GUSTAVO DIAZ ORDAZ (1967), the Constitutional President of the United States of Mexico rightly remarks “ The world should no longer regard tourism merely as a business, but as a means by which men may know and understand one another ; human understanding being so essential in the world at this time”.

ECOLOGICAL – ENVIRONMENT IMPACTS :

The growth of tourism in North Bengal affects environment in many ways. An assessment of this, is particularly important as the various facets of the environment constitute the basis of tourist development in the region. These can be summarized as follows –

(1) PERMANENT ENVIRONMENT RESTRUCTURING :

The first major source of environmental stress in the study area is permanent restructuring of environment brought about by a variety of major construction activities, such as urban developments, construction of transport network, building of marinas or sky-lifts. There were once majestic wooded slopes, running white waters, rustic peasant cultural settings and divine solitude before tourism came to the study area. But as tourists swarmed like locusts, the beauty faded away and the valley has been filled in with monstrous concreted high-rises. Really

“Man kills the thing he loves

Tourism destroys tourism”.

Thus with the advent of tourism, the heavy human use of open space is adversely affecting the biomass of the region especially in Darjiling hill areas.

(2) DEPLETION OF FAUNA AND FLORA :

Tourism is also causing the destruction of existing fauna and flora in the region. Trampling directly kills plants and it invites soil erosion. Moreover, increasing use of wood as fuel and timber in a number of industrial products (Including souvenirs industry) also leads to felling and cutting of trees and consequently encourages the soil erosion. These initial changes in the local biotic community lead to the eventual loss of other species. Plants are also lost by plucking of wild flowers and leaves by wanderers. A number of rare plants are being exhausted by this very habit of a number of tourists. Recent increase of landslides in the Darjiling hills is nothing but the out come of tourism. Moreover the depletion of flora badly affecting the haven of wild life species in the region.

(3) GENERATION OF WASTE RESIDUALS :

The replacement of the existing natural environment by a new built environment gives rise to various residual products in the form of waste in the region. The used papers, nuisances, plastics and other various types of thrown garb ages affect land, water and air quality. In addition to this, during peak seasons the automobile emissions are found to be higher as a result of the effects of altitude and slower travelling speeds. This environmental degradation is prominent in Darjiling Himalayan region.

Since the present study is concerned primarily with the impacts of tourism, hence two figures, adopted by *Tejvir Singh, Valene L. Smith* (1992) are considered to be suited best for the study area. The two figures(**figure-32 & 33**) will reflect an overall picture of tourism's impacts of the region.

In conclusion it can be said that when tourism helps in the economic development of the region, it brings about some environmental and socio-cultural disruptions too. For this very nature of double-edged sword it should be developed methodically.

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON NORTH BENGAL

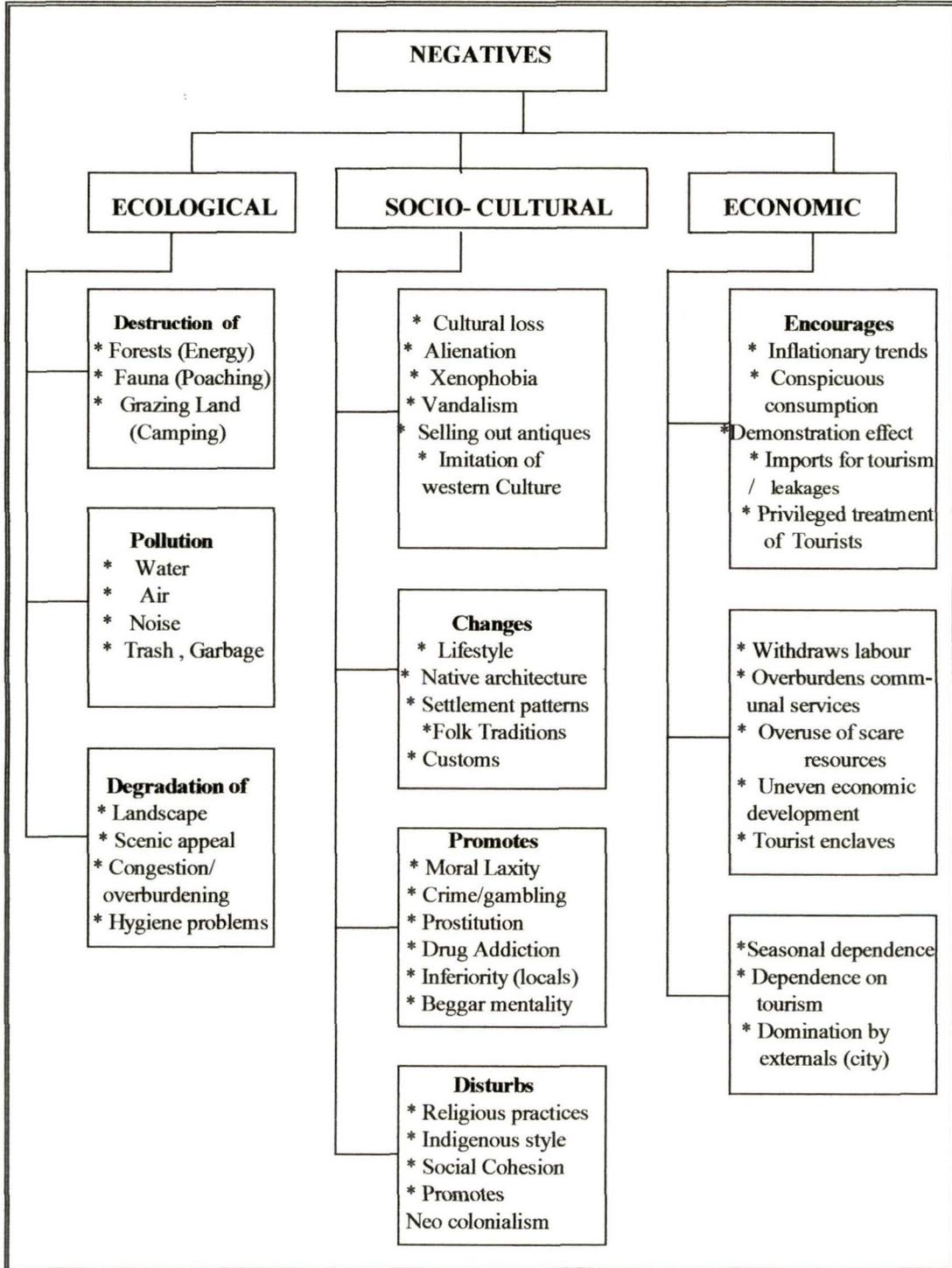


Figure-32

POSITIVE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON NORTH BENGAL

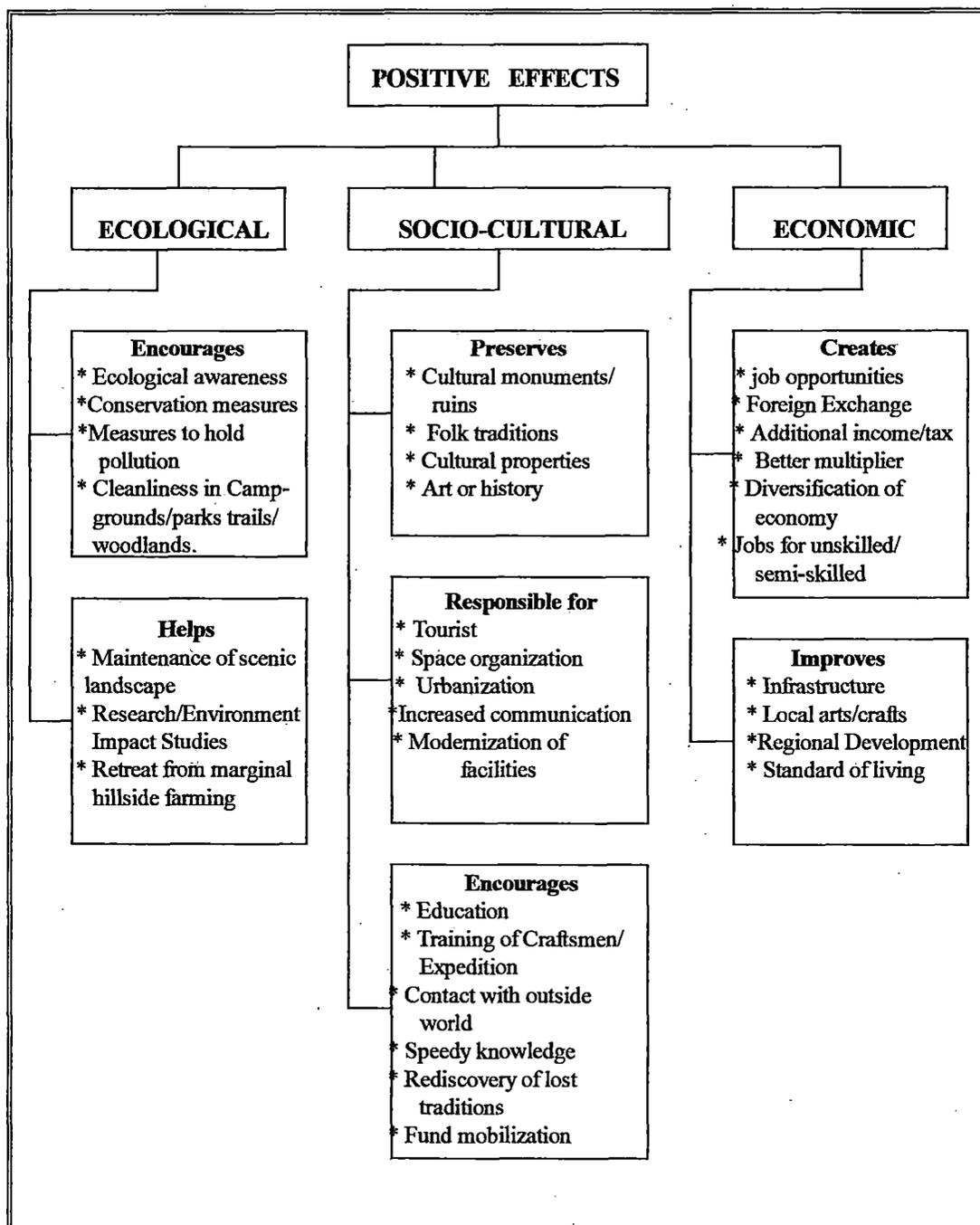


Figure-33