

Future Prospects of Eco-tourism and Tribal Development in Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary, Nuapada, Odisha

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ABSTRACT: Eco-tourism and tribal development both are complementary to each other in the forest areas of a sanctuary; because anthropological approaches towards eco-tourism combining ecology, ethnic culture and development. A case is highlighted in the context of eco-tourism potentialities and tribal livelihood issues in and around Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary of Odisha. The paper also reflects the future prospects of tourism and its potentials. It underscores that eco-tourism if properly developed; it can not only enrich the possibilities for attracting tourists from near and far, but will also generate revenue for the state and protect tribal livelihood issues in Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary of Odisha.

INTRODUCTION

India is endowed with natural resources. The real capital of this nation is reflected in its bio-cultural diversities and antiquities. If the country could have properly integrated all these natural resources¹, then the growth of tourism² in India would have four times faster than the world average (WTO, 1994). Small countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Maldives and Bhutan have proved more potential to make their national tourism as an Industry. More so, tourism is one of the sources of foreign exchange in countries like Costa Rica, Belize, and in Guatemala it is second (Yadav, 2002). In Indian context the plans and policies formulated and implemented over the decades has threatened the convergence of tourism as a major resource to generate and strengthen the economies of the nation, state and people. Since 1991 the very process of globalization has been widening the scope and potentialities of tourism worldwide.

Under the state hegemony the bio-cultural³ resources are treated as a part of national property and the state bestowed with the maintenance of such resources. The state has never approached to develop these resources with the life and livelihood⁴ of the people inhabiting inside these protected areas. The people are not allowed to access these resources as a part of their livelihood enhancement programme. Tribal communities⁵ living in and around the sanctuaries, reserve forests and biospheres are treated as outsiders, which deprived of their natural livelihood and right. The desired effect of ecotourism is yet to be seen and the connection between ecotourism, conservation and livelihoods has not been established yet.

The paper is having the following objectives:

- (i) To examine the concept of eco-tourism, the policy relating to it and changes therein.
- (ii) To highlight a least known primitive tribe of Odisha uniquely dominated the entire Sunabeda wildlife Sanctuary, the potential of eco-tourism and the future prospects of development.

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- (iii) The paper from empirical finding from Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary of Odisha explains the potentials of rich ethnic tourism which attracts tourists from within and outside Odisha.
- (iv) Finally, the paper argues that eco-tourism, if promoted can enhance the livelihood basket of the Bhunjia and other communities.

DATA SOURCE

The data for the paper have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. In order to collect primary data⁶ from different categories of informants, the paper adopted observation, eco-tourism and livelihood approaches in which the socio-cultural and livelihood importance of the tribal communities have been reflected. The secondary data⁷ relating to various aspects of ecotourism was collected from the Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary station office at Sunabeda. The data was collected during the months of October to December-2010 and May to June-2011. The villages covered under primary data collection are Sunabeda, Salepada, Junapani and Chinmundi.

CONCEPT OF ECO-TOURISM

The concept of eco-tourism has been defined differently by the various national and international agencies. The Ecotourism society⁸ developed the following definition of eco-tourism “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people” (Epler Wood, '96). “The person who practice eco-tourism has the opportunity of immersing him or herself in nature in a way most can not enjoy.....” (Boo, '92; Lindberg, '96; and WTO/UNEP, '92). Other scholars have also used the term ‘ nature tourism’ (Ceballos Lascurain, '96) which not necessarily ecologically sound; while Cohen ('84) raised the issue of neglect of development in and around protected areas.

Eco-tourism both at conceptual and empirical levels is significant in a number of respects. Traditionally it encapsulates scientific, aesthetic, and philosophical approaches which reflect the structure and function of the society. Over the decades numerous changes have been observed both in the content and context of eco-tourism. With globalization the process of these changes not only widened and multiplied, but also gained in importance. The UN

International Year of Eco-tourism during 2002 reviewed eco-tourism experiences worldwide, highlighting three significant aspects: (i) nature, (ii) tourism, and (iii) local communities. Most of the studies relating to tourism emphasize the economic dimensions at international and national levels, while very few have investigated local levels. The present research paper is based on empirical observation in Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary of Nuapada District of Odisha which is largely dominated by Bhunjia tribal community.

TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS OF INDIA AND ODISHA

The term ‘Protected Area’ can be interpreted in many ways – national park, national reserve, game reserve, forest reserve, marine park, nature reserve, wildlife management area – that even those working in the field can be confused . The World Conservation Union (IUCN), however, has developed the following definition of a protected area: “An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means” (Melchias, 2001).

The basic objective of creating ‘Protected Areas’ in India is to conserve the natural heritage⁹. Government took the whole responsibility over these protected areas and kept people away. The people living inside the Protected Areas are treated as outsiders. As far as ecotourism is concerned, there is no exclusive policy formulated to focus the possibilities of this emerging sector both at national and state levels. Those states where ecotourism is being practised to some extent, the compliance if at all there is by various stakeholders are only of the tourism policy and other related policies like Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Forest Conservation Act, 1980, etc. But in late on 2nd June 2011, the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), Government of India, released a draft guideline on eco-tourism. The said guideline lays out a detailed set of framework on the selection, planning, development, implementation and monitoring of eco-tourism in India. The guideline does not draw a detailed framework of conservation and protection of wildlife through eco-tourism. Rather, it is aiming at the planning and implementation

process. However, it implies that Government has realized the prospects of eco-tourism to enhance wilderness protection and wildlife conservation, while providing nature-compatible livelihoods and greater incomes for a large number of people living around natural ecosystems. Earlier Amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act in 2003 has given a recognition and legal backing to community initiated wildlife protection (MoEF, GoI, 2011). 20 per cent of forest areas of Odisha, with a variety of wildlife, are being protected and managed through self initiated forest protection initiatives by 12,000 village communities (Rath and Mohanty, 2012). A survey of 200 protected areas of India by Indian Institution of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi (Kothari *et al.*, '89) reveals that 37 per cent national parks, and 83 per cent sanctuaries are officially opened to tourism, but over 70 per cent of them do not have visitor's orientation centers and tourism management infrastructure. The study also establishes the fact that the protected areas are suffering from high level of disturbances due to human interferences (Kothari *et al.*, '89).

Odisha having rich forest resources spread out in all parts of the state. The protected areas are the mines for varieties of flora and fauna. A few of such sites in Odisha are highlighted. Similipal, Gahirmatha, Chilika, Bhitarkanika, Ambapani, Satkosia George, Nandankanan, Karlapat, etc. All these regions are rich in flora, fauna and community cultures and tribal as well as non tribal groups.

SUNABEDA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

The Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary¹⁰ located between longitude 82° 20' 00''E and 82° 34' 42''E and latitude 20° 24' N and 24° 44'N in Nuapada district of Odisha, Sharing common border with Chhattisgarh State, is an excellent natural habitat of endangered flora and fauna¹¹. It was declared as sanctuary in the year 1983 with total geographical area of 600 sq km. Mostly dry deciduous forest with enchanting hill ranges, the heart throbbing cliffs, extensive plateau, scattered grass lands, magnificent waterfall and gorges, and primitive tribe Chuktia Bhunjia having a very rich age-old cultural heritage are fascinating attraction of Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary. Besides, the Maraguda valley, Jumlagarh

fort with traces of ancient civilization and river Jonk are adding to rich cultural heritage of Odisha. This wildlife sanctuary being the source of origin and catchments of Jonk, Sunder and Indra rivers plays an important role in socio-economic development of the locality. Many wild animals, birds, and plants attracted people from far and near places.

There are more than fifteen villages having about five thousand population. The villages are mostly inhabited by Bhunjia community members. Other communities like Gond, Paharia, Kultha are also living in and around Sunabeda.

TOURIST SPOTS IN SUNABEDA

Sunabeda: Goddess Sunadei Temple, Hamlets of primitive tribe Chuktia Bhunjia, Interpretation centre.

Beniadhush: Waterfall of 24 mts height, surrounded by dense forest.

Kharaldhus: Waterfall of 50 mts height, ancient Jumlagarh Fort, adventurous trekking track, wildlife observation, Nature camp site. The site could be promoted by inviting various adventure clubs, those are involved in such activities.

Goudhus: Waterfall of 30 mts height, Nature camp site, Rock climbing, trekking track, temple of Lord Shiva. The site could be promoted by inviting various adventure clubs, those are involved in such activities.

Maraguda: A small wetland of 50 hectares, place of residence and migratory birds, ancient monuments, watch tower, Scenic view of potora dam. Near about 45 kinds of different migratory birds are visiting this site during the winter as per the report of Bird census, (Department of Forest, 2009) of Sunabeda range forest department, Nuapada.

ETHNO-CULTURAL PROFILE OF BHUNJIA TRIBE

Odisha is a tribal dominated state having the largest number of tribal communities' i.e. 62 in India. Out of this the state has 13 number of primitive tribes

to pursue a very backward economic life and maintains a very rich age old cultural heritage.

According to Bhunjia people the term Bhunjia is a combination of two terms i.e. Bhunj and Jia. Bhunj means eat and Jia means depend on. That means life depend on eating. The tribe Bhunjia divided into two exogamous groups i.e. Chuktia and Chinda. The Chuktia section of Bhunjia has been declared as a primitive tribe¹² which is least known and least studied out of the 13 primitive tribes reside in Odisha. They are mostly confined to the Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary in Nuapada district and also found concentrated in some parts of Kalahandi district of western Odisha. Whereas the Chinda section of Bhunjia are acculturated and found to be concentrated in plain areas. Bhunjia belongs to Dravidian racial group.

The Chuktia Bhunjia are concentrate in the Sunabeda plateau and their total population is 2269, the density of population per sq km is 15, and average household size is 4.4. Out of the total population 2269 the female population is 1145 and male population is 1124. Their sex ratio is 1019. There are total 519 number of households living in different villages and all households belongs to Below Poverty Line (BPL) category. Out of 519 households, 197 are landless (CBDA, 2007). They are more conservative, tradition bound and inward- looking. They have a number of exogamous units or clans, which regulate their marriage. A simple family with a monogamous form of marriage is found in their society. Their kitchen shed is considered sacred and the entry of married daughters into the kitchen shed is strictly forbidden. Traditionally, the socio-political system recognized the village council with elderly members as the basic unit and there existed the inter-village council at the apex. The Bhunjias worship the Sunadei as their supreme deity and the pujari performs the priestly functions. Besides this they worship 54 gods and goddesses for their well-being and prosperity. Both the region and the community attract tourist during winter.

It is very peculiarly found that Chuktia Bhunjia girls are not allowed to have formal school education as they can not touch a boy after their initiation ceremony. The women on the other hand have to maintain several restrictions which are unthinkable on the part of modern woman. The Sunabeda plateau

is not yet connected by a fair-weather road. Perhaps for this reason they remain isolated from the mainstream and least contact with outsider. Due to their isolation they well preserved their age old cultural heritage and indigenous identity. Their culture is categorically integrated with ecological matrix of the Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary. For their socio economic development Government of Odisha in the year 1996 established Chuktia Bhhunjia Development Agency (CBDA) and operating micro projects from Sunabeda.

Eco-tourism Provisions in Sunabeda

There are many tourist spots in and around Sunabeda and there are eco-tourism provisions¹³. They are viz, Sunabeda, Beniadhush, Kharaldhus, Goudhus, Maraguda etc. The river spots which attracts the tourists include Jonk, Sunder and Indra. For the accommodation of tourists there are rest house at Sunabeda, Goudhus, Circuit house at Nuapada, Rest house at Potra, Hotels at Khariar road and Nuapada. All the tourist spots provide opportunity for organizing picnic programmes.

Attempts were made to find out the tourist flow into the Sunabeda failed because of non-recording of tourist profile. However, forest officials and villagers said that most of the tourists visited to Sunabeda during winter. It was observed that many of these tourist facilities within Sunabeda do not have basic living support like availability of food, alternative power supply, health care facilities, transport and drinking water. The great problem is that the rough weathered roads are hindrance in the path of tourism promotion. Non availability of these facilities many time have forced the tourists to leave in the same day of their visit. Though there is presence of forest officials in and around Sunabeda and planning for the protection of forest resources, they are giving less importance to the promotion of tourism. The above findings concludes that the poor infrastructure base of the Sunabeda which do not attracts or very poorly attracts the tourists. Besides, the usefulness of ethnic contents for the promotion of tourism in Sunabeda Sanctuary has never been thought for using by the state.

Recommendations

Sunabeda was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in the year 1983, in spite of that the Government of

Odisha has not given due and appropriate importance to develop or to enrich tourism from an ecological and cultural point of view. For this reason, the following recommendations¹⁴ are made:

- I. Attempts should be made to conserve the physical ecology as well as the cultural ecology of the primitive tribe Chuktia Bhunjia by empowering them through a participatory protected area management approach.
- II. Attempts should be made to establish a tribal museum, so that tribal material aspects of culture can be displayed and tourists will attract to visit the Sunabeda.
- III. Studies should be conducted on biosocial mapping of Bhunjia tribal community.
- IV. Greater investment should be made in the promotion and preservation of monuments with cultural, historical and mythological significance.
- V. Development¹⁵ of infrastructure and safety measures in the interior of the Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary should be of prime importance in the intervention to promote eco-tourism.
- VI. Cultural village may be created one in Sunabeda and another in Nuapada district head Quarter displaying the resources of Bhunjia tribe.
- VII. Tourist festival may be organized on regular intervals and promotion of tourist destinations may be made.
- VIII. Recording of tourists profile should be maintained so as to update knowledge on their flowing population, purpose of visit, whereabouts, etc.
- IX. The community should also be encouraged to enter into co-operative eco-tourism ventures to take advantage of alternative livelihood opportunity.
- X. Local institutions like Gram Panchayat, Forest protection committee should be involved in any initiative to develop eco-tourism so that the community feel a sense of ownership and put into its strengths.

XI. Hoarding at prime locations should be erected for drawing the attention of visitors towards tourist spots, tourist's code of conduct and better civic sense.

XII. Public campaign should be launched to enlighten the tourists as well as the villagers about environmental / forest laws, rules and regulations framed by Government from time to time.

NOTES

1. Natural resources occur naturally with environments that exist relatively undisturbed by mankind , in a natural form. A natural recourse often characterized by amounts of biodiversity and geo diversity existent in various ecosystems.
2. Tourism, the business activity connected with providing accommodation, services and entertainment for people who are visiting a place for pleasure.
3. Bio-cultural means both biological and cultural aspects are inextricably linked and have likely coevolved.
4. A livelihood comprises the capabilities , assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living.
5. Tribal communities are small in scale are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relations and possess a morality, a religion and world view of corresponding dimensions.
6. Data observed or collected directly from firsthand experience is called primary data.
7. Published data and the data collected in the past or other parties is called secondary data.
8. The International Ecotourism society (TIES) is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promote ecotourism. Founded in 1990, TIES has been in the forefront of the development of ecotourism providing guidelines and standards, training, technical assistance, research and publications.
9. Natural heritage is the legacy of natural objects and intangible attributes encompassing the countryside and natural environment, including flora and fauna, scientifically known as biodiversity and geo diversity.
10. The Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary named after Sunabeda, a well known tribal village located more or less at the centre of the plateau. The Sunabeda Plateau has an altitude of 3,000 feet approximately above the sea level. The area includes the entire plateau along with the adjoining forest for which it is named as Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary. The very name Sunabeda derived from "Sunadei" , the supreme deity of Bhunjia tribe.
11. Flora, the plants of a particular area, type of environment or period of time. Fauna, the animals living in an area or a particular period of history.

12. Tribal communities, who carry on pre-agricultural activities for their survival, have been classified as so called primitive Tribal Groups.
13. Direct observation and personal interaction with the villagers and forest officials during my fieldwork from 2010 to 2011.
14. Recommendations made out of direct observation and personal interaction with the villagers, forest officials and from anthropological point of view.
15. Development is a multi dimensional process to progressively improve the social, economic, cultural and human conditions of the people.

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