

Promoting Sustainable Tourism & Empowering Local Community through Tourism Entrepreneurship: a case study of Mawlynnong Village in Meghalaya

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Abstract:

In a developing country like India, tourism acts as a catalyst for development. In the recent years, tourism has been associated with a number of economic, cultural and environmental challenges. Therefore the need of sustainable tourism business arises.

Mawlynnong, a small village situated in the east Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, is a hot spot of Meghalaya Tourism. In the year 2003, Mawlynnong held the title of being the cleanest village in Asia and in 2005, the cleanest village of India by Discover India. After the title being conferred, it has attracted a number of national as well as international tourists to visit and spend their leisure time which in turn generates revenue in different ways to the local people involved in the exchange of goods and services. In spite of thousands of people visiting the place and all the fame, it has been able to develop itself over a period of time in a sustainable way.

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The aim of this paper is to throw light on importance of sustainability in Tourism industry in the present era and how it paves way for empowerment of local community through a case study on Mawlynnong village of Meghalaya, India.

Keywords: Development, Empowerment, Mawlynnong, Sustainability, Tourism..

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, responsible or sustainable tourism, which has a green glow to it, has become a buzzword among transport companies, hotels owners, ground agents, tour operators and others associated with the tourism industry. Environment friendly travel offers unparalleled opportunities to stimulate the local economy, provides tangible benefits to local community and most importantly conserve the rich biodiversity.

The concept of sustainable development circles around three points- economic development, social development and environmental protection. Activities, management and development are the different forms of sustainable tourism which benefits the economy along with preserving and protecting natural, social integrity and resources. The potential economic benefits associated with tourism cannot materialize without careful planning. Indeed, uncontrolled tourism development can have huge negative impacts on the jewels of country's heritage.

Located about 90 kilometres away from the state

capital Shillong, Mawlynnong village is located in the East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya and is often referred to as 'God's own Garden'. It came to limelight after earning the distinction of being the cleanest village in the entire continent in the year 2003 and cleanest village of the country in 2005. It offers an enriching experience which can only be felt through senses by actually visiting it, though one may not find it to be conveniently accessible. Yet, the journey to the village not only enthuses but overwhelms as well.

The village is over hundred years old and is inhabited by Khasi tribe who are worshippers of nature. Keeping the surroundings clean is the age old tradition of this tribe and this collective effort attracts thousands of people who come to visit this place. The village is indeed beautiful with thriving greenery all around in the midst of waterfalls paving way to tiny streams with abundant blooming flowers hanging from trees and bushes adorning to the splendour of the village.

II. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Shifting from mainstream tourism to a sustainable one is not that easy as it may seem. It needs to be deliberate and executed well so as to optimize the outcomes related to social and environmental concerns. Its gigantic impact on social and environmental aspects additionally provides huge doorway to influence positive change globally. Thus, switching to sustainable tourism is imperative. In order to pursue it, the case study of a small village in the state of Meghalaya has been taken which in spite of being a tiny one has been able to inspire many due to the beliefs and practices adopted by its people. Thus, Mawlynnong village is a perfect example of sustainable development and is guaranteed to inspire.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various sustainable tourism development dimensions were investigated by Dhiman & Dubey (2011) by employing various statistical tools to see if these dimensions depend on the demographic characteristics of stakeholders. It was concluded in the study that there are a set of common parameters of sustainable tourism development. The results also indicated that there is a significant difference among the tourism stakeholders in terms of perception of different aspects of sustainable tourism development dimensions in India. The different opportunities available for sustainable development and its preservation is largely influenced by the quality of the environment, goods and resources as per the study of Angelkova & Koteski et.al (2012). They also concluded that in order to develop sustainably, it is considered any kind of tourism that contributes for the protection and promotion of environment, natural and other resources, cultural values and integrity of the local community every time. Ecotourism is considered to be an integral part of sustainable tourism development which was also agreed by Barkaukiene and Snieska (2013) and they presented ecotourism as one of the fastest growing amongst various types of tourism in the world. Haseena & Mohammad (2014) conducted a study on tourism aspects in the state of Kerala and concluded that it doesn't only facilitate infrastructure development but also help in balanced and sustainable regional growth by generating income and creating employment opportunities. Finally, they also proved that there was a high degree of opportunities in the industry with the help of technology and infrastructure in connection to the process of globalisation which helped in focusing and exploring its

natural resources and cultural inheritance along with its traditional nature of simplicity. In the context of sustainable development, a thorough research was made by Zolfani, Sedaghat et.al (2015) outlining the key disciplines, journals, articles and through an in-depth and structured examination of published researches. The study was made to clarify, categorise and interpret the current research on sustainable tourism definitions and applications. The best practices of a comprehensive sustainable tourism strategy in Cuba were identified by Laitamaki & Hechavarria et.al (2016). Their research addressed the important problem of improving sustainable tourism practices and suggested there is room for improvement in each of these areas based on more integrated development approach. A research was carried on by Font and McCabe (2017) focusing on making tourist destinations a better place to live as well as visit and special attention was given to the methodologies of sustainable tourism marketing, to the subject's breadth and complexities and to many of its innovations. In 2018, an attempt was made by Qiu, Fan et.al to develop and validate a framework for assessing economic sustainability of tourism from the perspective of local stakeholders which consisted of three dimensions-economic positivity, development control, and individual welfare which was confirmed by the data of subsamples. Evaluation was also done with regards to linkage between socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes toward tourism economic sustainability.

IV. RESEARCH GAP

The above literature reveals that a number of studies have been made on sustainable tourism practices all over the world as it is the need of the hour. Maximizing the economic benefits alongside protecting and preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the place is crucial at this point of time. However, it can also be seen that there has not been extensive research on sustainable practices in tourism industry adopted and applied in Indian context thus making this research paper helpful for future references.

V. PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the major challenges in managing sustainable tourism in India is the lack of universally recognised and accepted tools to measure its impact on destinations. If every stakeholder of the whole industry put their efforts together and implement more sustainable practices,

undoubtedly, it could improve the lives of millions of living beings. Taking charge and going ahead communally to safeguard the surroundings and promote social and economic justice reduces acquiescence risk and keeps businesses ahead in this era of fast-changing regulations. It also reduces the risk of loss of reputation, responds well to various needs of consumer and builds customer trustworthiness, lowers costs, improves effectiveness, efficiency and reduces the rate of employee turnover, and helps protect destinations beyond the resort walls.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper is a case study method of learning which refers to the scenarios prevailing in Mawlynnong village of Meghalaya. This study intends to elaborate on the sustainable practices adopted by the village through which it has been able to set itself as a perfect example of developing tourism in the most sustainable manner.

VII. TOURISM AT MAWLYNNONG

In spite of being a small village in one of the remote areas of Meghalaya, Mawlynnong has been able to grab the attention of tourists visiting the state. Stepping into Mawlynnong is similar to visiting an enchanted place. The hum of the rains, the gush of wind, the roar of the flowing water and the rustle of the leaves from trees seem to be proudly uttering about the beauty of the place. Cobbled streets with neatly done lawns lead up to traditional made thatched houses made by the locals. There are bamboo dustbins at every corner and is almost a litter-free zone. There are beautiful flowers blooming from every garden of the house

The Khasi folk of the village have left no stone unturned to provide a one-of-a-kind experience to every tourist and offer an astounding view of the plains in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh as it is strategically located on the Indo-Bangladesh border. Known as Sky View Point, a viewing platform which has been created with the help of the branches of the tallest tree by making a bridge of entwining bamboos, linking more than five trees and rising to the topmost branches of the trees in the forest, close to 60 feet which finally surfaces onto a platform called 'machan' or observatory. It offers a bizarre experience of looking atop of trees and being touched around by the cool breeze. On a bright sunny day, one can observe the canopy of Meghalaya's woods and the plains of Bangladesh merge into the horizon.

There is also an amazing natural balancing rock which has an extraordinary natural phenomenon where a boulder balances on another undersized rock. Around 15 minutes away from Mawlynnong, is a living root bridge at Riwai which is considered to be as old as 500 years and is shaped by the meandering roots of the Indian rubber tree and is used by the residents of the village to commute everyday.

One can also take the experience of staying in a tree house made up of bamboo which is 20 feet up in the air, near a waterfall and a placid pool. Built on the branches of a well-built tree, this cosy tree-house has two bedrooms, a living room and a machan, along with all accessories to make one self feel absolutely comfortable and feel at home away from home. The machan is a comfortable sit-out space built with bamboo and tied together with jute, and is ideal for gazing starry skies, listening to the gushing flow of water below, hums of the birds around and the rustle of the leaves above.

VIII. ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Tourism is one of the major sources of revenue in Mawlynnong. Since a number of tourists visit the place every year, maximizing the economic benefits of tourism to the local community, including the expenditure made by tourists in the area is relevant. Since bamboo is an important part of the local economy, they engage themselves in making various artefacts baskets, carpets and decorative items out of it. The locals also earn money by providing transport services and acting as tour guides. Homestay is another source of income where the locals provide the tourists an authentic and warm environment. The Khasis are very good at carving and thus make their own style of fancy jewellery and sell it to the tourists as souvenirs. On the basis of their visit to ecotourism places like balancing rock and living root bridge at Riwai, they charge a small amount of fee which also becomes a source of revenue. The locals have come up with small restaurants and eateries at small distances providing the local and authentic cuisine which is relished by those visiting the place.

IX. SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES ADOPTED BY LOCALS AT MAWLYNNONG

Mawlynnong village is an eco-tourism destination visited by thousands of travellers from various parts of the country and abroad every year, especially after being declared of being the cleanest village. In order to keep up

the name, fame and glory of the place, certain sustainable practices have been adopted by the people of the village. Moreover, there is a strong sense of self-determination among these people and certain rules which they follow traditionally.

The village council makes it a point to systematize and conduct workshops to create awareness of the dangers from global warming. According to the village headman, there is a fine imposed by the village council for anybody found to be throwing litter around or cutting trees. One can learn from these Khasi tribesmen the aesthetic sense of keeping the surroundings and environment clean and toxic-free.

Being one of the rainiest places in the country, successful attempts have been made for rainwater harvesting for conservation of fresh water. Harvesting of rainwater is done in natural stone basins which has large cavity and is placed outside every hut in that village and then used later for different purposes. The people at Mawlynnong are experts in the art of waste disposal over generations. They ensure that the environment is clean and their way of living is sustainable to the surroundings around them.

X. SUGGESTIONS

A lot has already been done to make Mawlynnong a better place. However, there is always a scope of improvement. The locals of the village may be trained to equip themselves while dealing with tourists of different states and countries. It is not only important to identify the need of specific training but also the focus should be on how it is to be effectively imparted. Training is vital as it helps in providing better service to the tourists and also will keep them abreast with the latest trends associated with it. The government should come up with better and comfortable modes of transport in order to commute from one place to another. Better medical and health care facilities may be provided which will benefit both locals as well as tourists.

XI. CONCLUSION

Keeping in mind the requirement to provide economic opportunities to the local communities and also the need to preserve the ecosystem and the ethnic identity of the people, the tourism policy needs to be designed to sustain the rich cultural heritage and biodiversity of the state. Sustainable tourism development requires informed participation of everyone starting from stakeholders to

every person even at grass root level along with a strong political headship. Achievement of sustainable tourism is a cyclic process and requires continuous scrutiny of impacts and introduction of necessary preventive and/or corrective measures as and when required. The tourism policies need to be reviewed from time to time and redesigned in order to sustain the rich cultural heritage and biodiversity of the state. It is important on the part of sustainable tourism to maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, and also raising their awareness about sustainability issues and encourage sustainable tourism practices amongst them. Thus, the preservation of cultural integrity, the integration of environmental protection and cultural heritage resources in programs related to tourism are needed. Extensive attempts need to be made in order to implement the principles of sustainable tourism development and both are to be made at the regional level and at the level of tourism enterprises

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