

Research paper on
“Climate change and its impact on tourism in India”
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Introduction :

Tourism is both vulnerable to climate change while at the same time contributing to it including direct and indirect impacts such as more extreme weather events, increasing safety concerns, water shortages, biodiversity loss & damage to attractions at destinations, among others. Continued climate-degradation and disruption to cultural and natural heritage negatively affect the tourism sector resulting in the reduction of the attractiveness of destinations and lessen economic opportunities at the national and the international level.

While on the other hand tourism is also contributing to climate change. The unprecedented levels in greenhouse gases has shown impact related to tourism by the emissions around 5%. The Paris Agreement has generated a new platform and there are all form of efforts at all levels to find solutions to mitigate impacts and adapt to changing environmental conditions, as well as to vigilantly report on activities and impacts. The tourism sector continues to be more evident on essential climate-related information that is needed for better decision making.

The main aim of the Paris Agreement is to keep long-term global warming well below 2°C and the agreement requires all Parties to materialize their efforts through “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead.

According to UNWTO in 2016 approximately 40% of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) acknowledge tourism either as a country priority or as a sector vulnerable to climate change. The international sphere of tourism also provides opportunities for increased efficiency and acceleration of climate action. However, as it was concluded during the discussions held at the 2016 International Symposium of the 10YFP Sustainable Tourism Programme at UNFCCC COP22 in Marrakech, the lack of a sectoral perspective does not allow creating links between the contribution of tourism industries to the NDCs and the efforts being undertaken by tourism stakeholders operating internationally.¹

Climate Change : Definition , Causes & Effects

Climate change, also referred as global warming, means the rise in average surface temperatures on Earth. The climate change is mainly because of the human use of fuels for transportation and industries,

which releases CO₂ and other greenhouse gases into the air which trap heat within the atmosphere and effects the ecosystems, including rising sea levels, severe weather changes, and another natural imbalances due to devastations and disasters.

The primary cause of climate change is the burning of fossil fuels, such as oil and coal, which emits greenhouse gases into the atmosphere—primarily carbon dioxide. Other human activities, such as agriculture and deforestation, industrialization, also contribute to the proliferation of greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

Even small increases in Earth's temperature caused by climate change can have severe effects. The earth's average temperature has gone up 1.4° F over the past century and is expected to rise as much as 11.5° F over the next. That might not seem like a lot, but the average temperature during the last Ice Age was about 4° F lower than it is today.²

Rising sea levels due to the melting of the polar ice bases contribute to greater storm damage; warming ocean temperatures are associated with stronger and more frequent storms; additional rainfall, particularly during severe weather events, leads to flooding and other damage; an increase in the incidence and severity of wildfires threatens habitats, homes, and lives; and heat waves contribute to human deaths and other consequences.³

Tourism Spots Affected due to Climate Change:

The Uttarakand Devastation:

The 2013 natural devastation and the Unprecedented destruction the rainfall witnessed in Uttarakhand state was also attributed, by environmentalists, to unscientific developmental activities undertaken in recent decades contributing to very high level of loss of property and lives. Roads constructed in haphazard style, new resorts and hotels built on fragile river and more than 70 hydroelectric projects in the watershed of the state led to a "disaster waiting to happen" as termed by certain environmentalists.⁴ The environmental experts reported that the tunnels built and blasts of the 70 hydro electric projects contributed to the ecological imbalance in the state, with flows of river water restricted and the streamside development activity contributing to a higher number of landslides and more flooding.⁵

The Kerala Floods:

Kerala received more than 75% of the rainfall in the month of August leading to the unending flood situation for nearly one and half month. A.B. Anita, executive director, Centre for Water Resources Development Management (CWRDM), an autonomous research institution under the Kerala State government, said that heavy run-off of the top soil in the upland areas and the siltation in the rivers were the reasons for the falling water level, the top soil in the hills, mountains and upland areas had been removed in the flash floods to a depth of up to two metres in many places. As the top soil was shaved off, it ruined the hills' capacity to sponge in rainwater, she said. Ms. Anita also cited ecological destruction caused by deforestation, harmful land use in the upland areas and sand mining in the streams and rivers as having contributed to the top soil run-off and siltation. This was exacerbated by the impact of climate change at the macro level.⁶

The Constitutional Response:

The 42nd amendment inserted the article 48A as a part of the Directive principles of the State which read as, "The State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country." Art.51A (g) of the Fundamental Duties read as "It shall be duty of every citizen of India...to protect and improve the natural environment..."⁷. The case of M C Mehta vs. Union of India⁸, the Supreme Court held that under Art.51A g there shall be compulsory one hour lecture in the teaching sessions of schools and colleges based on the topics of environmental protection and sustainability. The principle of "polluter pays", precautionary principle are accepted in India.

International response:

According to the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change and the Kyoto protocol, the industrialized areas are mainly responsible for the climate changes in the world over. And India is not an exception to it.

In 2003, the Madrid-based UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) convened the 1st International conference on Climate Change and Tourism in Djerba so that the various issues can be discussed thereon and the solution to it be found out. The Eco-tourism and the sustainable tourism concept came into effect.

The Sustainable Tourism/Eco-tourism:

The heated air, the hike of humidity, the imbalanced climate is leading tourist to destination known as Eco-tourism or the sustainable tourism. Kerala sea-shores, the back-waters, the cool hills, the Ayurveda cult and the medicinal therapies are all attracting the tourist from the local and international places. The economy of the State is raised because of the tourism attraction.⁹

The Himalayas with its snow-clad mountains are attracting the people to a free life. The tourists packages with attractive offers and discounts are provided to the commoners who wish to stay away from the pressures of the life including climate fluctuations.

Conclusion: The sustainable tourism is the way of travelling and exploring a destination by respecting the culture, environment and the people. The stability in environment can only be brought by the continuous environmental awareness and imparting education to the unreached as well. The climate changes need to be now to be a concern finding ruling our lives. The cutting of trees, the lessening of the mine/quarry explorations, the killing of animals, etc. to be avoided and all reformatory activities to be started.

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