



NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF TOURISM ON ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY IN RISHIKHOLA, WEST BENGAL

Chayan Mondal

State Aided College Teacher, Berhampore College

ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the biggest determinants of economic growth in India. Tourism is very importantly related to the environment but unplanned tourism in many cases causes harmful effects on the environment. Rishikhola, developed in the heart of Kalimpong district, stands today as a very popular tourist destination. Many tourists visit here almost throughout the year. The natural environment and ecological balance of the region is being disrupted due to the huge number of tourists. This study examines the negative impact of tourism on the environment. The research work is based on primary data, collected through field observation, questionnaire surveys of local residents and tourists. The study emphasizes on long-term environmental conservation and sustainable tourism development in Rishikhola.

KEYWORDS : Tourism, Environment, Rishikhola, Negative Impact, Ecological Balance.

INTRODUCTION

Rishikhola is a small village located in Kalimpong district of West Bengal. It is now a popular tourist destination for those tourists who are fascinated about offbeat destination. By embracing offbeat tourism, travelers can have more authentic, immersive, and transformative experiences, while also supporting local communities and promoting sustainable tourism practices. Rishikhola is famous for its scenic beauty with Rishi River, green forest, bird watching etc. This is why from past few years Rishikhola has been attracting a huge number of tourists.

Due to huge number of tourist inflow Rishikhola has witnessed some environmental pollution and degradation. Impact of tourism on environment is now a big concern for us. If the intensity of usage by tourists exceeds the environment's ability to support it, tourism will have a negative impact on the environment (Nagora and Nagora, 2022).

Sustainable tourism development always needs to respect the environment and refer to accepted principles of sustainability. It must be planned to make balanced use of the resources of any site, thus avoiding negative effects, reducing visitor satisfaction, or adversely impacting the local society, economy and culture (Gazta, 2018). By adopting sustainable tourism practices, we can minimize negative impacts and maximize benefits for both local people and the environment.

Objectives

The Specific Objectives of the Research Paper are as Follows:

- To assess the major forms of environmental degradation caused by tourism in Rishikhola.
- To analyze local perceptions regarding tourism-induced environmental change.
- To suggest sustainable tourism management strategies based on field evidence.

Methodology

Research method is a procedure to collecting and analyzing data. Primary data were collected through field surveys conducted on November 2024. A structured questionnaire was administered to a total of 93 local residents and visiting tourists for collection of data on tourist behavior, environmental awareness, and perceptions of tourism's impact. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who were directly involved in tourism activities.

Beside this questionnaire survey, direct field observation was carried out to document waste disposal practices, infrastructure development, vegetation changes, and the condition of the Rishi River.

The collected primary data were tabulated and analyzed with the help of Microsoft Excel and GIS software was used to prepare maps of the study area.

Study Area

The study area for this research work is Rishikhola. Rishikhola is small valley located on the bank of river Rishi at an elevation of 2000ft. It is situated in Kalimpong district of West Bengal. It is 135 km from NJP station and is accessible via Kalimpong, making it an emerging offbeat tourist destination. The geographical location and spatial extent of the study area are shown in Figure 1. Rishikhola is famous for its mesmerizing natural beauty and perennial Rishi river.



Figure 1: Location Map of the Study Area. (Source: Prepared by the Author)

DISCUSSION

The relationship between tourism and the environment is complex and multifaceted. Tourism is the most important force affecting the natural environment, both positively and negatively (Nagora and Nagora, 2022). In this article we will go to discuss about some negative impacts of tourism on environment at Rishikhola.

Environment Pollution

Pollution is defined as the introduction into the environment of substances harmful to humans and other living organisms. Pollutants are harmful solids, liquids, or gases produced in higher than usual concentrations that reduce the quality of our environment (Manisalidis et al., 2020). A large number of tourists have been coming here for the past several years. As a result of this huge influx of tourists, water, air and noise pollution are occurring in the region.

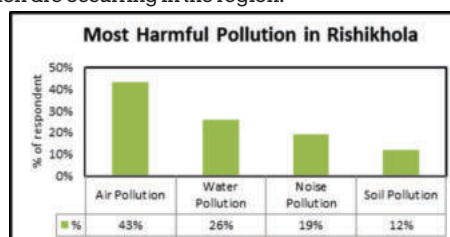


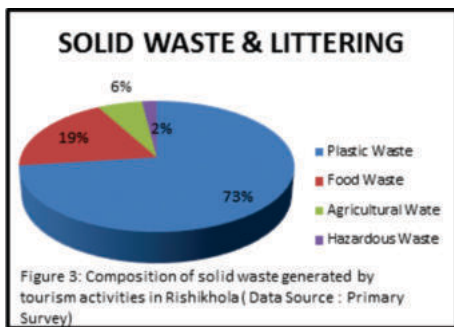
Figure 2: Perceived Types of Environmental Pollution in Rishikhola (Data Source- Primary Survey)

During the interaction with the local people and tourists it has been found that air pollution is the most harmful environment pollution followed by water, noise and soil pollution at Rishikhola.

Types of Pollution	Causes said by the respondent
Air Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use of wood in cooking ➤ Increase in arrival of vehicles ➤ Construction Work ➤ Excessive deforestation
Water Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase of sewage and wastewater ➤ Creation of an artificial dam in Rishi River.
Noise Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase in arrival of vehicles ➤ Construction Work ➤ Using of loud sound system for tourist entertainment
Soil Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase of plastic uses.

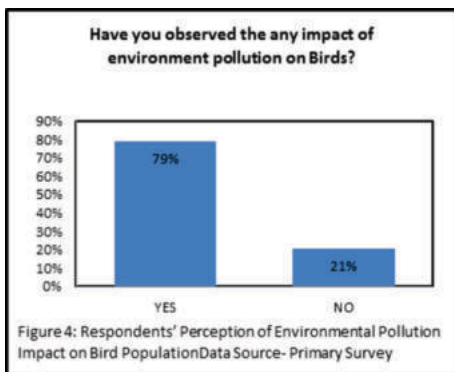
Solid Waste & Littering

Solid garbage is the unwanted, harmful, and wasted substance arising from day-to-day civic events (Choudhary, 2019). In areas with high concentrations of tourist activities and appealing natural attractions, waste disposal is a serious problem and improper disposal can be a major spoiler of the natural environment - rivers, scenic areas, and roadsides (Gazta, 2018). Due to heavy tourist inflow a lot of solid waste has been generated at Rishikhola and these wastes create a lot of environmental problem. Among all wastes plastic waste (figure 3) has been considered as most problematic waste for environment.



Impact on Birds

Rishikhola is called paradise for bird lovers. It is known as home of many different bird species including: Crimson Sunbird, Himalayan Bulbul, Scarlet Minivet etc. But from past few years it is seen that the number of birds is decreasing day by day. This is a big concern for Rishikhola. As shown in figure 4, 79% of people think that different environment pollution has a big role in decline the number of birds at Rishikhola. Noise and air pollution are considered to be the most responsible for this issue.



Impact on the Rishi River

The Rishi River originates from the Jore Pokhari Lake and this river is the life line of Rishikhola. Local authority of Rishikhola has made an artificial dam to constructed a road to connect the village with the main road. This dam is partially blocking

the normal course of the river, which to some extent is damaging the ecosystem of the river. On the other hand, human wastes like plastic etc. are polluting the river.



Suggestions:

- Sustainable Tourism Practices: Encourage tour operators and local homestay owner of Rishikhola to adopt sustainable practices, such as reducing plastic use, conserving energy, and promoting eco-friendly activities.
- EIA: Environmental Impact Assessments should be carried out regularly to determine what impacts tourism is having on the environment and how they can be remedied.
- Waste Management: Implement effective waste management systems, including recycling and composting, in tourist areas at Rishikhola.
- Eco-Friendly Accommodations: Promote environmentally certified accommodations, such as those using solar power, rainwater harvesting, proper waste management system and sustainable building materials.
- Responsible Tourist Behavior: Tourists should be made aware of nature and should be made to understand that they should not pollute the environment by littering.
- Engagement of Local Public: Public opinion of Rishikhola village should be sought and actively involved in how tourism can be improved without polluting the environment.
- Pollution Control Measures: Special measures should be taken to prevent pollution of air, water, soil, noise etc. by reducing single-use plastics, use LPG gas instead of using wood for cooking, and promoting sustainable transportation.
- Protecting Birds: Bird conservation requires control of environmental pollution and protection of birds from poachers. Sound system playing and vehicular traffic should be reduced in bird habitats.

CONCLUSION

Tourism and environment complement each other. Tourism can never be developed at the expense of the environment. Tourism in the region is mostly dependent on natural beauty. Therefore, the development of tourism in this region is possible only through conservation of natural ecosystems and control of environmental pollution.

Limitations and Future Research

In view that Interaction between tourism, environment, and local communities are complex and multifaceted. On the other hand insufficient pre-tourism data makes it difficult to assess changes. Clearly, these are the areas that call for further investigations. In future the social and cultural impacts of tourism on local communities and the role of technology in reducing tourism's environmental impact can be investigated.

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