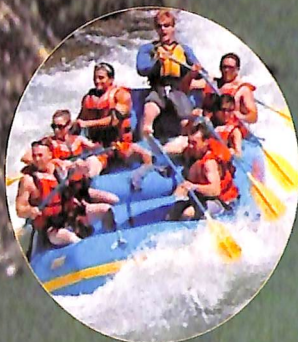
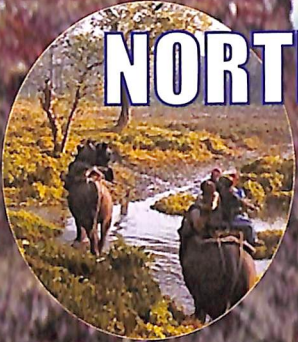


GROWTH OF ECO-TOURISM IN NORTH BENGAL & SIKKIM



CL

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GROWTH OF ECOTOURISM IN NORTH BENGAL AND SIKKIM

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DEDICATED

TO

*THE LOVING MEMORY
OF MY DEPARTED FATHER*

Late Haripada Karmakar

PREFACE

*“God’s earth in all its fullness and beauty is for the people”
Thomas Cook”*

From my childhood I see a unique geographic personality of North Bengal and Sikkim region. The diversity of landscapes and its aesthetic beauty, bracing climate, exotic flora and fauna, historic antiquities, water bodies and varied people and their folk cultures-all lured me. However, the realization of importance of ecotourism activity at the regional level and its relevance for the upliftment of socio-economic scenario in North Bengal and Sikkim region, has stimulated me to carry out this present work. In fact ecotourism has greater relevance to society in this study area which holds greater potentialities and promise for the promotion of tourism. This economically backward region can be developed through the promotion of ecotourism and development of infrastructures. Ecotourism can generate employment opportunities, promote regional growth, encourage small scale industries (souvenirs, memento), help cultural exchange and friendship etc. Ecotourism being a lucrative economic activity based on the locally available natural raw materials, can do a lot of good to the society of North Bengal and Sikkim region. Again the study area being unique in regional and cultural identities has failed to attract the attention of research community, particularly the geographers. There are much to search, research, explore and to investigate in the study area since ecotourism in the region is a blooming industry. Considering these background I have decided to present an eco tourism profile of North Bengal and Sikkim.

The main objectives in writing this book have been (i) to reflect the conceptual idea of Ecotourism(ii) to assess the present status of Ecotourism in different places of North Bengal and Sikkim (iii) to study the impact of Ecotourism on the study area (iv) to identify the major constraints of Ecotourism in North Bengal and Sikkim region

and to suggest planning measures to promote Ecotourism in the area (v) and to trace out the prospects of Ecotourism in the area

No study whether descriptive, explanatory or normative can proceed without sufficient source materials and information. Data constitute the basic ingredients of any scientific study. The selection of different tourist destinations for detailed studies and the field survey for primary and secondary data collection about them followed a systematic methodology.

The present study is mostly based on primary data generated through author's field survey and direct contact with tourists and common people of the region. A series of field surveys with the help of prepared schedules were conducted in a systematic and phased manner. In order to collect information regarding tourists' characteristics i.e, purpose of visit, origin of tourists, religion of the tourists etc. field surveys were carried out. To collect the data on tourist flow and economic upliftment the field survey has been very fruitful and effective. Secondary data have been collected from different research based data. Efforts were made to go through the available literature on eco tourism as geographic phenomenon and consult the major contributions. Apart from these, secondary data were also picked up from different govt. offices, gazetteers, travelogues, census reports, statistical handbooks and other reliable data sources.

Thus all these collected primary and secondary information were later on systematically processed, arranged, tabulated and analyzed to have a clear view of the ecotourism scenario of North Bengal and Sikkim. The information collected from primary and secondary sources have been verified with the field experience. However certain simple cartographic methods have been adopted to make data easily understandable in the book with statistical records.

The present study of Ecotourism in North Bengal and Sikkim has been carried out under nine chapters. The first chapter deals with the conceptual background of geography of Eco tourism and recreation. Analyzing ecotourism as applied geographic phenomenon

some significant contributions to this new emerging field have been touched upon. In this chapter a global ecotourism scenario including India has been represented. The second chapter reflects a geographical account of North Bengal. The third chapter explores a systematic detailed analysis of the growth and development of ecotourism that has been blossomed in the six major districts of North Bengal. Some of the basic tenets of eco tourist behaviour has been reflected. In fact, the entire chapter seeks to build a profile of growth, tourist behaviour of North Bengal's ecotourism in the background of the existing physio-socio-cultural-economic settings.

Chapter four presents the ecotourism typology and spatial variations of ecotourism activity in North Bengal. Chapter five is an effort to highlight the present economic, social, cultural and ecological impacts of eco tourism on the study area. The six chapter is an overview of some of the problems of eco tourism faced by the study area. Based on the interplay between the demand and supply of tourist resources, proper ecotourism management planning and developmental programmes have been suggested at the end of this chapter. Here proposed tourist circuits have also been included that are essential for the promotion of eco tourism. The chapter seven concludes with a detailed study of potential eco tourism nuclei of the North Bengal. The eighth chapter has highlighted a detailed account of Sikkim ecotourism along with its geographic personality. Lastly, in the ninth chapter, a conclusion has been drawn. References have been arranged alphabetically finally at the end of the report. The book concludes with some appendices.

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We know that no book is completely the work of the author himself. Every book is a social work and the unnamed authors of this book are legion. The unnamed authors have greatly helped in explaining some of the complex ecotourism phenomenon in its various manifestations.

For preparing the present work 'Growth of Eco Tourism in North Bengal and Sikkim' I have been greatly inspired and guided by my teacher Prof. Pranab Kr.Chakraborty, Department of Geography and Applied Geography. It is my proud privilege to express deep sense of gratitude to my Sir. As a guide he not only took scrupulous pains in rendering advice on concepts, contents and methodology of the entire work but also gave me continuous encouragement. My special thanks to A. K. Bhattacharya, IFS, Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal -M.P for consultation of his works.

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INTRODUCTION

Concept and Nature of Ecotourism:

The curiosity to explore the unknown and to see the enchanted beauty of new lands is the inherent nature of man from time immemorial. This insatiable wanderlust and instinctive inquisitiveness gave impetus to the mass movement of people from time to time, which is known as Travel. Infact travelling is the most ennobling, inspiring and abiding human passion, an expansion of mind and adventure of soul. Poet Tennyson nicely puts this insatiable spirit of wanderlust in the mouth of Ulysses-

"I can not rest from travel; I will drink life to the lees."

At the dawn of civilization travelling was largely unconscious, unplanned and indeterminate. No travel formalities existed in those days. The traveller of the past was a merchant, a pilgrim, a scholar in search of ancient texts and even a curious wayfarer and wanderer looking forward to new and exciting experiences and sometimes in order to seek fortunes. But in recent years a major shift has taken place in the motivations for travel (H. Laji Pathi Rai 1993). Early travel has now changed its old course and is flowing through a new channel, which is known as Tourism.

Tourism is essentially a dynamic phenomenon. It is dominated by changing ideas and attitudes of its customers and must be prepared to show a much greater degree of sensitivity and willingness to adjust to new conditions than it has in the past [Robinson. H. 1979]. The traditional tourism activity has brought an excess of luxury both in means of travel and in accommodation. Man has faded up with this traditional tourism. So he wants a variety in tourism especially a

yearning for the simple life. A hunger for direct contact with the elements of nature. Increasingly, City-dwellers want to spend their holidays getting in touch with nature and they often have a profound urge for physical action. Thus the mass standardized and rigidly packaged holidays of old tourism activity have been replaced by the new forms of tourism or alternating tourism. Eco-tourism is a very important example of this kind of tourism activity.

The concept of Ecotourism evolved in 1980s and this concept mainly developed in response to calls for sustainable forms of tourism. One of these was an increase in environmental consciousness which had begun in late 1960s and gained momentum in 1980s (Figgis, 1993; Wight, 1993; Figgis, 1994; Harris and Leiper, 1995; Eagles, 1996; Ceballos-Lascurian, 1996).

When the term Ecotourism first appeared in the 1980s, it was loosely applied towards travel that included any aspect of nature. Most of these travel packages and destinations, however, were little more than mass tourism taken outdoors. Most imparted more impacts. Butler writes that whale watching that began in response to their depletion of the Humpback whale, Blue whale in the 1960s (resulting in them being declared protected in 1967 and 1966 consecutively) marked the birth of the ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascurian, 1996).

As a result of the increased environmental awareness, eco-development arose as a model that sought to integrate cultural, social and ecological goals with development. It has been suggested that out of this popular school of thought, the concept of ecotourism was developed as an opportunity to put the ideas of eco-development into practice (Sagasti and Colby, 1993; Nelson 1994). Ecotourism, being promoted as a means of 'giving nature value' and hence of achieving sustainable tourism development could be a useful choice besides the other types of tourism (Kamra, 2001).

Ecotourism has been defined in different ways. Ecotourism was first defined by Ceballos-Lascurian as: "*Travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and*

its wild plants, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas" (Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1994).

As awareness and experience of the activity has grown, the need for a more comprehensive and detailed definition is essential. Martha Honey (1999) has proposed an excellent, more detailed version: *Ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights.* Again the definition adopted in 1996 by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) which describes ecotourism as: *Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples.* The Nature Conservancy has adopted the concept of ecotourism as the type of tourism that it recommends its partners use in most protected area management, especially for national parks and other areas with fairly strict conservation objectives. For The Nature Conservancy, ecotourism represents an excellent means for benefiting both local people and the protected area in question. It is an ideal component of a sustainable development strategy where natural resources can be utilized as tourism attractions without causing harm to the natural area. An important tool for protected area management and development, ecotourism must be implemented in a flexible manner. However, the following elements are crucial to the ultimate success of an ecotourism initiative -

- have a low impact upon a protected area's natural resources;
- involve stakeholders (individuals, communities, ecotourists, tour operators and government institutions) in the planning, development, implementation and monitoring phases;
- respect local cultures and traditions;

- generate sustainable and equitable income for local communities and for as many other stakeholders as possible, including private tour operators;
- generate income for protected area conservation; and
- educate all stakeholders about their role in conservation.

In the Global Ecotourism Conference (GEC07), held in Oslo, Norway, from 14-16 May, 2007 The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism, *as a form of tourism that entails responsible travel to natural areas and which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.*

The TIES has outlined the following principles of ecotourism-

Minimize impact

- Build an environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate"

The Green Globe 21 International Ecotourism Standard has adopted Australia's definition of ecotourism : "Ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation." However, a more definitive "definition" of ecotourism is the expansion of this statement into a core set of principles with specific performance indicators (i.e. the key ecotourism performance areas).

The core set of principles for ecotourism are:

Nature Area Focus : The nature is one of the primary concerns of ecotourism, which often involves travel to relatively undisturbed areas. As the tourism product is dependent upon nature, negative impacts upon that resource should be minimized. As Cater [1994] mentions, even the most conscientious tourist will have some degree of impact on the nature and so ecotourism should therefore attempt to minimize that impact.

Interpretation: It provides opportunities to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.

Environmental Sustainability Practice: Ecotourism also represents best practice for environmentally sustainable tourism.

Contribution to Conservation: It contributes directly to the conservation of natural areas.

Benefiting local communities: Ecotourism produces direct economic benefits for the local community. Without economic benefits, the host community will have little reason to view the intrusion of tourists positively and will have little incentive to protect the environment upon which tourism depends. Ecotourism is often found in designated protected areas or national parks which may have been imposed upon the indigenous population and if they can see no benefit from its existence, they may have little incentive to adhere to the environmental regulations of the "common pool" resource (Hardin, 1968; Healy, 1994).

Local participation: Proper importance is given to the need for local participation in ecotourism. According to Wallace and Pierce [1996], ecotourism is a type of tourism that "maximizes the early and long-term participation of local people in the decision making process that determines the kind and amount of tourism that should occur". There are important reasons for local involvement other than a moral obligation to incorporate the people tourism will affect. The degree of control the local population has over tourism in their locality is generally perceived as being a significant element of sustainability [Mowforth & Munt, 1998]. The most likely way these objectives can be achieved is if the local community are actively participating in and empowered through ecotourism. Cater [1994] points out that: "In terms of conserving the natural and socio-cultural resource base, the time perspective of the local population is longer than that of outside entrepreneurs concerned with early profits. They are also more likely to ensure that traditions and lifestyles will be respected. Their co-operation is also a vital factor in reducing infringements of conservation regulations such as poaching and

indiscriminate tree-felling". Again Drake [1991] notes further advantages of involving the local community in ecotourism projects: "Local participation functions as an early warning system, helping managers to avoid or plan for decisions that might otherwise cause conflict with the local population. Also, including a participation program in the design stage of a project provides the opportunity for the local community to become educated about the purpose and benefits of the project, thereby increasing support for the effort."

Cultural Respect: It is sensitive to, interpret and involve the cultures existing in the area.

Customer Satisfaction: Consistently meets consumer expectations.

Responsible Marketing: Eco tourism markets and promote it honestly and accurately so that realistic expectations are formed.

Providing education: The final principle to which ecotourism should adhere is that of education. Wight [1994] asserts that ecotourism "should involve education among all parties – local communities, government, non-governmental organizations, industry and tourists". Guides should therefore have been taught conservation issues and the tourists should be told about local conservation efforts and why they are deemed important. Tourists should be made aware of the damaging potential of their stay and should be properly informed on "ecotourism etiquette" and how to behave to reduce any negative impacts they might have [Cater, 1994].

Ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. Ecotourism is a preserving travel to natural areas to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to disturb the integrity of the ecosystem, while creating economic opportunities that make conservation and protection of natural resources advantageous to the local people. In short, ecotourism can be categorised as a tourism programme that is - *"Nature based, Ecologically sustainable, Where education and interpretation is a major constituent and Where local people are benefited."* Infact Eco tourism means making as ineffectual environmental jolt as possible and assists in to uphold the native folk, thereby heartening

the conservation of wildlife and habitats when sojourning a site. This is an ideal form of tourism and tourism progress that encourages going back to natural wealth in every aspect of life. It is also the passe-partout to sustainable ecological development. Eco-tourism is consecrated for preserving and sustaining the diversity of the world's natural and cultural environments. It serves and enthralls its visitors in a way that is imperceptibly impertinent or destructive to the environment and supports the native cultures in the locations it is functioning in. Responsibility for both travelers and service providers is the authentic point for Eco tourism. In fact, ecotourism can serve as an incentive for nature conservation while supporting the well-being of natural areas and local people. As a distinct form of tourism differing from traditional nature tourism, ecotourism provides funds for preserving land and water resources and the biodiversity they support. It minimizes environmental impacts, incorporates ecologically sensitive architecture and land use design, and offers local people opportunities for compatible economic development. True ecotourism is a conservation strategy that goes beyond traditional forms of protected area management to secure a healthy future for a variety of natural and cultural assets.

Salient features of Eco-tourism:

1. This is an alternate tourism that breaks the traditional tourism activity.
2. It should be small scaled, locally controlled, land sensitive and ecologically oriented
3. It should be based on environmental ethics with a concept of 'Small is beautiful', doing more with less and treated with fostering resource integrity.
4. It should be sustainable environmentally, socially, culturally and economically.
5. It should be enrich experience and should be educational.
6. It prevents the environmental degradation caused by uncontrolled tourism activity.
7. It affords cultural exchange between rural and urban people.

8. Rural people are economically benefited for its initiation and hence a tool of a rural development.
9. Introduction of education on nature and environment.
10. But its most avowed objective is to attain a balance between nature and human beings and ensure the co-existence of both

Honey(1999) suggests that real Ecotourism has seven characteristics. These are

1. It involves travel to natural destinations
2. Minimises impact
3. Builds environmental awareness
4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
5. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
6. Respects local culture
7. Supports human rights and democratic movements

However there are five key principles that are fundamental to ecotourism. They are that Ecotourism is -

- Nature based
- Ecologically sustainable
- Environmentally educative
- Locally beneficial
- Generates tourist satisfaction

Theoretically, ecotourism can be defined as a type of tourism where the environment, local community and visitor all benefit. In practice, the term 'ecotourism' is often used by tour operators as a marketing tool to promote any form of tourism that is related to nature. As Wight [1994, p.39] notes: "There seem to be two prevailing views of ecotourism: one envisages that public interest in the environment may be used to market a product; the other sees that this same interest may be used to conserve the resources upon which this product is based. These views need not be mutually exclusive".

Eco-tourism is a new segment of the Indian tourism plan. Eco tourism facilitates die-hard nature enthusiast to meet Mother Nature in her unblemished glory abundant with rich bio diversities of flora and fauna..

The “Green Laws” of ecological stability are making people conscious of how human and the natural environment can survive, assisting each other for more time to come. Eco tourism is the only way to over emphasize and protect the environmental and social benefit of tourism. In India also, the progress is gathering force with more and more travel and travel-related organization’s emphasizing the perquisites of the Eco-tourist and proclaiming Eco-tourism in the country. Whether it is The Eco tourism drive initiated by the green state of Kerala or advancement of Heritage Hotels by Rajasthan, all of these initiatives testify toward the increasing acceptance for Eco tourism in India.

NEED FOR ECOTOURISM:

In recent years the tourism industry is moving towards sustainable development. The industry needs to carry on profitably despite all the shocks of the modern world. And it also needs to develop future tourists with the interest to visit the tourism places rich with diversity. For the tourism sector, the concept of sustainability implies meeting current uses and demands of tourism without impairing the natural and cultural heritage, or opportunities for collective enjoyment of tourists of the future (Hawkes and Williams, 1993). As an attraction to mass tourism, which has caused negative social, economical and ecological impacts, ecotourism is the latest product the tourism industry is trying to project. It is a focused journey to natural areas to understand the history of environment, without altering the genuineness of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to the local people. Fundamentally, eco-tourism means making as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of wildlife and habitats when visiting a place. This is responsible form of tourism and tourism development, which encourages going back to natural

products in every aspect of life. It is also the key to sustainable ecological development.

Eco-tourism focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. It is typically defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Responsible Eco-tourism includes programs that minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment, and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, initiatives by hospitality providers to promote recycling, energy efficiency, water reuse, and the creation of economic opportunities for local communities are an integral part of Eco-tourism. Historical, biological and cultural conservation, preservation, sustainable development etc. are some of the fields closely related to Eco-Tourism.

However in a nut shell the necessity of ecotourism lies in the followings-

- Removes negative impacts that can damage or destroy the integrity or character of the natural or cultural environments.
- Educates the travelers about the importance of conservation of our environment or includes an interpretation/learning experience.
- Helps to collect revenues for the conservation of natural areas and the management of protected areas.
- Imports economic benefits to local communities and injects revenues to local people living adjacent to protected areas.
- Emphasizes the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism sector and seeks to ensure the social and environmental “carrying capacity” of the tourism development.
- Imparts revenues in the host country by harnessing the use of locally owned facilities and services.
- creates employment for surrounding communities, thus providing economic incentives to support protected areas.

- Helps to build local infrastructure that will develop sensitively in harmony with the environment and minimizes the use of fossil fuels,
- It helps to conserve local plant and wildlife .
- It also Helps in cultural renovation and international understanding.

Components of Ecotourism : Different elements of tourist attractions are called the components of tourism. These elements are the basis of tourism. Tourists will not be motivated to go to a particular place if these components are absent. Transport, Locale and Accommodation are the three basic component of tourism. Among these basic components 'Locale' with attraction and amenities is the most important. The 'Locale' means physical space where tourist will spend some days However tourism scholars have attempted to classify the various attractions of different 'Locale' of ecotourism . Ecotourism is based on the natural environment with a focus on its biological, physical and cultural features. Ecotourism depends on a natural setting and may include cultural elements where they occur in a natural setting. Here we can mention the geographical components of H . ROBINSON(1976) with some modifications for Ecotourism components (Table1.1).

TABLE 1.1 : COMPONENTS OF ECO-TOURISM

1. Landscapes	(a) Mountains, rolling plains , canyons, cliffs, coral reefs. (b) Water, e.g. rivers, lakes, geysers, glaciers, the sea. (c) Vegetation, e.g. forests, grassland, moors, heaths, deserts.
2. Climate	Sunshine and cloud, temperature conditions, rains and snow.
3. Animal life	(a) Wild life e.g. birds, game reservations (b) Hunting and fishing.
4. Settlement features	(a) Towns, cities, and villages. (b) Historical remains, monuments and legends (c) Archaeological remains.
5. Culture	Ways of life, traditions, fold-lore, arts and crafts etc.
6. Ethnic diversity and varieties in social life	

However there are several components of Ecotourism in North Bengal. These are as follows-

TABLE 1.2 : COMPONENTS OF ECOTOURISM IN NORTH BENGAL

COMPONENTS	MAJOR FACTORS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Northern hilly country and rolling topography of Dooars 2. River aspects, Tanks, Bills etc. 3. Sunrise (Tiger Hill) 4. Lakes (Sumendu lake) 5. Flora 6. Wavy tea gardens 7. Fauna 8. Climate: Temperature, precipitation, Comfort / discomfort index. 	<p>NATURAL BEAUTY, FLORA, FAUNA AND CLIMATE</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local language and etiquettes. 2. Ethnic significance: The world's smallest ethnic group-TOTOS 3. Art and architectural features: traditional fine arts (dance, music) 4. History: Legends and ancient ruins, visual reminders. 5. Varieties in social life/Village visits 	<p>SOCIO- CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nature Interpretation centers , Zoos and Museums. 2. Botanical gardens 3. Rope way 4. National parks, Tiger projects, Wild life Sanctuaries. 5. Biosphere Reserves 6. Rock climbing 7. Rafting, canoeing in mountainous turbulent streams. 8. Boating, angling 	<p>RECREATION AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES</p>

The Northern hilly country and the rolling topography of Dooars, snowclad peaks, furrowed ridges, murmuring streams, foaming torrents, lakes, smiling valleys, abundant historical ruins, antiquities, architectures, ethnic diversity and the rich cultural expressions- all these components have built the framework of Ecotourism in North Bengal(TABLE 1.2).

The greenery of forest and wild cries of animals always attracted the mankind. As far as North Bengal is concerned it is very rich and prosper in faunal and floral resources. Different types of trees are seen in this area. Shorea Robusta (Sal), Dalbergia Sisoo, Acacia Catchu, Bombax Mahabanicum, Oaks, Maples, Chestnuts, Rhododendron, Cryptomaria Japonica and others types of rare orchids are the major attraction of botanists and other scientists. Recently rare species of orchid has been discovered named *Bhanda Alpina*.

Again the wilderness of the forest is the home of a number of wild animals. Docile, denizens of the wild – the elephant and the majestic tigers very often break the silent of the forests. Some of the rarest animals such as Red Panda of Mahananda wildlife sanctuary, Pangolin of Buxa Tiger reserve also draw Scientists and Zoologists from various parts of India as well as overseas. The area has also the wealth of numerous colourful birds and fishes in rivers, stream and ponds.

Climate is a vital tourism resource. It has always been a key factor in any tourism resource inventory. A number of phenomena mostly connected with weather and climate like sunrise, sunset, moonlit night, sunbath, cool breeze-land or snowfall, winter games, summer month etc, have become the catchwords of eco tourism. In Himalayan parts of North Bengal, cool hill resorts attract tourists during summer season. In the month of April, May and June when other parts of the state have hot and scorching weather, in these hill areas climate remains rather cool, soothing, pleasant and healthy. Again in Dooars, tourists generally gather during post monsoon period when blue open skies are visible.

EcoTourism shows an interesting relationship with socio-cultural characteristics. Abundant historical ruins, antiquities, architectures and cultural expressions of the districts of Koch Bihar, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur and Dakshin Dinajpur draw tourists from far distances. North Bengal is also important from anthropological point of view. The World's smallest ethnic group the 'TOTOS' are very often visited by social scientists. The physical appearances, dress, food, manner and ideal colourful customs, rituals and taboos of these tribal people are quite fascinating to the tourists.

INTER DISCIPLINARY RELEVANCE OF THE ECOTOURISM STUDY

The study of Eco-tourism is not only included wholly within the realm of geography it is a broad spectrum of all branches of social sciences. Although at present Eco-tourism as an aspect of recreation has been growing up within the domain of applied geography it is one of the most complex phenomena lying at the interface of most of branches of knowledge- ecology, anthropology, sociology, economics, history, environmental science and above all geography. Eco-tourism is concerned with the travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed areas and hence it is decentralized in nature. Thus Eco-tourism has been an integral part of ecology. It focuses on the assessment of local cultures, related factors and cultural heritage of the society. Hence Eco-tourism has been a subject matter of sociology.

It reflects the eco-awareness, education on nature and environment. It may have to be viewed as part of a longer time strategy of sustainable development. Thus Eco-tourism has been a part of environmental science. Apart from these it is widely agreed that local communities and indigenous people are economically benefited from eco-tourism activity and it also investigates various economic aspects. Hence this new disciple embraces the field of economics. Thus we see that as a newly emerging branch of applied geography, Eco-tourism, touches different branches of social and other sciences.

GEOGRAPHERS' ROLE IN ECO-TOURISM:

Eco-tourism as a field of geographic study and research has blossomed quite late and because of that geographers have directed their attention to the study of tourism only a few years ago. The role of geographers in ecotourism can be highlighted in the following way-

The role of Non Indian geographers on Eco-tourism:

The role of Non Indian geographers in Eco-tourism is very important. Mexican environmentalist *HECTOR CEBALLOS LASCURIAN* for the first time used this new term 'Eco-tourism' in 1983. Within a short span of time this new 'Eco-tourism' concept has been popularized worldwide. Since then many scholars began to foster this new concept in the academic field. Eadington, W.R., and V.L. Smith (1992) nicely mentioned the emergence of alternative forms of tourism and its potentials and problems in the development of tourism. Wight [1994] focused on the importance of Eco-tourism in the present day world. On the same year Prosser highlighted on the sustainable form of Eco-tourism. Cater, E. and G. Lowman (1994) worked on the Third World Ecotourism scenario and its Problems and prospects for sustainability. Wallace and Pierce [1996] stressed on the necessity of the long term participation of local people in Eco-tourism. Again Wallace [1997] noted that Eco-tourism is an agent of change. However Mowforth and Munt [1998] perceived Eco-tourism as a significant element of sustainability. Crinion, D. (1998) elaborated about the south Australian tourism strategy and the role of ecotourism. Isaacs, J.C. (2000) pointed out the potentiality of ecotourism to contribute to wildlife conservation. Tuohino, A., and A. Hynonen (2001) highlighted Ecotourism on the basis of concepts and practices in Finnish rural tourism. Barkin, D. (2002) in his work described Ecotourism as a tool for sustainable regional development.

Apart from these the works of Weaver(2001), Buckley, R.C. (1995), Burchett, C. (1991), Collins, C. (1994), Erlet and Gwen Lowman (Eds), (1994), Figgis, P. (1993), Epler Wood, M. (1996), Fennel, D. A. and smale, B.J.A., (1992), Kallen, C., (1990), Moore,

S. and Carter, B., (1993), Smelding, S.S.A., (1993), Wheeler, B., (1990) are also noteworthy in the field of Ecotourism.

The role of Indian geographers on Eco-tourism:

Eco-tourism as field of geographic study and research has blossomed in India after the 1990. Eco-tourism as a part of study has been introduced now in some of the universities. Therefore literatures on the various aspects of Eco-tourism are quite meager. Some regional monographs dealing with tourism throw light on certain aspects of Eco-tourism. But the works directly dealing with the eco-tourism as a scientific field of investigation are quite few in India. We get some idea about eco-tourism from some regional works of Singh, T. V. [92], Lajipathi Rai [93], Nutan, Tyagi [92], Karmakar, M[2008], Bhattacharya, A.K., (2005), Kamra, Krishnan A. (2001), Khanna, M.K.(2007) Raj, A(ed. 2007), Rao, Nina& Suresh K. T(2007). etc.

The Global Ecotourism scénario:

At present many countries of the world are emphasizing on tourism to rejuvenate their economies .As a result of this tourism activity is being expanded throughout the world. In 2007 there were 898 million international tourist arrivals (6.5% growth per year between 1950-2007) in world (TABLE 1.3). International Tourism Receipts totalled US\$ 733 billion, or 2 US\$ billion a day, in 2006 Tourism represents around 35% of the world's exports of services and over 70% in Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

TABLE 1.3: SHARE OF INDIA IN INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS IN WORLD, 1999 – 2006

Year	International Tourists arrivals in world (in million)	Foreign Tourists Arrivals in India (in million)	Percentage share of India
1996	573.5	2.3	0.40
1997	597.6	2.4	0.40
1998	616.0	2.4	0.39
1999	639.5	2.5	0.39
2000	686.7	2.6	0.38
2001	686.0	2.5	0.36
2002	7.6.4	2.4	0.34
2003	693.2	2.7	0.39
2004	761.0	3.5	0.46
2005	802.0	3.9	0.49
2006	842.0	4.4	0.52

Source: Tourism Market Trends 2005 Edition (WTO) for the year upto 2003, WTO Barometer June, 2007

Ecotourism is considered a specialty segment of the larger nature tourism market. *Eco-tourism is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide and representing 6% of the world gross domestic product, 11.4% of all consumer spending - not a market to be taken lightly.* This new alternative tourism is not only a powerful social and economic force but also a factor in the physical environment as well. It has the power to enhance the environment, provide funds for conservation, preserve culture and history, to set sustainable use limits, and to protect natural attractions. For this reason Ecotourism has been flourished in many countries.

Ceballos-Lascuráin (1993) reports a WTO estimate that nature tourism generates 7% of all international travel expenditure (Lindberg, 1997). The World Resources Institute (1990) found that while tourism

overall has been growing at an annual rate of 4%, *nature travel is increasing at an annual rate between 10% and 30%* (Reingold, 1993). Data which supports this growth rate is found in Lew's (1997) survey of tour operators in the Asia- Pacific region who have experienced annual growth rates of 10% to 25% in recent years (Lindberg, 1997). WTO (1998) stated that ecotourism and all nature-related forms of tourism account for approximately 20 percent of total international travel. Fillion (1992) outlines the magnitude of the ecotourism market through the use of general tourism statistics. Fillion qualifies ecotourism as "travel to enjoy and appreciate nature". Fillion identified, through an analysis of inbound tourist motivations to different worldwide destinations, that 40-60% of all international tourists are nature tourists.

There is currently no global initiative for the gathering of ecotourism data. However, certain indicators show us how the larger nature tourism market, of which ecotourism is a segment, is growing at a rate faster than that for tourism as a whole, particularly in the tropics. These indicators are:

- Travelling to Hol Chan Marine Reserve in Belize increased by two-thirds over a five year period, from 33,669 tourists in 1991 to 50,411 in 1996 (Belize Tourism Board, 1997).
- More than two-thirds of tourists in Costa Rica visit protected areas and reserves.
- The global destinations of U.S.-based outbound ecotourism operators' clients were: Central America 39%, South America 25%, North America 18%, Mexico and the Caribbean 5% and other regions 13% (Higgins, 1996).
- In Honduras, experts estimate that the number of nature-loving visitors grew nearly 15% (for a total of 200,000 tourists) in 1995; a 13-15% increase in visitors

A survey of U.S.-based outbound ecotourism operators shows that the number of operators grew by 820% between 1970 and 1994, or an average of 34% a year (Higgins, 1996).

- Ecotourism is growing at a rate of 10-15% annually, as estimated by the World Travel and Tourism Council.
- Many countries whose primary attractions are natural areas are experiencing dramatic increases in tourist arrivals. For example, arrivals in Costa Rica more than quadrupled from 246,737 in 1986 to 1,031,585 in 1999 (ICT, 2001). Belize has seen more than a 600% visitor increase, from 51,740 in 1986 to 334,699 in 1996 (WTO, 1997).

Now the question is why are people so attracted to nature destinations? Most likely this trend has followed the global increase in interest in the environment. As people hear about the fragility of the environment, they become more aware of conservation issues around the world. At home, they are willing to pay more for “green” products and services and are taking specific conservation actions such as recycling. For their own pleasure, they want to learn first hand about endangered species and threatened habitats. They want to understand the complex challenges of rainforest conservation and want to experience them first hand. Travelers are seeking more remote destinations. They want to go off the beaten path, go to the heart of the jungle.

In 2004, ecotourism was growing globally 3 times faster than the tourism industry as a whole. Sun-and-sand resort tourism has now “matured as a market” and its growth is projected to remain flat. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Conservation International have indicated that most of tourism’s expansion is occurring in and around the world’s remaining natural areas.

Eco tourism has been the backbone of economies of the Galapagos Islands and Costa Rica and many Central American

countries(Lindberg and Enriquez,1997). The most successful Ecotourism destinations in developing world are Fiji, Maldives, Maurisus, Lakshadives, Andaman Nicober Islands. Dominica in the Caribbean, Komodo National Park in Indonesia and Kenya, In 2002, the *EcoTourism Society of Kenya*(ESOK) became the first to launch an Eco-rating scheme in Africa(Okech, R.N-2007).Phillip Island of Australia becons tourists from different parts of the world .New Zealand and Malayesia also have rich Ecotourism destinations. Apart from these there are other countries where Ecotourism has been flourished.

These are-

Australia

There has been a considerable increase of international tourists to Australia's national parks, with a rise in tourists numbers between 1993 and 1996 from around 1.2 million to more than 1.6 million, an increase of 33.3 per cent. By 1998, this figure had increased to nearly 1.7 million, or 47% of all inbound visitors to Australia aged 15 and over reported having visited national parks (Bureau of Tourism Research, cited by Sport and Tourism Division Australian government, 1999). In Australia, recent research found eco tourists to represent nearly 30% of domestic travellers (ecotrends 1999, cited by Wight, in press). There are an estimated 600 ecotourism operators in Australia today, approximately 85% of these employ fewer than 20 staff. Ecotourism businesses are estimated to have an annual turnover of some \$250 million and to employ a total staff of around 6500, the equivalent of 4500 full-time staff (Sport and Tourism Division Australian government, 1999).

Peru

An estimated 10.3% of tourists that visit Peru prefer to go bird watching in natural areas (Proyecto PRA, 2000). According to

studies carried out by PromPerú (2000) 47% of foreign tourists to Peru visited natural zones. Of this number, 44% combined visiting natural zones with visiting cultural attractions and 3% came only to visit natural zones. The flow of tourists to 26 of the 52 Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado – ANPE (Protected Natural Zones by the State), increased 250% during the 1990-1999 period. Just in 1999, the number of tourists was estimated in 6.43 lakh according to the figures provided by the Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales - INRENA (National Institute of Natural Resources) (Promperú, 2000).

Brazil

Five million tourists came to Brazil in 1999, five times as many as in 1991. Brazil has more than 150 conservation areas, of which 40 National Parks (FIG. 1.1). An estimated number of 3.5 million tourists went to these National Parks in 1998. Especially the last two years the number of foreign eco tourists has grown, it had 6 lakh Brazilian eco tourists and attracted 2 lakh foreign eco tourists in 1998 (Janér, 2000).

Galapagos Islands

Galapagos nature tourism has grown steadily since the pioneering days of the 1970's, to the present level of over 60,000 tourists a year, making a \$100 million-plus contribution to the Ecuadorian economy (Charles Darwin Research Station, 2001).

Kenya

From 1983 to 1993 tourists arrivals to Kenya grew by 45% (372,000 to 826,000). The Kenya Wildlife Service (1995) estimates that 80% of Kenya's tourist market is drawn by wildlife and that the tourism industry generates one-third of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Revenue from Kenya's wildlife parks increased to Ksh. 711 million in 1995. (In 1997 US\$1=60KS).

South Africa

In the period of 1986 until 1998 the number of tourists to game and nature reserves in South Africa has grown by 108% annually. In 1986 the number of tourists to the reserves was 4.55 lakh and in 1998 this number has grown to 58.98 lakh tourists. Game and nature reserves are the number one activity for tourists to the country in 1997 (60%), rising by 2% over the previous year (South African Tourism Board, 1998).

Nepal

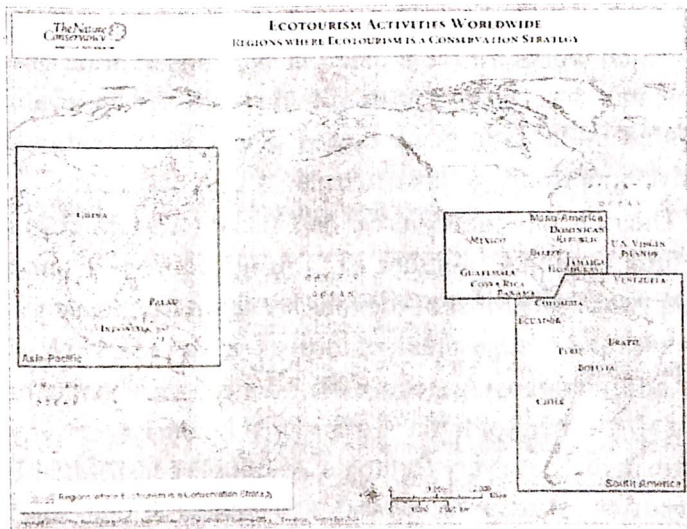
The Annapurna area is the most popular trekking destination in Nepal. Since 1989 the number of trekkers coming to the area has increased at an annual rate of approximately 18%. In 1997, 50,708 international trekkers visited the area. Out these 12,000 visited the Annapurna sanctuary .

Belize

In 1999, 49.4% of the tourists visited Mayan sites of Belize and 12.8% visited Parks and reserves. Important reasons for visiting Belize are to observe scenic beauty, to be in a natural setting and to observe wildlife (Higgins, 2000). Caves and Barrier reefs were visited by 87% of visitors.

However there are four most important background factors that govern the development of Ecotourism in different parts of the world. These are –

1. Overall growth and product diversification in world tourism.
2. The development of cheaper and faster access to new destination areas.
3. Increased levels of green awareness.
4. The search for sustainable alternatives to mass tourism.
5. The need for acquiring knowledge on nature.



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Fig. 1.1 : World Wide Regions Where Eco-Tourism Has Been Accepted As A Conservation Strategy

Ecotourism in India :

India, the land of varied geography offers several tourist destinations that not just de-stress but also rejuvenate one. There are several ways to enjoy Mother Nature in most pristine way. The few places like the Himalayan Region, Kerala, the northeast India, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and the Lakshdweep islands are some of the places where you can enjoy the treasured wealth of the Mother Nature. Thenmala in Kerala(Appendix-I) is the first planned ecotourism destination in India created to cater to the Eco-tourists and nature lovers. The topography of India is enriched with abundant source of flora & fauna. India has numerous rare and endangered species in its surroundings. The declaration of several wildlife areas and national parks has encouraged the growth of the wildlife resource, which reduced due to the wildlife hunt by several kings in the past. Today, India has many wildlife sanctuaries and protection laws.

Currently, there are about 80 national parks and 441 sanctuaries in India, which works for the protection and conservation of wildlife resource in India. The land mass of India is crossed by several rivers and dotted by lakes at many places. These water bodies provide attractive opportunities for ecotourism.

The rich natural resources and also the cultural resources of India thus attract a number of foreign tourists from far and wide(Appendix-II).Most of the tourists come from western world. India beckons a huge chunk of tourists from U.K, USA, Canada, France and Germany(Appendix III).It is necessary to mention here that not all the areas of India are enriched in tourism activity. Some states are in this case very fortunate. Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh Tamil nadu etc. states receive maximum number of domestic tourists while Delhi, Maharastra, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan draw a large number of foreign tourists(Appendix- IV & V).

Eco-Tourism in India is still at a very nascent stage, but there are for sure conscious efforts to save the fragile Himalayan Eco System and culture and heritage of the indigenous people, which is probably the largest concentration in the world.

Holiday Camping vis a vis Hotel accommodation are gathering momentum amongst the metropolis traveller. A plethora of holiday camping options are available in the Himalayan belt, where soft adventure tourism is packaged with holiday camping to create an acceptable eco-tourism product. Resorts tucked deep inside jungles of Karnataka, North Bengal, House-boats of Kerala, Tree Houses at Vythiri and North Bengal combine to make India one of the most diverse eco-tourism destinations on the planet(Table 1.4). Some of these are given below :

TABLE 1.4 : MAJOR ECO TOURISM DESTINATIONS OF INDIA

DESTINATIONS	PRIME ATTRACTIONS
Andaman Nicobar Islands	Scuba diving, snorkeling, surfing, trekking, Island camping (Appendix-VI)
Gulmarg and Sonamarg	Trekking, golf course
Kerala	Backwaters, parasailing, surfing, wildlife adventure, adventure trekking, ancient Ayurveda treatment
Kovalam	Glittering silvery sand beach, green palm groves, sun-bath in the exotic tropical sun lying on the vast silvery fling sands, kayaking, swimming, surfing and skiing
Garhwal and Kumaon	River rafting, aero sports and skiing, yachting, kayaking, canoeing , boating in lake, scenic beauty
Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary	Diverse variety of fauna and flora , ethnic diversity
Rajasthan	Rich heritage, culture, camel safaris, golden sand dunes and great wildlife in the national parks/ sanctuaries.
Kangra Valley	Mountaineering, trekking, rock climbing and fishing, hang gliding
Ranthambore (Sawai-Madhopur)	Immense rocky terrain with steep slopes, rambling streams and elevated trees, foremost rendezvous joints of the diverse wildlife.
Gir National Park	Asiatic big cat- the lion, other endangered fauna
Sikkim	Snow clad mountain peaks, luscious valleys, meandering rivers , vegetation, mountaineering, trekking, river rafting, yak safaris, mountain biking and gliding.
Uttaranchal	River rafting, aero sports and skiing, canoeing , scenic beauty, mountaineering, trekking, wildlife adventure
Gahirmatha sea beach	Olive ridley turtles, mangrove forest, sandy beach
Lakswadip	Beautiful coral reefs, coconut trees, silvery sand beach
North Bengal	Spectacular landscape, undulating plains, wavy tea lands, wildlife adventure ,river rafting, canoeing , mountaineering, trekking

The wave of Eco-Tourism concept has reached on the North Bengal only a decade back. This started its journey at first at Buxa National Park on 15th August 1996. Under Buxa National park there are several tourism spots like Buxa Duar, Raja Bhatkhawa where *Nature Interpretation centres (NIC)* have been set up to spread the Eco-Tourism. According to Forest and Environment Ministry although 'Non-forestry work' is prohibited in the reserved forests, but yet considering the economic background of the poor forest dwellers this plan has been outlined. There are two advantages of this plan here-

- (1) Forest dwellers dependent on wood and other forest products will keep away themselves from deforestation and consequently the area of the Buxa Natural Park will be increased.
- (2) Forest dwellers will act as guide for the tourists who will visit the forest and so they will be economically benefited.

This 'alternate tourism' has also flourished in Jaldapara, Murti, Kalimpong and in Mahananda sanctuary. The Kunj Nagar Eco-Tourism Park of Falakata and Gorumara Nature Interpretation Centre have been developed to spread the Eco-Tourism. Apart from these, it has been blossomed isolately at Chuna Bhati Monastery; Dukpa dominated village, Rupam Valley, Rover's point, Tapsa, Tasigaon and Lataguri areas of North Bengal.