

P R E F A C E

Sikkim became a part of the Indian Union in 1975 through the 22nd Amendment of the Indian Constitution. Before that it was a monarchy and was ruled by the Namgyal Dynasty for more than 300 years. Sikkim underwent a rapid transformation after it became an Indian State as it started accessing funds from the Government of India. This led to a rapid pace of development with a lot of investment being made in expansion of road network leading to even remote areas being opened to tourism.

Sikkim is rich in natural resources with its small area exhibiting vast and unique forests and biodiversity. The third highest peak of the world, Mount Khangchendzonga, is located on the western border of Sikkim and has a special place in the culture of almost all ethnic communities of the State. Numerous mountain peaks and glacial lakes dot the topography of Sikkim and many of them have cultural significance as they are revered for various reasons. All this makes Sikkim a unique place, fit for tourism development and attractive to adventure seekers and summer holiday makers.

The natural and cultural bounties of the State have become its unique selling property and awareness of this has led the State Government to promote ecotourism in a big way over the last two decades. Almost every nook and corner of Sikkim has aesthetic value and rural people though mainly pursuing an agrarian lifestyle have now diversified their vocation to take advantage of the rapid growth of tourism in the State.

There have been several studies on ecotourism development in the State and some have focused on the role of ecotourism in economic development of rural areas. The present study was carried out to understand whether the stated goals of ecotourism, which are to improve the economic condition of ecotourism service providers and of promoting conservation of natural resources through ecotourism, were actually being achieved or not. Not many studies have dealt with the impact of ecotourism on local society and culture. This was also a theme that was explored in this study. Analyses of the present state of ecotourism in Sikkim and the future prospects have been included in this thesis drawing comparisons from other parts of the country and the world.