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PROSPECT OF TOURISM INDUSTRY THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTURISM INEAST SIKKIM: AN ASSESSMENT IN RESPECT OF DZULUK AND GNATHANG VILLAGES

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is the practice of travelling for some definite purposes which include pleasure, recreation and relaxation. The state of Sikkim has achieved a remarkable success in promoting the Tourism industry in recent years. An empirical study on the mode and pattern of development of ecotourism as a new industry in East Sikkim reveals some very interesting facts which directly exercise influence on the socio-economy of this country. Dzuluk and Gnathang villages, being situated at 2,560m (8,400ft) and at 4,116m (13,500 ft) respectively in East Sikkim are now gaining popularity day by day as Eco-destinations by arranging home-stay and organising trips for sight-seeing for the tourists to draw attention of them to the majestic scenic beauty of the areas around. An infield study through questionnaire survey it has been found that the locals are now acknowledging the concept of ecotourism about which they did not have any idea earlier. A large proportion of the villagers of Dzuluk and Gnathang have been found to have very loving attitude towards the tourists coming from outside the state. Analyses of data collected through perception study also show that a considerable proportion of the residents of these two villages do not accept that the influx of tourist in any way would disturb their peace of life and thus they maintain a very cordial mentality towards the tourists. They are aware of the fact that whatever the economic affluence they are having in recent years is because of the arrival of a sizable number of tourists in different seasons.

KEYWORDS: *Ecotourism, socio-economy, eco-destinations, home-stay, questionnaire survey, perception study*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely recognized as the world's largest industry today. It essentially is the practice of travelling for some definite purposes which includes pleasure, recreation and relaxation. Thus tourism has become a multifaceted and fast changing industrial activity of Global importance. Tourism is also one of the important factors for the growth of the Nation and has always been a backbone of the economy of the country. Tourism, as has been defined by WTO in 1993, concerns: "the activities of a person travelling to a place outside his or her usual environment for less than a specified period of time and whose main purpose of travel is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited". In recent years a new concept of tourism has emerged with the name of Ecotourism, which is based on the sustainable and ecological understanding in promoting tourism as an industry (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996, Joshi, and Dhyani, 2009, Kaushal, and Sharma, 2011).

In the present day Sikkim, as a state, is regarded as the most important tourist destination in the North-eastern part of India (Shrivastava, 2006). A few researchers have thrown some light on the present status of tourism and ecotourism in Sikkim (Sattar, 2007, 2010, Rai and Chattopadhyay, 2014). This paper is an extract of the findings of Ph.D. Research of this author on Tourism and Ecotourism development in the district of East Sikkim (2016).

Recent growth of tourism industry in East Sikkim

Sikkim tourism has embarked on new and splendid initiatives, which has enabled it to figure as a prominent tourism destination over the World (Chettri, 2010). The state has achieved major strides in promoting the Tourism industry. With the opening up of new tourist destinations and places, the tourism sector in the state has enjoyed an unprecedented boom under the state government. The Government views the tourism industry as an important tool for employment generation and propelling economic growth. It is maintained by the environmental scientists that Sikkim has now progressed considerably in the development of tourism industry. "Sikkim has become one of the popular tourist destinations in India and the state has started promoting village tourism. Such type of tourism is based on peoples' participation approach where the local culture acts as the central resource of investment. Local people have become the most responsible authority to maintain the natural as well as cultural sustainability and also to generate profits from tourism activities in a collective way" (Das, 2012; Das and Roy. 2012).

East Sikkim, having Gangtok as the capital city, is one of the most visited destinations and as the government administrative center and capital; it is the most developed part of Sikkim. In the urban hub of Gangtok tourists also find lots of shopping destinations. Popular tourist destinations including M.G Marg, Rumtek monastery, Chhangu Lake, Nathula Pass are located in east Sikkim.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aims and objectives of this study are as follows:

- to assess the present status of tourism industry of Sikkim in its East district.
- to study the role of economic development through tourism examining the growth and strategies used .
- to study the emergence of ecotourism and their present trend of development in this part of Sikkim.
- to evaluate the prospects and make recommendations for future development of ecotourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to make a comprehensive work on assessing the pattern of growth of tourism and ecotourism in the East Sikkim district around the two villages Dzuluk and Gnathang a systematic methodology has been used. These are as follows:

Pre-field (predatory) work

- Selection of study area and the concerned topic has been done for its present importance.
- Background work about the area was done by examining all the relevant information in form of literature, secondary data and maps.
- Questionnaires were prepared to generate data by perception study to understand the tourism status.

A. Field work

- The major aspects of tourism development and changes have been studied through field survey. For doing this particular emphasis has been given on studying the conditions of two villages – Dzuluk and Gnathang.
- For detailed study these two villages were identified on the map.
- Structured Questionnaires survey has been conducted by random and purposive sampling methods.
- Photographs were taken as the pictorial records of conditions of the concerned areas.

B. Post-field (compilation) work

- Data collected and generated through field investigation have been processed using appropriate statistical techniques.
- Suitable diagrams have been prepared upon the processed data.
- The paper has been compiled by incorporating all the information as made available and analysed data.

Traditional life and economy of the residents of Dzuluk and Gnathang villages

Dzuluk village, located at an altitude of 2,866m (9,400ft), is a small hamlet settled in East Sikkim district on the rugged terrain of the Himalaya. A bifurcating road from the National Highway (No.31A) from Rangpo connects this village to the north-east through the rugged terrain via Rongli, with a journey time from Rangpo by motor vehicle being about 4 hours. One needs to get the inner line permit to visit this place. It has a primitive appeal with about 60 families consisting of about 700 people living in. They are honest, simple, hardworking and hospitable by nature. Earlier most of them used to live on supplying necessary materials to the army camp located in this area. Now have have found a new way of life by arranging home-stay for the tourists. Most of the inhabitants are illiterate. This small terrain is very much suitable as a refuge for the peace-loving tourists.

Gnathang village, located at an altitude of 4,116m (13,500 ft), was the home for the traditional yak herders who came from Tibet. In autumn when the grass dries up the valley floor appears golden, in rainy season it remains carpeted with flowers and in winter it gets buried under 2m thick layer of snow. Gnathang is located in the middle of the Silk Route circuit to Jelep La and is the most scenic place to stay. This place also offers home-stay accommodation to the tourist nowadays. The majestic view of Mt. Kanchenjunga is one of the main attractions of this part and it is a destination for snow tourism. There are some beautiful lakes nearby.

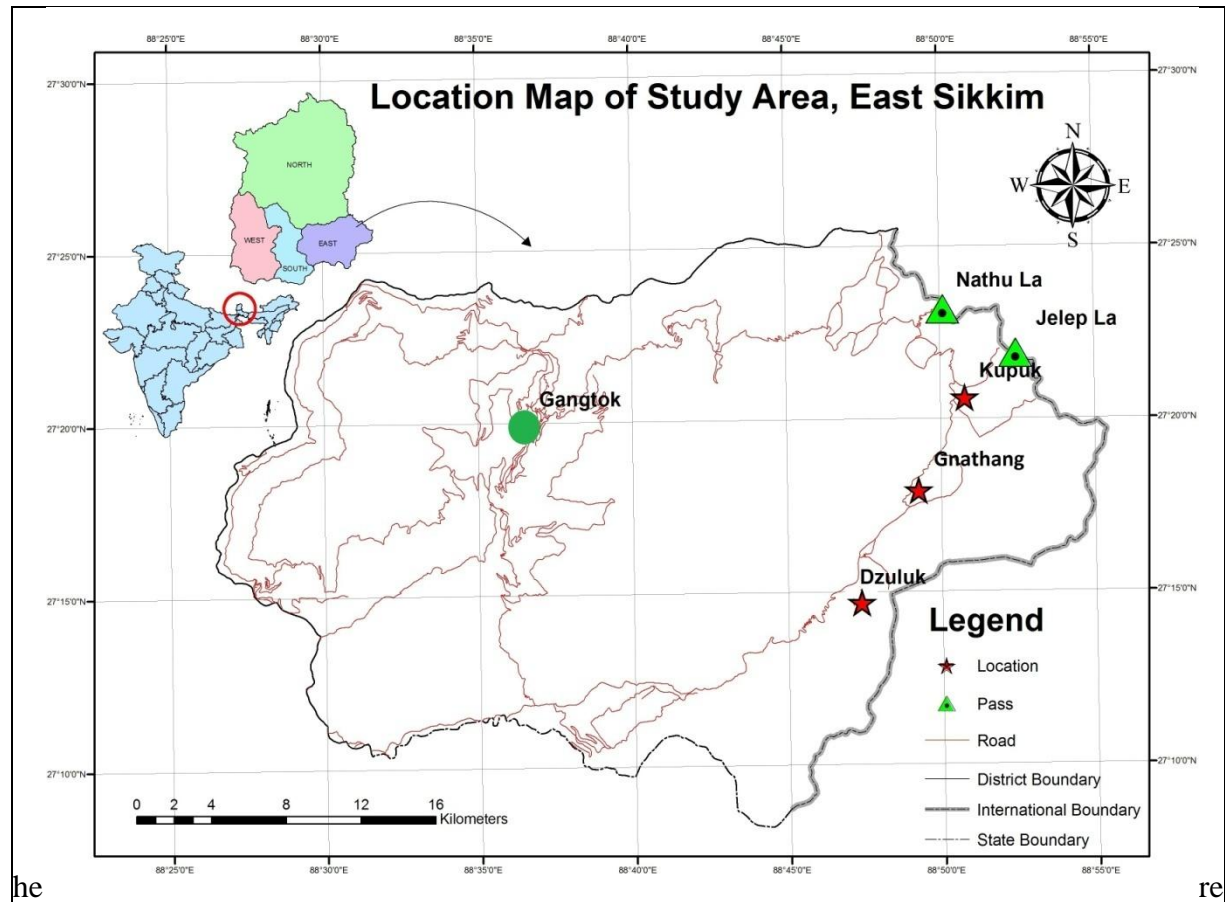


Plate 1: Location of the study area in the East Sikkim district

Level of economic prosperity achieved through the recent development of ecotourism

From low profile villages to tourist destination hotspots both Dzuluk and Gnathang now offer home-stays that drive ecotourism, raising their economy by all standards. Until tourism started in the villages, the residents depended on making their livelihood through labour work with minimum pay from GREF (General Road Engineering Force). Mr. Gopal Pradhan a local resident of Dzuluk was the man, who initiated the step to start the business in his village not just for him but for the whole village. He took ideas from Sebastian Pradhan of Pedong located in Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling hills (W.B), who was already into the business and was doing well. With lots of hard work and learning process since 2002, it was only in September 2008 the ecotourism started in Dzuluk. The first homestay was the 'Green Cottage', a guest house of Agriculture Department which was given to the self-help (Lali Guras and Himali Kasturi) in 2004. So with the growth of tourist flow, another homestay was started with the name Palzor Homestay in Dawa Sherpa's house. In 2009 Mr. Gopal Pradhan's own home-stay came into existence with the name Dil Maya Home-stay and Hidden Paradise. Today, Dzuluk has 10 more home stays in operation having a capacity to accommodate at least 300 tourists in a day. The economy has significantly upgraded the standard of living in the region has gone up as well. The poverty line has been raised. People are living a life which is more wonderful than it was earlier. Development of ecotourism started in Gnathang village some years later from 2011 with the establishment of some home-stays and the number is growing rapidly in recent years.

Perceptions of the villagers on tourism, ecotourism and their expectation for the future

The people living in these two villages are honest, simple, hardworking and hospitable by nature. However, most of them are illiterate. Only the elder members of the family stay at home and most of the children are sent outside the village, in the cities, for studies.

The locals are acknowledging the concept of ecotourism as home-stays but they don't have the proper knowledge. People tend to expect that tourism will benefit them showing pathway to earn adequate money for their family. Mostly the women are happy to accept this development which, they believe, will allow them to earn by staying at home rather than going for labour work. The factor that shows their perception is not clear is that they are depending upon each other rather than taking initiative to learn and develop ideas. As most of them are uneducated they cannot pursue tourism courses and training. The following perception of residents of the villages have been studied through questionnaire survey.



Plate 2: The panoramic view of Dzuluk village



Plate 3: The panoramic view of Gnathang village

Liking towards the Tourists: The factor, that plays a crucial role in the development of tourism industry in the villages, is the mentality or receptivity of the local people about the tourists who come from outside. The mountain people are in general open minded and very simple in nature. On this assumption a study was conducted by questionnaire survey to learn the level of likings of the local people to the tourists and visitors. The result of this study has been given below.

Table 1: Pattern of liking of the local people to the tourists

Sample size: 20 persons from each of Dzuluk and Gnathang villages

Sl no.	Pattern of liking	Number (Dzuluk)	%	Number (Gnathang)	%
1	Likes very much	13	65	10	50
2.	Likes to some extent	4	20	5	25
3.	Do not like	0	0	2	10
4.	No idea	3	15	3	15
Total number of persons interviewed		20	100	20	100

Source: Data generated by field survey

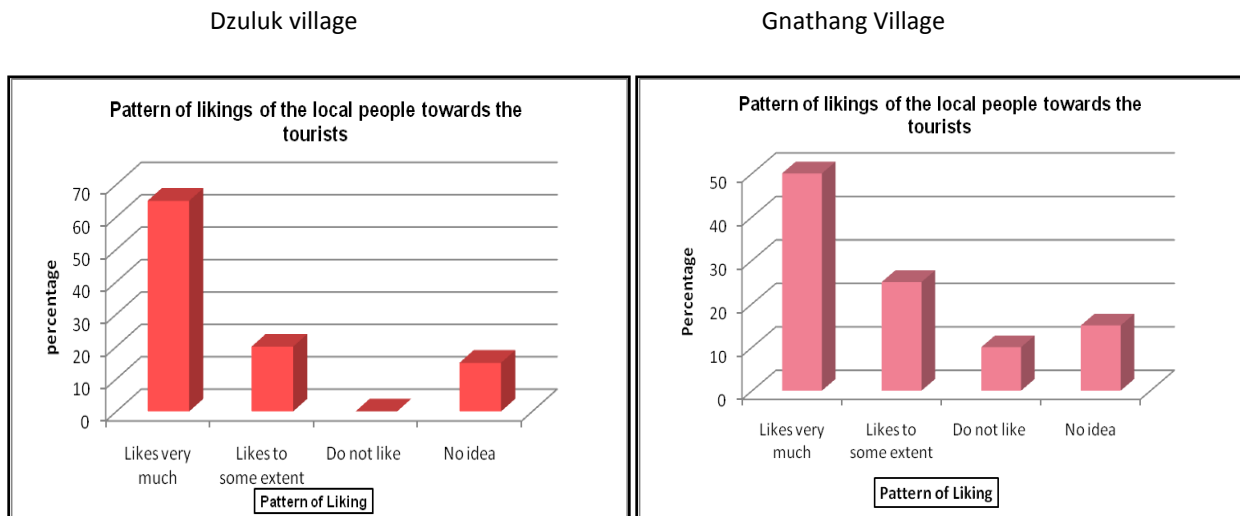


Figure 1 : Patterns of liking of the local people towards the tourists

The above table and the subsequent figures make it clear that a large proportion (50-65%) of the villagers of Dzuluk and Gnathang have very loving attitude towards the tourists. A sizable proportion (20-25%) like the tourists to some extent, and the remaining others either do not like the tourists (in apprehension of disturbance in their peaceful life in the mountain) or maintain indifferent view about the tourists.



Plate 4: Silk Route: The main attraction for the tourists in East Sikkim district

Notion about the tourist influx: In conjunction with the study of views of the local inhabitants towards the tourists about their possible suspicion for the tourists in general an assessment study was also conducted to explore the mentality of the people regarding their apprehension about the possible disturbance in their life to be created by the tourist influx. The result of this study has been presented below.

Table 2: Notion about the tourist influx whether it disturbs their life

Sample size: 20 persons

Sl no.	Notions about tourist influx	Number (Dzuluk)	%	Number (Gnathang)	%
1	Influx will disturb life	4	20	4	20
2.	Influx will not disturb life	13	65	9	45
3.	No idea	3	15	7	35
Total number. of persons interviewed		20	100	20	100

Source: Data generated by field survey

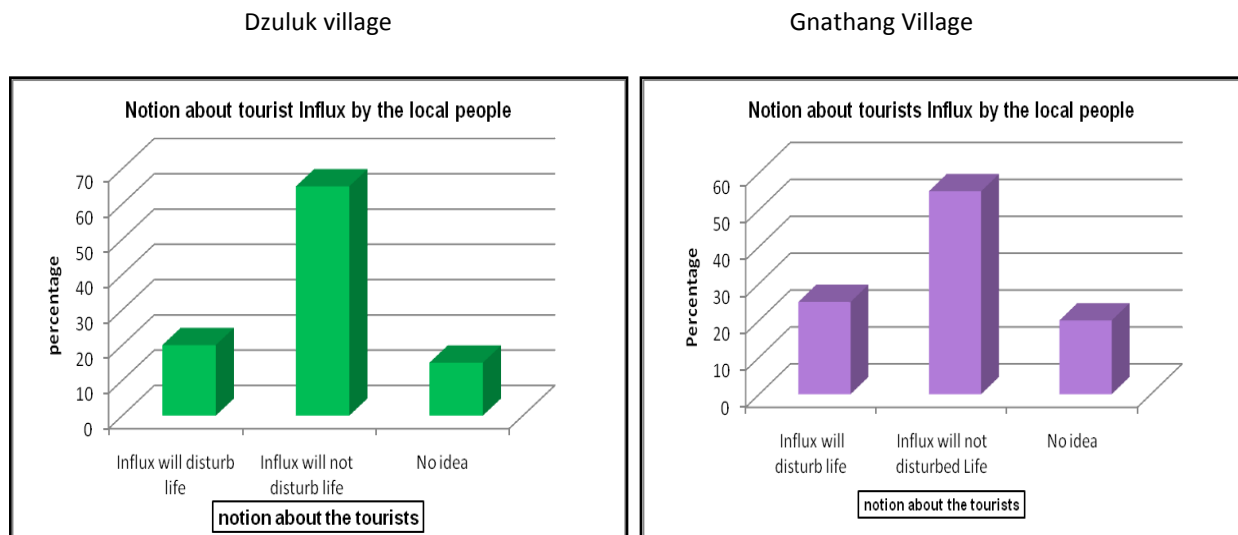


Figure 2: Notion towards tourists influx by the local people

The above data and the subsequent diagrams prepared upon the study show that quite a large proportion (45-60%) of the residents of these two villages do not accept that the influx of tourist in any way would disturb their life. They maintain a very cordial mentality towards the tourists and they know that the economic affluence they are having in recent years it is because of the arrival of tourists. However, a small contingent of the villagers, particularly the traditional minded old generation is not happy in this regard and they maintain that growing number of tourists in this area will bring some problems in their life and culture.

Level of expectation for economic development through tourism development

Over the last few years, particularly from the time of opening of the old Historical Silk Route in this part of Sikkim for the tourists from outside the Government of Sikkim has been giving encouragements and incentives to the villagers of this area to open and run business of tourism. The villagers have also been taught by the authority that, with tourism industry, the people would have affluence and self sufficiency in economy; their standard of living would also be raised by this endeavour. Keeping this in observation a study has been conducted to find the level of expectation of the local inhabitants maintained for economic development through tourism industry. Following is the revelation of this study.

Table 3: Level of expectation for economic development through tourism industry

Sample size: 20 persons

Sl no.	Level of expectation for economic development	Number (Dzuluk)	%	Number (Gnathang)	%
1	High expectation	10	50	10	50
2.	Some expectation	5	25	5	25
3.	No expectation	5	25	2	10
4.	No idea	0	0	3	15
Total number of persons interviewed		20	100	20	100

Source: Data generated by field survey

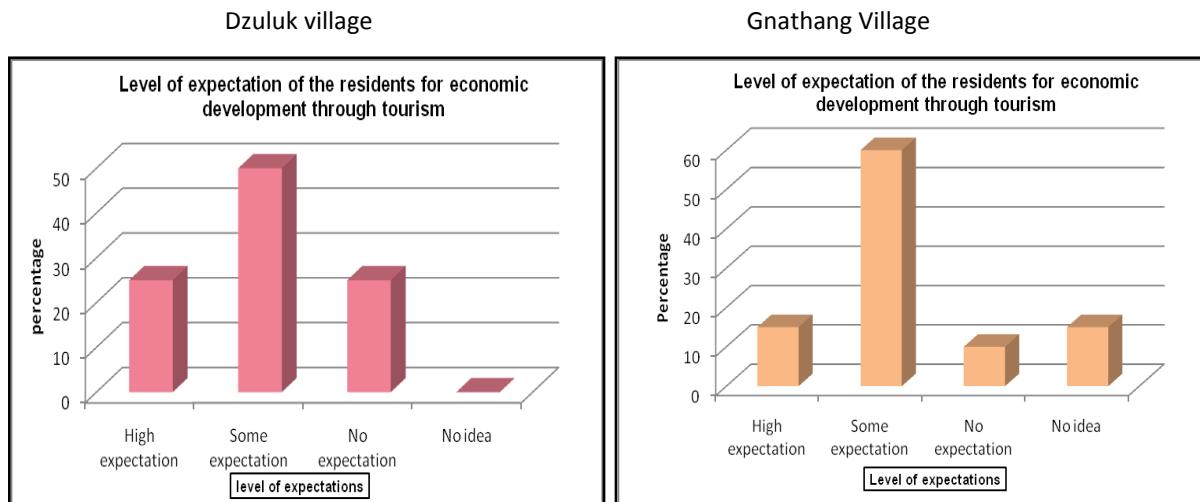


Figure 3: Level of expectation of the residents for economic development through tourism

The level of expectation of the residents for economic development through tourism is clearly displayed in the above table and in the figures. Half of the residents of both the villages expect to have their economic revival through the tourism business they have recently started. The people of Dzuluk village are more optimistic in this

regard. In the case of Gnathang village some people were found to have no clear expectation from the tourism industry, whether this would bring any financial prosperity for them or not.

Recommendation for planning for sustainable development through promotion of tourism and ecotourism industry

Sikkim is now coming up distinctly and rapidly in the picture of tourism industry. Developmental projects for necessary infrastructure have been initiated particularly from the 1990s and this has acquired momentum particularly from the first decade of this 21st century. With detailed and in-depth observation of the dynamics of tourism and ecotourism industry some recommendations have been made here for a reasonable and acceptable further development in this sector. These have been stated below:

- Government enterprise in the development and promotion of ecotourism in a systematic form is urgently needed.
- Tourists should also be encouraged to visit the sanctuaries like Kanchenzonga National park, Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary, Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, Fambunglho Wildlife Sanctuary and Singba Rhododendron Sanctuary but not only for enjoying leisure tourism.
- Proper channels of training and workshops should be organized to give locals the concept of ecotourism with knowledge in sustainable environment apart from economic sustainability and superficial development of the area.
- Tourists should be properly apprised of the attractive ecotourism spots around this area from within the state (Gangtok) rather than coming through detour from the neighbouring state of West Bengal.
- In all ecotourism spots signboards with necessary instructions and codes of conduct should be displayed for the tourists. This will help learning environmental ethics by the locals as well.
- Cultural and other heritage spots should be taken care of from the government level to attract tourists from outside. Government should also encourage the locals to organize their cultural performances for the ecotourists.
- Transport development is the major concern to reach the selected attractive tourist spots, which are located at remote places with little infrastructure facilities.
- Conducted tours under the well trained and educated guides with local persons of the area can also attract large number of tourists.
- Regular monitoring system for any possible environmental degradation due to tourists in all popular tourist and ecotourist spots should be arranged by the Government authority.
- Awareness campaigning must be done against any environmental degradation due to garbage dumping and spoiling plants and flowers in the nature. Proper campaigning for maintenance of the aesthetic views of the surroundings of tourist spots is also needed. This is important for both the local inhabitants at large, the home-stay owners as well as for the tourists.

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