

ECOTOURISM: BHANDARDARA

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism or Ecological tourism implies travel to natural biodiversity rich areas having monuments of historical importance and cultural heritage sites which should help in conservation of environment and improvement in the financial status of the local people along with their welfare without disturbing the natural resources and environment. The picturesque place of Bhandardara is rich in biodiversity scenic beauty and places of tourist interest and is in the state of Maharashtra. It can be developed into an ecodestination in an eco-friendly sustainable manner along with study tours and can generate lots of interest among domestic and foreign tourists.

Key Words: Mount Kalsubai, Biodiversity, Arthur Lake, Umbrella falls, Wilson Dam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism involves travelling to relatively undistributed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific aims of enjoying and studying its bio-diversity as well as existing cultural aspects (Ceballos-Lascurian, 1983).

According to Honey (2008) it has been considered as panacea to fund conservation scientific research, projects, fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instil environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel community, besides satisfying and educating the tourists.

The aim of the present study is to enable people to explore, enjoy and study biodiversity its role without harming it and also to create awareness among the locals, tourists, students, researchers to take care of the rich biodiversity.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Day visits to Bhandardara previously and few days stay at a stretch this summer vacation.

2.1 Location:

Located in Akola Tehsil in Ahmednagar district of state of Maharashtra on the western Ghats about 185 kilometres from Mumbai, 65 kilometres from Nashik and 190 kilometres from Pune and 110 kilometres from Shirdi Bhandardara is easily accessible by road, trains and taxi.

Western Ghat is one of the mega biodiversity hot spot regions in India. Deciduous and semi evergreen forest types are found in this range of Sahyadri range of mountains (Bhise and Reddy 2012). Ahmed Nagar district is one of the ten districts of Western Ghat region. The district covers an area 17035 square kilometres.

Pravara River originates from Sahyadri hills of Bhandardara village. It is one of the tributaries of Godavari River. Godavari and Pravara rivers meet at Pravara Sangam near Kaygaon Toka.

2.2 Cultural Heritage:

It is believed that Lord Ram and Laxman visited Agasti Rishi to seek his blessings. Rishi Agasti gave an arrow to Ram to rescue his wife Sita. The other belief is that Rishi Agasti meditated here for a year surviving only on water and air, pleased with his devotion Gods blessed him with a stream of the Ganges River which is now known as Pravara River.

There are two forts Ratnagad and Harishchandra fort. Ratnagad is one of the favourite fort of Shivaji Maharaj.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Biodiversity:

Biodiversity is essential for stabilization of ecosystem, protection of overall environment quality for understanding intrinsic worth of all species on the earth (Ehrlich and Wilson, 1991).

Flora: The place is rich with tree species and includes fruit trees, shrubs and other herbaceous plants and climbers. Main tree species are *Terminalia chebula*, *Terminalia bellarica*, *Terminalia arjuna*, *Cassia sps*, *Bauhinia sps*, *Albizia sps*, *Bombax sps*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Delonix regia*, *Pterocarpus sps*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Acacia sps*, *Abutilon sps*, *Caesalpineia sps*, *Mimosa pudica*, *Mimosa sps*, *Cocus nucifera*, *Ficus benghalensis*, *Ficus glomerata*, *Ficus elastica*, *Ficus religiosa*, *Gymnema sps*, *Ixora sps*, *Trema orientalis*, *Mangifera indica*, *Atrocarpus sps*, *Michelia champaca*, *Musa sps*, *Polyalthia longifolia*, *Carica papaya*, *Psidium sps*, *Psidium guajava*, etc.

Many other plant species include *Ocimum sanctum*, *Mentha sps*, *Lantana camera*, *Panacratium sps*, *Murraya koenigii*, *Carissa sps*, *Zizipus sps*, *Vernonia sps*, *Euphorbia sps*, *Capparis sps*, *Asparagus racemosus*,

Amaranthus sps, *Quisqualis indica*, *Jasminum sps* and *Thunbergia sps*, etc.

3.2 Fauna:

Leopard, Jungle cat, Palm civet, Mongoose, frogs, wolf, Jackal, Fox, Barking deer, Sambar, Monitor lizard, turtles and many other species of snakes, storks etc. (Forest Department of Maharashtra). Fruit bats are seen hanging from the trees.

Pravara river is rich in fresh water fish biodiversity and some of the fish include *Catla catla*, *Notopterus notopterus*, *Puntis sps*, *Cyprinus carpio*, *Labeo rohita*, *Labeo calbasu*, etc (Shinde, et. al 2009). Lake Arthur also abounds with different kinds of fish which need to be studied.

3.3 Tourism:

There are other sites of tourist attraction which include Mount Kalsubai peak (1646 metres) of the Sahyadri range. It was used as watch tower during the rule of Shivaji Maharaj. There is a small temple and a well. The water level has never dropped below three feet.

Built on Pravara river in 1910 is Wilson Dam 150 metres high one of the largest earthen dams in India. It has a garden with rich biodiversity and streams. Fruit bats can be seen hanging from the trees during day time.

Umbrella falls are also quite famous which can be observed during monsoons. When the level of the lake rises, the dam opens its gates to release excess water down the town.

Another tourist attraction is Arthur lake, an open type of lake which gets water from Pravara river. Water is quite clean and clear and abounds with fish and can be lifted for drinking purposes.

Randha falls descend from a height of about 170 feet into a beautiful gorge and the view is quite spectacular during monsoons. Panoramic view of the Sahyadri ranges can be enjoyed from

Ghatgar viewpoint. Among other attractions is Kalsubai Harishchandragad Wildlife Sanctuary.

4. CONCLUSION

Bhandardara with many attractions, biodiversity and easy accessibility by road, train can be developed into an ecodestination. Although this place is visited during monsoons yet it is an ideal place to be visited during summer vacations too.

The area has many tribes known as Mahadev Koli, Thakkars, Bhils and Ramoshies. Their major occupation is agriculture. Rice, black sesame and finger millets are cultivated by these people. These tribes also utilize other forest resources for their livelihood (Khyade et al, 2008).

If economic development is in tune with continuous conservation of its bio-diversity the local people can find it worthwhile to stay in their own environment instead of shifting to urban areas it shall enrich the biodiversity of the place. The local people are in a better position to do it than those who are brought there from outside and are not aware of the local conditions. Arrangements should be made in such a way that these people should benefit, which is one of the prime importance of Ecotourism.(Jaffari,1996).

There is a great stress on environmental resources due to tourist influx. Tourists in general need to be educated through official guides to avoid activities which are detrimental to ecosystem. In fact they should be educated about the biodiversity its role and need for its conservation and their cooperation in enriching the already existing biodiversity and natural resources. Thus there is a need to invent and devise new ways and means through which negative impacts can be minimized and positive impacts can be strengthened keeping the basic concept of ecotourism in mind. Promotion of recycling, reuse, energy efficiency, water conservation and creation of economic opportunities for the local people should be encouraged.

The tourism activity, meals accommodation etc. should be carried out in the natural settings. Solar cells and panels should be used to generate electricity. It means without making much changes in the infrastructure with minimum alterations to suit the requirements of tourists should be made available.

Sustainable ecotourism should include local participation and protection of total environment, historical monuments. Impact on environment should be minimized. Tourists should be provided with guides who should be educated enough regarding conservation and environmental issues.

A number of jungle trails can be introduced in the Harishchandragad Wildlife Sanctuary by the Forest Department Maharashtra Government. These trails allow to see the more unexplored parts of the sanctuary, thus will add to its ecotourism potential.

Visits for students, researchers should be encouraged. A detailed study of biodiversity of the area needs to be carried out and encouraged.

All these efforts in the field of study and research of its biodiversity, its conservation and its tourist potential can only be successful if its main aim is to benefit local population. It has been observed almost all over the country that economic development should be pivotal in the study and research of its bio-diversity.

If it benefits the local population it can give rise to their proper awakening which can result in development and their enthusiasm for progress.

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