

The Indian Case for Ecotourism and Environmental Migrants

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ABSTRACT

Regardless of the reality the ecotourism has a substantial influence, particularly in developing nations like India, the actual circumstances of wildlife protection in India are exceedingly confusing. These conservation operations spread positive luck including adverse outcomes (for local tribal populations due to livelihood threats and displacement for conservation), making protected areas controversial despite their importance. Conservation refugees in India are people who have been compelled to leave their houses due to the development of designated areas; these people are the actual victims of environmental expropriation. The past history of conservation attempts excluding native populations in designated areas is one of the most significant barriers to conservation today. Tribal communities are paying a high price to expand safari, construct wildlife preserves, and attract visitors. Recent efforts in India to forcefully remove up to 9 million indigenous people with deep historical and spiritual ties to the land and environment have met with fierce opposition. Preserving biodiversity at the price of displacing local populations, on the other hand, could be counterproductive. The social and economic and political ramifications of India's position as a developing country with a huge population hinder the country from embracing the concept of pure nature preservation schemes. Developing and sustaining successful multilayered rules for protected areas necessitates transparency regarding the expenses and advantages of these regulations, as well as an eagerness to communicate this knowledge with those who endure the consequences.

Key words: Ecological, Tourism, Refugees, Environment, Conservation

Introduction

With the goal to conserve natural areas while minimising visitor impact while allowing for beneficial engaged economic and social involvement in nearby stakeholder communities, ecotourism entails environmentally conscious trips to those regions in order to appreciate and gain knowledge about the natural world and its related ethnical lineaments, either historical and modern. The benefits of

ecotourism have to do with the cultural wealth and wildlife of developing nations, particularly the least developed. International Union for the Conservation of Nature defines ecotourism as "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides beneficially active socioeconomic involvement

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of local populations" (Stronza *et al.*, 2019). In recent years, ecotourism has acquired prominence in the tourism industry towards the context of global warming and sustainable development.

Thus, environmentalism is a contentious topic in tourism studies, in which it is alternately conceived as an item, a location, or an experience. There is an undisputed link among ecotourism and safeguarded areas in every region of the globe, from the Arctic and Antarctica to the tropics and from land to sea. Biodiversity and ecological tourism have undergone phenomenal development over the past several decades as a result of their position as a rapidly growing subsector. Ecotourism has been demonstrated to have adverse impacts on communities at large, including the disappearance of native dialects and traditions in addition to disruptions to society and the economy (Carzon *et al.*, 2023; Zerr *et al.*, 2022). On each continent, historically protected or unprotected biodiverse areas are rapidly becoming accessible to ecotourists. Existing kinds of ecotourism have had a substantial impact on biodiversity, regardless the lack of consistent policies and regulations. However, there is no question that ecotourism is an enormous global industry with extensive support. The tourism industry has been successful in silencing sceptics by emphasizing the market-driven financial benefits of ecotourism.

Ecotourism and Protected areas

Ecotourism is a and protected areas have a mutually beneficial relationship, with the latter playing a crucial role in the development and commercialization of the former. Thus, ecotourism makes use of protected areas, and the presence of ecotourism businesses suggests the presence of nearby protected areas. In theory, locals living on the periphery of national parks and other protected places view ecotourism as a source of income and a set of social and economic connections that may provide a practical platform for cross-cultural communication and understanding. Parks and park authorities are frequently linked to ecotourism modes due to the cash that tourism generates (Nguyen and Jones, 2022). Changes in land-use rights, unfulfilled promises of community-level benefits, and the implementation of restrictions and regulations on stakeholder groups in the name of conservation all contribute to tension and anger in the relationship (Tauli *et al.*, 2020; Shen *et al.*, 2020). Researchers have also pointed out the negative effects of ecotourism

projects that include conservation strategies (Hooper *et al.*, 2019; Ismail and Vennecya, 2022), which can have far-reaching social, economic, and political consequences.

Protected areas across India

Development is limited in protected areas, therefore there is less influence on the ecosystem and resource availability. In India, there are multiple types of protected areas, including national parks, animal sanctuary areas, environmental reserves, communal reserves, and marine conservation areas, all of them are protected to varied degrees by various laws and regulations. Conservation refugees in India are people who have been compelled to leave their houses due to the growth of designated areas; these people are the real victims of environmental encroachment. The past history of conservation attempts marginalising communities living in protected areas is one of the most significant barriers to conservation today. For example, India had 89 national parks in the year 2000, but there were 485 sanctuaries for wildlife. However, at the end of January 2023, India had 106 parks of national significance, 567 sanctuaries for wildlife, 105 ecological reserves available, and 220 community reserves spread around the country. Protected areas in India have increased from 146665.60 square miles in 2000 to 173,629.52 square miles in 2023. Because a lot of designated areas miss the land mass required to offer adequate habitat for particular organisms, conservationists and ecotourists are advocating for protected area connectivity. Notifying 'eco-sensitive zones' surrounding protected locations is intended to preserve them, but it frequently violates residents' fundamental rights granted by the Indian Constitution, as proven by multiple reports from protected areas around the nation (Pande and Sharma, 2015).

Conservation refugees and protected areas across India

It is a central concept in environment conservation that locals must be dislodged and relocated from protected regions. The deracination of herders, forest resource gatherers, and farmers provided the foundation for modern environmental protection (Sarma and Barpujari, 2023). Carbon sequestration, ecotourism, and biodiversity protection are all positive outcomes of protected areas, but there are also negative consequences. When considered in terms of the cultural and economic effects on surrounding

populations, the establishment of protected areas is not highly stimulating (Terraube *et al.*, 2017). The removal and relocation of stakeholder communities is a direct outcome of the growing number of protected areas, which in turn increases the number of conservation refugees. One term for these evacuees is "conservation refugees." This group of individuals might be thought of as "the people who are displaced by the creation of protected areas; actually they are the victims of ecological expropriation." They enter the sphere of survival after being uprooted or evicted, moving to the slums of cities and villages where they have no claim to property or housing. Restricting access inside and outside of protected areas can also force local residents to relocate without their consent, a phenomenon that is all too typical in India's national parks (Fanari, 2022). In India, two villages were removed from the Kaziranga Park in Assam in 1908, marking the beginning of the country's pioneering relocation effort before independence. Attempts were then made in Kashmir's Shikar Reserve and Madhya Pradesh's Kanha National Park. Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary in the state of Rajasthan, Gir Forest in Gujarat, etc. have all documented incidences of eviction and relocation since 1947. With the introduction to the WLPA in 1972 with the beginning of Project Tiger in 1973, relocation efforts like this became commonplace throughout the decade of the 1970s. While ecotourism and wildlife adventure tourism are allowed, the recent laws of ecological diversity operations under the Wildlife Protection Act, Biodiversity Act, and National Green Tribunal interferences have impacted millions of indigenous inhabitants in the forest and their traditional way of life (Thapa *et al.*, 2022).

Conclusion

Depending on factors including origin, proximity, ease of access, and scope of operation, ecotourism can take on a wide variety of forms. Conclusions may be drawn about how shifting values and beliefs about wilderness and animals have impacted management practices, especially in emerging nations like India. Ecotourism revenue sharing with local communities in conservation zones is a hotly contested topic. The social, economic, and political repercussions of supporting attempts to preserve natural pristineness would be too great for India to tolerate. Historical groups of people that depend on

the forest for their livelihoods are still around today. Either the new conservation legislation or the newer ecotourism efforts need to compensate the stakeholder communities for their absence of livelihood by providing them with alternative livelihood alternatives so that they may continue to support themselves and live with respect and dignity. In light of global warming and the need for long-term sustainability, the United Nations sees ecotourism as an urgent priority. In addition, we need to recognise that people are a crucial link in the ecological food chain and cannot be separated from the concept of biodiversity. Developing and maintaining effective multilayered rules for protected areas calls for openness about the costs and benefits of these policies, as well as a willingness to communicate this information with those who pay them.

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