



## Eco –Tourism and its Development in Tribal Regions of Himachal Pradesh

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**ABSTRACT:** The tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh are known for natural beauty. Eco tourists are often motivated by the chance to experience tribal culture, which can have a positive and affirming effect on that culture. Schemes like Home Stay started by Dept. of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Himachal Pradesh on the one hand saves the tribal areas from becoming concrete jungles and on the other gives a firsthand experience of tribal culture to the tourists. Moreover this also becomes a means of income generating activity for tribals. The tribal areas of Himachal such as Spiti, Kinnaur, Sangla, kalpa and Bharmour are all major tourist destinations today. The tribal population in Himachal Pradesh is about 11% of the total population i.e. 244587 lakh. These tribal include the Kinners or Kinnaure, the Lahules, the Spitiens, the Pangwalas, the Gaddis and the Gujjars.

However it is often said, tourism destroys tourism. It seems to be true in the case of the Sangla valley in Kinnaur, which is fast losing its scenic charm and tranquillity due to the unregulated growth of the tourism industry. New buildings are coming up in a haphazard way, as there is no plan for the development of the tourist destination. Another environmental fallout of concrete structures, which are not suitable for such cold areas as well as the scenic beauty of the place. In addition negative effects also exist, such as the transformation of traditional cultural symbols into commodities to sell to visitors, the disruption of the pre-existing relationships between local people and higher incidences of crime.

Considering this it is important to analyse what should or should not be done so that tourism is developed in tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh in a sustainable manner. It was found that to promote tourism in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh schemes like homestays, Har gaon ki kahani, etc. should be promoted. Incentives can be given to private developers to develop ecotourism projects in the state. Unregulated growth of tourism should be monitored. Heli-taxi scheme in tribal areas conceptualised by the state government can also attract high-end tourists. Moreover it is also very important to sensitise tourists regarding do's and don'ts in the tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Eco-Tourism, Tribal areas, Tourist destination, Tribal development

### I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has long played an important role in the Indian economy as being the third most important industry sector of national economy. Within the tourism industry worldwide, ecotourism is one of the fastest growing sectors (Eagles, 1995). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has recently estimated that ecotourism is worth some \$20 billion a year, and together with nature-based tourism, accounts for 20% of global international travel (WTO, 1998). In the Asia-Pacific region, ecotourism has grown faster than any other form of Tourism (Lindberg et al., 1998).

Ecotourism has been defined by the Ecotourism Society as 'responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people' (Cochrane, 1996: 241), a definition which emphasizes the view that ecotourism should have positive impacts. The Government of India believes that ecotourism can contribute to the preservation of the environment, which is an approach consistent with this definition (Dixit Saurabh Kumar and Narula Vinay Kumar, 2010).

Different studies have highlighted various aspects of eco-tourism. Some have focused on the industry aspects, such as the nature and quality of provision and environmental attraction that eco-tourists expect (Khan 2003, Rudd Tupper 2002), while few have studied the relationship between eco-tourism and the local people's conventional livelihoods and forms of social organisations (Akram, and Medina 2003) and others have analysed the motivation of the eco-tourists (Duffy 2002). Only over the last decade have serious efforts been made to establish strategies that link eco-tourism and cultural tourism into sustainable 'pro-poor' tourism approaches (Poyya, 2003).

A review of the Indian case reveals that tourism has helped in maximising economic benefits rather than ensuring social benefits. Whereas Eco-tourism as a concept centres on the nature of the tourism and with regard to local communities, emphasises conservation, sustainability and biological diversities. Eco tourists are often motivated by the chance to experience tribal culture, which can have a positive and affirming effect on that culture. Schemes like Home Stay started by Dept. of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Himachal Pradesh on the one hand saves the tribal areas from becoming concrete jungles and on the other gives a firsthand experience of tribal culture to the tourists. Moreover this also becomes a means of income generating activity for tribals (Nilakantha Panigrahi, 2005).

India has a huge ecotourism potential and this can be adjudged from that the country is having 572 nature-endowed areas, 89 national parks, and 483 wildlife sanctuaries. On the top of this the country is blessed with the mighty Himalayas which have been always an attraction for the people around the world. The Himalayan Mountain Range bisects India from the rest of Asia by its invincible mountain ranges. The Himalayas or the 'Abode of Snow' stretches from Jammu & Kashmir in north India to Arunachal Pradesh in the extreme northeast India. Himachal Pradesh is a beautiful hill state situated in the western part of Himalayas. With its lofty snow-capped peaks, fast flowing rivers and perennial mountain streams, magnificent biodiversity and fascinating ethnic diversity, the Himachal is a thing of beauty and object of adoration (Beautiful Himachal, 2012). This state has over the years developed as an ecotourism destination with the foresightedness of the Government. In Himachal the tribes have a considerable percentage in the total population in the state. Most of the tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh have now developed as major tourist destinations such as Spiti, Kinnaur, Sangla, Kalpa and Bharmour (India line, 2012).

## **II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Himachal Pradesh is undoubtedly blessed with everything that makes it a first choice of eco tourists. The tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh are known for natural beauty and have recently been opened up to foreign tourists who can visit this area in a group of four or more. There is an urgent need to provide clean international standard facilities for tourists visiting this area. This area is open for private sector investment for creation of facilities for tourists. The thousand years old Buddhist Monastery of Tabo in Spiti with its fine paintings has been declared as a world heritage site by UNESCO (Himachal Pradesh yellow pages, 2012).

However it is often said, tourism destroys tourism. It has been noticed around the world in many studies that unregulated growth of tourism industry can make an upbeat destination lose its scenic charm and tranquillity. As has been seen in cases of Shimla and Manali the haphazard growth of buildings and concrete structures, has deteriorated the sheen of these beautiful destinations. In addition negative effects also exist, such as the transformation of traditional cultural symbols into commodities to sell to visitors, the disruption of the pre-existing relationships between local people and higher incidences of crime.

Considering this it is important to analyse what should or should not be done so that tourism is developed in tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh in a sustainable manner. Therefore, this needs to be seen that whether development of ecotourism can be a panacea for the tribal people and environment of tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh?

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To have an analysis of the issues pertaining to the development of eco tourism in the tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh a study of various tribal regions of the State was conducted. The data for this research was collected from secondary sources of Government and non-Government records and reports as well as from various sites related to the development of tribal tourism in Himachal Pradesh.

## **IV. TRIBAL POPULATION OF HIMACHAL PRADESH**

There are approximately two hundred million tribal people in the entire globe, which means, about 4% of the global population. They are found in many regions of the world and majority of them are the poorest amongst poor. According to 1981 census, the population of Scheduled Tribes in the country was 5.16 crores, consisting about 7.76% of total Indian population, which means one tribesman for every 13 Indians. The tribal population in Himachal Pradesh is about 11% of the total population i.e. 244587 lakh (Dept. of information and public relation, 2011).

## **V. FAMOUS TRIBES OF HIMACHAL PRADESH**

According to IndiaLine (2012) over a period of time, the tribal population of the state has decreased since more and more tribals have migrated to other places and have risen enough to support separate families. These tribal include the Kinners or Kinnaure, the Lahules, the Pirals, the Gaddis and the Gujjars. By nature, these people are highly sociable and like to make friends. This is despite the fact that they do not stay at one place and continue to move around. The tribal population of Himachal Pradesh follow their own set of traditions and customs. They even have their own dress up, music and dance to make them a unique lot. The famous tribes of Himachal Pradesh are:

### **Kinnaure**

These people occupy the areas of the border district of Kinnaur. Some of these people believe that they belong to the Kinners of Mahabharata while others consider themselves the descendants of the Kirats. Kirats were the people who were overpowered by the Aryans and Khasas and forced to recede into the remote trans Himalayan region. One interesting aspect about the Kinnaure is their marriage system. All brothers in one family marry a single girl. This is what they call the Pandava marriage since the five Pandava brothers too had one wife for them. This custom has also left many of the girls unmarried.

### **Lahule**

The denizens of Lahaul are called by the name of Lahauli. These people trace their origin to the native Munda tribe and the racially intermixed Tibetans. The tribal population of the Lahaulis segregate themselves into higher and lower classes and mainly follow Buddhism. There is a shrine with an image of Buddha in the house of every well off Lahauli. Lahaulis are also liberal as far as their marriages are concerned. Women can marry more than once and divorce is extremely normal affair.

However, marriages have to be within the tribe. The Lahaul valley is situated on the traditional trade routes to Ladakh, Sinkrang and further. This is the reason why trade also forms a major occupation of the people here apart from farming.

### **Gaddi**

These people normally reside in the Mandi, Kangra and Bilaspur district though a majority of them live in the Kangra district. Gaddis are not nomadic in strictest of sense since they have villages where they reside. However, they do make their way to the higher pastures in the summer season with their flocks. The origin of the Gaddis is rather unclear. The Gaddis themselves believe that their ancestors fled from the plains of India due to the lack of security for them. At that point the persecution of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb forced them to leave for a more protected area. The main occupation of the Gaddi tribals is shepherding.

### **Pirals**

These people are essentially goatherds and it is this occupation of theirs that takes them from one place to another. During winter, these people descend to Kangra and the forest of Hoshiarpur while summer is the time put up along the banks of rivers Chandrabhaga in Lahaul. The Pirals are fun loving and traditional people and love to celebrate their festivals. Marriages of Pirals are very similar to that of Hindus.

### **Gujjars**

Gujjars are the Muslim tribals of the Himachal Pradesh. Most of the historians believe that Gujjars came to India all the way from central Asia during 6th century. Gujjars are mostly vegetarian and are shepherd and goatherd by occupation. Search for better pastures take them to lowland plains in the winter and to the upper reaches of the Himalaya during the summer.

## **VI. TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH**

The tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh though sparsely populated continue to receive special attention of the State Government primarily on account of their strategic location and comparative economic backwardness. The State Government is trying to accelerate socio-economic development of these areas by earmarking adequate funds in the Annual Plans. The flow of funds from State Plan to Tribal Sub-Plan has substantially increased over a period of time from 3.65 in 1974-75 to about 95 at the end of the Eighth Five Year Plan of and the same level for the 11th Five Year Plan. The size of 11th Five Year Tribal Sub- Plan 2007-12 and Annual Tribal Sub-Plan 2009-10 has been fixed at Rs. 1260.00 crores and Rs. 243.00 crores respectively. The government is working hard towards a new social order based on social equality and social harmony, but still it is not adequate enough for the development of tribal people in India as well as in Himachal Pradesh (Vaid *et al.*, 2011).

## **VII. TOURIST DESTINATIONS OF TRIBAL AREAS**

The famous tourist destinations of Himachal Pradesh (Himachal World, 2012) are:-

**Kalpa :** It is one of the main villages of the district connected by link road 14 km. from Powari beyond Rekong Peo. Looming in front of Kalpa is an impressive view of 'Kinner Kailash' directly across the Satluj river. This mountain changes colors several times a day with a change of weather conditions or may be as destined by Lord Shiva his eternal abode. 'Parvati Kund' is located on the top of Kinner Kailash. The ancient villages of Pangi, Moorang and Kanum are situated close to Kalpa.

**Lahaul Spiti :** Lahaul Spiti has beautiful landscapes and interesting blend of Buddhism and Hinduism. Tourism in Lahaul Spiti offers a place which seems to be frozen in time. Lahaul and Spiti are actually two valleys which are completely different from each other. There are breathtaking valleys, trekking areas and some very famous monasteries here. Weather varies in both Lahaul and Spiti, from alpine zone weather to dry and heavy snowfall, cold weather.

**Bharmour :** This is a small village located around 60 km from Chamba and is known for its picturesque beauty and ancient temples. Bharmour once served as the ancient capital of Chamba and is dominated by the Gaddi tribes. While in Bharmour, tourists should not miss shopping for the fruits and blankets.

The main tourist attractions here are archaeological temple remains dating back to more than 1,000 years. The most famous temples here are Lakshna Devi and Ganesh, known for their architecture patterns. Tourists are advised to enjoy an easy 4 km trek on the hill to the Chaurasi temple and enjoy the spectacular views. Pilgrims flock here to take a dip in the waters of the holy Manimahesh Lake (35 km uphill trek from Bharmour) during the Manimahesh Yatra held from August to September.

Trekking and mountaineering are a few challenging sports tourists can enjoy here. The regional center of mountaineering Institute of Manali is located here to assist the adventurers. The best time to visit Bharmour is during the months from April to October (Must see India, 2012).

**Sangla valley:** Among these tribal destinations Sangla valley is more developed. Sangla is a tribal area of Himachal Pradesh in true style. The breathtaking Sangla valley offers breathtaking view of lush green orchards in the lap of majestic mountains covered with dazzling white snow. Variation in altitude is from 1000 metres to 4000 metres. Summer temperatures range between 6°C and 25°C, and winter temperatures remain between -1°C and 0°C. Days from April-Oct are warm, light woollens May-July and heavy woollens in rest of the season.

To develop the tourism in Sangla, Banjara camps playing important roles. Banjara Camps are an ideal setting for total relaxation with cosy Swiss-style tents that have attached bathrooms, a well-equipped kitchen and evening bonfires that keep the

chill away. These camps are not harmful for environment. Concept of Banjara Camps & Retreats is to provide wholesome soft adventure family holidays. For those who are interested in serious adventure.

### VIII. TRIBAL FAIRS

Fairs and festivals have always been a part of the life of tribes in India. Few of these fairs and festivals are mentioned below:-  
**Bhunda festival** : Bhunda festival is celebrated in Nirmand region of Himachal Pradesh. This festival in Himachal Pradesh is performed believing that it will make local deity happy and He will shower prosperity and goodwill on the villagers. The main hero of the festival, a man from Beda tribe who is designated to perform the ritual, starts taking meal once in a day when only one month is left for the festival. He starts weaving the sacred rope by collecting the 'Munji' grass, on which he is going to slide on the day of the tribal ceremony, which is generally around 500 meters in length. Thousands of visitors from various parts of Himachal Pradesh and other parts of the country including tribal regions witness this three days long Bhunda festival ceremony (Tribes in India, 2012).

**Lavi Fair** : Three hundred years old famous 'International Lavi Trade fair' is one of the unique examples of the glorious, social, cultural, economic history and legacy of Himachal Pradesh. It is the biggest trade fair of the greater Himalayas, which is held at Rampur Bushahr, about 130 kms from Shimla from 11th to 14th November every year. Rampur Bushahr, which is popularly known as the gateway of tribal District Kinnaur is situated on the left bank of river Sutlej and is one of the oldest town on Hindustan Tibet road. People from other areas in general and tribal belt in particular participate in this fair with horses, mules, pashminas, colts, yaks, chilgoza, namdas, pattis, woolens, raw semi-finished wool and other dry fruits produced in the state are brought for selling ( Dev Bhoomi Himachal, 2012).

### IX. NUMBERS OF TOURIST ARRIVALS

The below given data (table 1) shows the number of tourist arrivals in the districts of Kinnaur, Lahaul & Spiti and Chamba. These districts are primarily the places where most of the tribal areas of Himachal are concentrated. The data represented below is of the whole district and is not specific to the tribal region only. However keeping in view that most of the tribal regions have become a tourist hub it can be concluded that though not all but still a huge percentage of the number of tourists given below must be visiting these areas. The point to be noticed here is that the numbers of tourist arrivals are increasing every year which means that there would be more income for the local populace, more employment opportunities, more taxes for the civic body and the Government which in return will transfer into more development of the area as a whole. However the increase in number of tourist arrivals also means that there would be requirement for more accommodation, parking, water and other amenities.

**Table 1: Tourist Arrivals.**

District	Tourist Arrivals				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Kinnaur	79146	168527	285098	403678	485046
Lahaul Spiti	125829	214329	316516	421785	543855
Chamba	562335	648262	689489	789416	819668

Source: Directorate of Tourism, Himachal Pradesh

### X. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

The Department of Tourism, Government of Himachal Pradesh has floated a number of schemes for tourism. Some of the schemes which are especially beneficial for the tribal regions are mentioned below:

#### A. Home Stay Scheme

With the aim of providing comfortable Home Stay facilities of standardized world class services to the tourists, and to supplement the availability of accommodation in the rural and tribal tourist destinations, State Government introduced Home Stay Facilities on the basis of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India "Incredible India Bed and Breakfast scheme (Unforgettable Himachal, 2012). Under this scheme a tourist is not only able to enjoy a clean and affordable place for stay but also gets an opportunity to learn about Himachali customs, traditions and cuisine.

#### B. Har Gaon Ki Kahani

One can experience the essence of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' in a Himachali village. Every village of this hill State has its own history, religious stories, customs, traditions, diversity in culture and cuisines. Under 'Har Gaon Ki Kahani' scheme, the village's historical events, heritage, stories of gods and goddesses, prevalent religious beliefs, interesting anecdotes, local customs, rituals followed on the occasion of marriage and festivals etc. are being made a special attraction to the tourists through such stories. Recently Himachal Tourism has been conferred with 25th Award for 'Har Gaon Ki Kahani' scheme launched to diversify tourism activities to promote tourism, at a prestigious inaugural Award Ceremony of International Tourism Conclave and Travel Award function (News Assembly, 2012).

#### C. Heli Taxi Service

The service is expected to give a new dimension in boosting up the economy of the state. This will attract not only foreign tourists but also domestic tourists who will now be able to explore the lesser-known destinations of the State which was not possible earlier due to unavailability of broad gauge railway lines and absence of regular air services. Moreover the state has already got a number of helipads and on the top of this construction of an airport entails huge plans, expenses and there is a lot of disturbance to the environment because lots of trees have to be cut (Development Channel, 2012).

## XI. THE DANGER OF DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN TRIBAL REGION

Many studies have also pointed out that despite of the many benefits that have been accrued; tribal tourism has also been associated with a number of negative effects. From socio-cultural perspective, an influx of large numbers of tourists into tribal areas has led to a change in cultural values, and not necessarily for the better. Practices such as prostitution, drug dealing and black markets are among the often cited ills. This has negatively affected some living standards of tribes which involved a greater sense of community co-operation and a strong commitment to family life, religion and traditional customs (Mpfu Thomas, 2009).

## XII. FINDINGS

It has been noticed from many studies that eco tourists are often motivated by the chance to experience tribal culture, which can have a positive and affirming effect on that culture. Himachal Pradesh has got a rich potential for ecotourism and therefore, the state can take full advantage of the same. Considering that there is a substantial portion of tribal population in Himachal Pradesh and the fact that the tribal regions of Himachal Pradesh have developed into tourism destinations the tribes can be benefited from the development of tourism. To add on the tribal fairs can be also be a source of attraction for the tourists. The number of tourist arrival has been increasing in tribal regions over the years which indicate a positive growth for tourism. There are number of government schemes in force to uplift the standard of the tribes who live in sparsely populated and economically backward regions of the State. However it has to be maintained that the State does not overlook the interest of the tribal population while developing ecotourism projects or fall prey to the development in such a way that as it has been in Shimla or Manali. The carrying capacity of a destination should never be exceeded.

## XIII. CONCLUSION

Ecotourism has the potential to enhance wilderness protection and wildlife conservation, while providing nature-compatible livelihoods and greater incomes for a large number of people living in the those areas. This becomes more important in case of tribal areas considering the fact that the environment and the originality of tribal culture have to be maintained. Moreover there is also a need to create income avenues for these people.

In case of Himachal Pradesh where the tribal population is substantial and the ecology has also to be protected the concept of ecotourism can be effective.

For the development of ecotourism in the tribal areas there are a few steps that can be taken up:

- The tribal people should be encouraged for their participation in tourism industry so that the fruits of development are not siphoned by the developers only.
- There should be promotion of tourism in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh through schemes like homestays and Har gaon ki kahani.
- Heli-taxi scheme in tribal areas conceptualised by the state government can also attract high-end tourists.
- The ongoing tourism boom is taking a heavy toll of the valley known for its pristine settings. There has been a spurt in construction activities and concrete structures, which do not blend well with the traditional tribal architecture.
- To sensitise the tourists about the tribal culture and practices followed therein the tour operators and escorts can distribute the list of do's and dont's among the tourists which can be obtained from the Department of Tourism, Government of Himachal Pradesh.
- Tribal festivals can also form a significant portion of a tourist's itinerary. For this purpose tribal festivals can be promoted through advertisements, brochures etc. But care needs to be taken so that these are not converted into mere objects thus loosing their original identity.
- The carrying capacity of destinations should not be exceeded.

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