



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260403034>

Abstract

The healthy tourism practices in country brings economic empowerment in the state and nation, which helps in building wealth. Talking about India, tourism plays a very important role by bringing fiscal credit and opens up various employment opportunities. India is known for its rich culture and customs, great legacy and exiting festivals, which pours an added advantage for generating income and helps growing GDP. It could be said that if this industry is managed properly, it will contribute towards the strengthening of the nation and its relation with the other countries. Hence, the question of sustainability arrives. For India's tourism industry, it is very significant to maintain and preserve the cultural and environmental legacy. The initiatives to support conservation practices, community involvement are becoming widespread due to the increasing awareness among people. The sustainable practices should be such which should have balance between the economic growth and social responsibilities. The social and environmental obligations are the key to ensure a sustainable future for tourism industry of the country, which will gradually benefit locals and visitors. Hence, the concept of sustainable development in the tourism industry is related to each other. The author has outlined the benefits and drawbacks of tourism while analyzing various factors like social, cultural and ecological aspects.

Keywords: *Sustainable, Environment, Development, Sociological, Tourism*

Introduction

Tourism plays a dynamic role in the lifecycle of an individual. It is the component for the global development of nation. It also affects all the aspects of society in multiple ways like cultural, societal, economic, environmental etc. Moreover, tourism is also important for the foreign exchange across the world. It is one of the subtle sector which directly or indirectly affects most of the sectors of the country. Travelers from all over the world find India to be one of the most alluring locations due to its various cultures, beautiful scenery, and historical legacy. (Rao & Reddy, 2016) India attracts adventurers, culture vultures, and vacationers with its diverse blend of spirituality, history, and scenic beauty. India's tourism sector is a colorful tapestry made up of experiences from bustling cityscapes to serene backwaters, breathtaking mountains to sun-kissed beaches, and colorful festivals celebrating life in all its hues to centuries-old architectural marvels. With a vast geographic area and a diverse range of customs, India provides a wide range of experiences to suit the interests of any kind of traveler. India promises a life-changing adventure, whether it's touring the famous sites of Delhi, taking in the timeless splendor of the Taj Mahal in Agra, going on a spiritual pilgrimage along the banks of the Ganges in Varanasi, or getting lost in the brilliant hues of Rajasthan's desert cities and the beautiful backwaters in Kerala. Moreover, India's tourism industry is not just about sightseeing; it's also about experiencing the warmth and the hospitality and friendliness of its people which will reflect the nation. (Gupta & Sharma, 2020).

Indian tourism relies on the rich and ancient heritage, colorful culture and breathtaking ecology. (Kumar & Chandra, 2019) Every year many tourists feel diverse festivals, enjoy delicious food and of course the spirituality leads them to the unforgettable experiences, which attract more promising tourists with warm hospitality and a myriad of attractions, India indicates travelers to immerse themselves in its timeless charm, making every journey an enchanting journey. The spirit of "Atithi Devo Bhava" (Guest is God) resonates deeply in Indian culture, ensuring that visitors feel welcomed and cherished wherever they go. (Mishra, Behera, & Mishra, 2018) Hence it is more important for the country to welcome new ideas and sustainable development practices to make the tourist destination more popular. Moreover, it is necessary to deliver ethical tourism as well. (Pradhan, Dash, & Barik, 2021) India believes to provide enchanting experiences while preserving the natural and cultural heritage for the future generations. This will be possible through community involvement tourism projects and eco-friendly lodging for the promotion of lesser-known destinations. India's tourism sector is embodied to honor the tourists with legacy, hospitality and diversity in every way. Travelers or tourists not only discover but also feels contented with the satisfying experiences that leaves a long lasting impressions on their soul for the delightful journey on the enchanted land. Welcome to the incredible journey that is

tourism in India – where every moment is a revelation, and every destination, a story waiting to be told. The tourism commerce or industry plays a very interesting role in engendering the economy and making it robust. Governments often invest in the construction of infrastructure, such as roads, railroads, airports, and tourism facilities, to create jobs in wide range of sectors and also to handle the growing number of tourists. (Singh, 2017) These investments also play a crucial role not only to grow economy but also help to build a bond with different countries. It also stimulates the economic growth of the country. Tourism indirectly boosts the exports by stimulating demand for locally produced goods and handicrafts. Souvenirs, traditional artistry, textiles, and artisanal products often serve as mementos for tourists, contributing to the revenue of local artisans and craftsmen. (Jamal & Camargo, 2019) Overall, the tourism industry serves as a significant driver of income generation in a country by stimulating economic activities, creating employment opportunities, fostering entrepreneurship, and contributing to government revenues. By harnessing the potential of tourism, countries can achieve sustainable economic growth and improve the well-being of their citizens. (Khadka & Acharya, 2019).

Accepting the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) of the United Nations India should also think about the sustainability in the tourism industry as the population of tourist is increasing every significant year which also impacts the environment. There are many example of the sustainable practices which were started by the Government and other organizations to have better sense of bonding with the tourist. A social awareness campaign “Atithi Devo Bhava” was started in the year 2005 by the Ministry of tourism. This campaign was to build better relations with the tourist and to maintain a sense of culture and tradition with them. The "Atithi Devo Bhava" campaign by the Government is not just a catchphrase but it is an ideology which is embodied in the Indian tourism and shows the essence of hospitality which encourages traveling as a good force. By working on this ideology, India is hoping to progress towards the experiences of tourism by preserving its culture, customs and the legacy which is rooted in the traditions. Along with that the sustainability of the same is required as it is the question of future generations. (Khan & Kumar, 2020) This campaign seeks to make every visitor feel genuinely appreciated and welcomed by endorsing a culture of hospitality and sustainability in the Indian tourism via the combined efforts of all stakeholders. The Government of India has also started another campaign named "Bharat Darshan" which aims to boost domestic tourism and inspire people of its own nation to discover and explore their own treasures from the country. The term "Bharat Darshan" translates to "Tour of India" in English, reflecting the objective of encouraging citizens to travel and discover the diverse destinations across India. (Kothari, 2018)

The concept of eco-tourism was emerged in the year 1970 and 1980, which was a modern concept and many nations started accepting it was seen as the promising idea for the betterment of the environment and sustainability as well. Hector Ceballos-Lascurain, a Mexican architect, ecologist, and preservationist, first used the phrase "ecotourism" in 1983. Ceballos-Lascurain defined ecotourism as "environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations." To promote eco tourism as a means of conservation and community development The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) was founded in 1990. (Kumar & Dey, 2019) In order to ensure that tourism operations minimize their undesirable effects on the environment and help local populations, a number of ecotourism certifications, standards, and guidelines emerged in the year 1990s. Talking about eco-tourism from the perspective of Indian context, the preservation of cultural legacy and empowerment of local inhabitants are the all-valuable aspects. The travelers or tourists immediately contribute to the socio-economic well being of the rural people by understanding the concepts of eco-tourism. (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2018) Additionally, eco-tourism provides opportunities for the significant cultural exchanges between people, gaining knowledge, understanding perspectives which helps in making it a rewarding and enlightening experience for both tourists and hosts. Today, ecotourism continues to play a crucial role in raising awareness about conservation, supporting sustainable development, and fostering appreciation for the natural world. Preservation of biodiversity, following the sustainable practices for tourism in the country will be helpful in the long run. (Pati & Padhi, 2020)

Objectives of the study

1. To understand and clarify the term Sustainable development in tourism industry.
2. To understand the tourism industry of India and how it has developed over period of time.
3. To develop a critical awareness and find out solutions to enhance the welfare of people through Tourism industry in India.

Research Methodology of the study

Research in the field of tourism can employ various methodologies depending on the research objectives. In this particular paper, a broader way of secondary data and information collection has been adopted to produce better results. The present study is mainly based on the secondary method, which has been collected from various journals and from the websites of tourism by Government of India. A figure has been created to better understand the sustainability of tourism. To understand a better linkages between tourism industry and sustainability a large number of a large set of periodicals is taken into contemplation. The journal articles were downloaded from authenticate sources like Jstor, Springer, Wiley, Emerald, and Taylor & Francis etc. Each articles downloaded were researched carefully to understand the viewpoints of authors and to uncover the potential gap in the research. Accordingly analysis is presented to ensure the objectives of the research area.

Review of Literature

The study conducted by Gupta, A., & Sharma, N. (2020) examines the role of community participation in sustainable tourism development in rural India. It explores sociological aspects such as community engagement, empowerment, and local decision-making processes. Even the research investigates the impact of community-based tourism enterprises on sustainable development in rural India. It delves into sociological dimensions such as community cohesion, livelihood improvement, and cultural preservation. (Mishra & Behra, 2018). Focusing on indigenous tribal communities in India, this study explores their involvement in sustainable tourism practices. (Mohanty, 2018) It discusses sociological aspects such as indigenous knowledge, cultural revitalization, and community well-being. (Kothari, 2018) The sociological issues and challenges related to sustainable tourism development in India. It examines factors such as socio-economic disparities, cultural conflicts, and community resistance. (Singh, 2017) Investigating sustainable tourism from a stakeholder perspective in India, this study analyzes the roles and interactions of various societal actors. It explores sociological dynamics among stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and businesses. (Comargo & Jamal, 2019) A study by Padhi and Pati, 2020 analyses the aspects such as community involvement, cultural preservation, and socio-economic impacts. It explores the role of societal attitudes, behaviors, and cultural norms in shaping sustainable tourism practices. Focusing on Goa, India, this research investigates the sociological aspects of tourism and sustainable development. It analyzes community perceptions, attitudes towards tourism, and socio-cultural impacts on local residents. (Verma & Mishra, 2020)

Significant development in the Tourism Industry

Early Years (Pre-Independence):

Prior to independence, tourism in India was primarily centered on cultural and historical attractions, such as ancient monuments, religious sites, and natural wonders. The development of infrastructure and promotion of tourism during this period were limited.

Post-Independence Era (1950s-1980s): The Indian government realized the potential of tourism as a vehicle for both cultural and economic interchange after independence. The establishment of the Ministry of Tourism in 1958 marked a significant turning point in the formalization of tourism policy and development initiatives. During this period, efforts like "Incredible India" were used to endorse cultural heritage, build infrastructure, and draw tourists from overseas. (Ministry of Tourism, Gujarat, 2020)

Liberalization and Growth (1990s-2000s): Noteworthy expansions in the industry of tourism were made possible by the economic liberalization measures which were implemented in the year 1990. The surge in the international tourist arrivals was caused because of the increased foreign investment, relaxed visa requirements and better air connectivity. The emphasis was switched to boost niche markets like wellness travel, wildlife adventure and different other types of tourism in enhanced way. (Pradhan & Behera, 2019)

Digital Revolution and Marketing (2000s-Present): The era of digital technology and internet has fundamentally altered the era of tourism and travel. Even the new ways of marketing have played an important role. Various social media platforms, online booking apps and platforms have become essential component for the tourism industry to attract people. It allows tourist to easily book, plan and inquire about the travels. (Sharma & Das, 2019) The Indian government's "Incredible India" campaign gained worldwide recognition, further advancing India's image as a tourist destination.

Infrastructure Development and Connectivity: For the tourist, travel spots are now more accessible because the Government has invested a lot in the infrastructure development, airport, roads and accommodation facilities. (Singh & Gupta, 2018) Initiatives like the Swadesh Darshan project and the UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) regional connectivity project were announced with the goal of creating tourism circuits, improving connectivity, and boosting travel in lesser-known areas.

Focus on Sustainable Tourism: In recent years, it could be noted that the ecofriendly tourist practices are gaining more attention in India. (Verma & Mishra, 2020) The consequence of environmental protection, cultural preservation, and socioeconomic development in tourist planning and operations is emphasized by initiatives like eco-tourism development programs, community-based tourism projects, and certification systems for sustainable lodgings.

Some programmes implemented by India

India has implemented numerous programs and initiatives aimed at encouraging tourism while ensuring sustainability. Here are some key programs:

National Tourism Policy (NTP): The governments plan and visions for the expansion of tourism industry is outlined by the National tourist Policy, which places a strong emphasis on the sustainable development practices and also stresses on the eco-tourism. It seeks to preserve the culture and legacy of the nation while encouraging the responsible tourism with more fair benefits to the local communities. (Das & Mishra, 2019)

National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA): This programme encourages the means of sustainable agricultural practices, which indirectly supports the sustainability of rural tourism. It also contributes to the preservation of rural landscapes and the ecosystems which frequently help in promoting the organic farming, soil protection and water management practices in the country. It is also necessary should also gain knowledge about the rural tourism related practices.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP): Air pollution is a major environmental challenge in many Indian cities, including popular tourist destinations. (Gangwar & Gupta, 2018) The NCAP aims to reduce the air pollution levels, improve the environmental quality of various tourist destinations and improve their experience. This could be only possible through the combinations of legislative measures, technology development and public awareness efforts.

National Mission for Sustainable Habitat (NMSH): The main goal of NMSH is to strengthen the quality and to increase the life of people residing in the urban area, which is focusing towards the sustainability of resources and better use of it. Many tourist destinations are very near to the urban development; hence sustainable urban development is important. This mission looks toward the challenges which are critical to justifiable tourism, green space management, waste management, water related issues etc.

National Mission for Sustainable Tourism (NMST): The NMST is a comprehensive program which was introduced in the year 2018, with the goal of encouraging sustainable development for the long run throughout India. Its emphases on the topics such as capacity building, community engagement and involvement, increasing resource efficiency. The main goal is to mainstream the sustainable development practices in to nation, state, and municipal level planning and operations to have a better future prospect.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission): In order to achieve cleanliness and to end the open defecation in country, the Swachh Bharat Mission was started in the year 2014. It is very necessary to have a hygienic tourist spot to increase the number of visitors. Some initiatives like constructing restrooms, raising awareness of hygiene and guarantee of proper waste management at various spots are the objectives of this mission.

Eco-Tourism Development Programs: To inspire nature-based travel while preserving biodiversity and safeguarding delicate ecosystems, a number of Indian governments have started eco-tourism development initiatives. Initiatives like generating nature paths, eco-friendly lodging options, and interpretation centers in environmentally sensitive places are all part of these programs. Initiatives for sustainable expansion that India has started.

Discussions and Findings

The sustainable tourism has become a strategy to decrease the adverse effects of tourism on various living and non-living resources. It is essential to understand the effects of the same on environment, economy and the traveling spots which are covered by the tourists. Tourism practices can increase the economy of the country and bring wealth to the nations. Country like India, is known for its diverse natural resources and the cultural heritage which is preserved here. To safeguard the resources for the future generations it is necessary that one should have the encouraging sustainable tourism practices in country. (Jain & Arora, 2020) Comparing the historical perspective and the current era, it could be measured that tourism industry of the nation has substantially grown due to various reasons like advancements in infrastructures, supportive policies and virtuous travel options. It is also cannot be ignored that this success and growth have led to the various issues concerning to environmental challenge, commercialization of culture, commodification of socio and economic conditions of various groups which has raised inequalities. Scholars such as Singh (2017) highlight the prerequisite for a paradigm shift towards sustainable tourism development to address these challenges effectively. From the perspective of environmental sustainability, it is necessary to look after various key areas like conservation of biodiversity, waste management, weather challenges, sanitation problems, reducing carbon foot print and water related issues. Studies by Kumar and Chandra (2019) emphasize the importance of eco-friendly initiatives such as wildlife preservation, adoption of renewable energy sources, and implementation of sustainable transportation systems to minimize the ecological impact of tourism activities. Further research shows that the expansion of tourism in the country has some notable impacts on the socio and cultural aspects. There are pros and cons which needs to be look after. Tourism has the ability to reinforce traditional customs along with the social systems, it can also contribute to the protection of indigenous culture and historical sites. Examination by Gupta and Sharma (2020) highlights the significance of community participation, cultural sensitivity, and unbiased distribution of tourism benefits in fostering sustainable socio-cultural development. Sustainability is not only about preserving natural resources; it is also about looking after wealth distribution among the local communities which are important factors of tourism. Hence, the balance between tourism revenue and the local communities are need to be kept on the same panel of equality. Studies by Mishra et al. (2018) believer for the promotion of community-based tourism enterprises, capacity building initiatives, and accountable investment practices to enhance the socioeconomic flexibility of destination areas. The strong policy frameworks and good practices implemented through strong governance are essential for encouraging the sustainability practices in India. Scholars such as Pradhan et al. (2021) emphasize the need and importance of integrated planning, stakeholder engagement on regular basis, and regulatory mechanisms to mainstream the sustainability ideologies into tourism policy as well as the decision-making processes. Altogether, the industry of sustainable tourism is seen as feasible development approach but with several obstacles remain in it as it is to be implemented in India. This encompasses the lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, people reluctant to change, inadequate funding from the system and so on. Despite these challenges, there are some opportunities as well such as innovation and team work, collaborations from various countries and signing treaties etc. Sustainable tourism in India has evolved into a multifaceted approach. The findings or the result of this study has highlighted varied and intricate aspects of sustainable tourism practices. (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2020) Comprehensive review of the existing literature sheds light on the challenges and opportunities to achieve sustainable development for tourism in country. There are many more issues which require attention in order to ensure more awareness among the people and preservation of flora and fauna. Some of the points are discussed as below.

- **Integration of Environmental Conservation**

A key result of the study highlights essential need to incorporate the environmental conservation into planning and development so that gradually it could be incorporated in to the tourism. Indias natural beauty and the cultural heritage attract many tourists every year, more number of people is a good sign but the assets face risk of damage from various aspects. This research emphasis

on the importance of implementing preventive measures to prevent India's natural heritage for future generations which include restoring the habitats, protecting wildlife and managing resources well. (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2019)

- **Community Engagement and Socio-cultural Preservation**

The community involvement plays an important role in advancing sustainable tourism. It could be seen that the local communities frequently experience the negative effects of tourism but are seldom included in the decision-making process and even do not receive the complete benefits of the same. The practice of sustainable development strengthens communities by enhancing their abilities and fair profit distribution. All these things are very crucial for the betterment of poor and unequal in the society. It is required for the cultural resilience and inclusiveness.

- **Economic Viability and Inclusive Growth**

The literature has shown the need for the needy people that why eco-friendly tourism should make efforts while fostering economic and inclusive development and reducing poverty. Although tourism can generate significant revenue and employment opportunities, provided the stakeholders should share all the benefits equally among all the sections of the society. The sustainable tourism also focuses on the small initiatives and local business (small scale enterprises) and ethical investment can contribute towards the strong and inclusive economic growth for the tourist destinations.

- **Policy Frameworks and Governance Mechanisms**

Tourism planning and management should integrate sustainability by implementing robust policy mechanisms and framework. The literature also indicates that the current social policies emphasis towards the economic growth more than environmental and social factors which results in the unsustainable methods and the unfair consequences. Integrated and collaborative approaches to policy development are essential, which emphasis on judicious use of the resources while considering the needs of the locals and stakeholders. (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2022)

Challenges and Opportunities for Future Research

The sustainable tourism is seen as favorable approach to development; there are still several challenges in putting it into practice. This includes the insufficient infrastructure, gaps in regulations, limited awareness, etc. (Rao & Reddy, 2016) further research in this area needs to concentrate on the challenges as the number of challenges are increasing every day. We need various interdisciplinary measures to find innovative solutions to the challenges which are tailored to India's distinct socio-cultural context. There are some challenges and opportunities listed.

Challenges

1. **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** In many tourist destinations it is marked that there are insufficient infrastructure facilities such as road, waste management, sanitation system which hinders sustainable practices and upset the tourists.
2. **Lack of Awareness:** Lack of consciousness and understanding also create various problems. This can hinder the initiatives which are claimed by government for the betterment of environment and community on a larger note.
3. **Policy Implementation Gaps:** Even though sustainable tourism policies and strategies exist, there might be problems in properly carrying them out and ensuring compliance at the local level, owing to administrative obstacles, corruption, and deficient resources.
4. **Pressure for Mass Tourism:** At a certain point of time, it is seen that there are high demands for mass tourism leads to overcrowding of people, environmental degradation which leads to achieve sustainability in tourism industry.
5. **Climate Change Vulnerability:** Now a days climatic conditions across the globe are getting affected by various reason. The climatic changes can also create problems and disrupt the tourist activities on a larger note. Increasing sea levels, weather events and changing ecological patterns are some of the adverse effects which needs to be considered.
6. **Conflict between Conservation and Development:** Maintaining a balance between conservation and development at the same time is quite challenging. Preserving the biodiversity, meeting the needs of locals with development and providing the best to tourist often led to conflicting interests. (Rai & Chauhan, 2019)

Opportunities

1. **Community Empowerment:** This can work as the powerful tool if used smartly. By involving the local communities in the planning and decision-making process can be more encouraging for them. They can be inspired to play the role of guardian for the natural resources, which will foster a sense of ownership and accountability and it will to transparency as well. (Paul & Chakraborty, 2020)
2. **Promotion of Sustainable Practices:** Through various policies and programmes there is a potential to encourage eco-friendly tourism including ethical wildlife observations, accommodations with the minimal impact which reduces the ecological footprint and provides genuine experiences to travelers.
3. **Technology and Innovation:** Utilizing AI, technology and innovation can help a lot. There is need to develop more sustainable transportation options, digital systems for sharing information and environment friendly infrastructure options can improve the facilities and activities which are provided to the tourists (Singh & Agarwal, 2020)
4. **Capacity Building:** There has to be financial supports for the capacity building programmes which should include the stakeholders and government for a better understanding of sustainable tourism practices and concepts. (Shah, 2017)
5. **Diversification of Tourism Products:** By focusing on focused areas like cultural heritage tourism, rural tourism, and adventure tourism, the variety of tourist experiences can be enhanced, benefits can be shared more evenly, and the strain on well-known tourist destinations can be lessened. (Yadav & Singh, 2019)

6. Public-Private Partnerships: The sustainable tourism initiatives can be developed more effectively through cooperation among the government agencies, public and private sector organizations and the involvement of academic institutions. Moreover, it is important to realize the young generations that the partnership between resources, knowledge and good implementation of things can create a significant effect on the tourism industry. Even NGOs can play an important role by working as non-profit organizations and setting examples for other stakeholders (Government of India, 1958)

Conclusion

Looking at sustainable tourism practices in India from a lens of sociological perspective highlights the intricate relationship between factors like social, environmental, social and cultural. This study emphasis on the significance of adopting a comprehensive and inclusive approach to tourist industry that prioritizes environmental sustainability and well being of the local communities. In India tourism is not only about the enjoyment and travel plans and getting refreshed but it is also about the exploring cultural heritage, knowing and learning about the importance of natural environment and understanding ethics and morality of people associated with it. (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2021) By involving the local communities as active participants of this industry will help government and tourists both. They can help in the promotion and protection of indigenous culture and economic resilience. Furthermore, the case study emphasizes the importance of policy frameworks and governance systems in encouraging sustainable tourism initiatives. Effective enforcement, regulatory framework and consistent oversight are crucial for incorporating sustainability principles into tourism development policies over all levels. (Singh, 2020) Even the role of education, awareness and types pf skill development becomes a key element in promoting sustainable development. By encouraging environmental literacy, cultural sensitivity, and accountable travel behavior, stakeholders and the local community can contribute to the long-term preservation of India's natural and cultural heritage. (Nagaraju, 2017) to conclude it can be said that sustainable tourism in India highlights the interlinkages between environmental, cultural and social aspects of tourism. India can harness the potential of tourism to foster a positive social change, cultural preservation for both domestically and internationally by adopting principles of sustainability, fairness and inclusiveness. (Sharma & Dutt, 2018)

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Dr. Pranjali S. Dighe:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: The author has given consent for the publication.

Competing Interest: No

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