

## (VII)

ECOTOURISM: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES IN SOOR SAROVAR  
BIRD SANCTUARY ON THE BASIS OF VISITOR MANAGEMENT.

Tourism is a practice of traveling to places outside the usual environment and residing there for at least 24 hrs for the purposes of pleasure, vocation, recuperation of health, pilgrimage, games and sports, business, a family trip, a mission, or for meetings and conferences. Tourism in India is the third largest foreign exchange earner, accounting for 2.5% of Gross Domestic Product(GDP). Although, it can bring both benefits and problems to an area. If well planned, developed and managed, tourism generates local jobs and income and provides opportunities to local entrepreneurs to establish tourism enterprises, it can help to pay for conservation of local natural areas, archeological and historic sites, arts and crafts and cultural traditions etc. However, if not well planned, developed and managed properly tourism can create congestion, pollution and other environmental problems (Bramwell, 1990a; Buhalis and Fletcher, 1995).

Tourism and environment are closely interrelated and it can have both positive and negative impacts on the environment. Sustainable tourism developed depends on protecting the environmental resources for tourism (Boo, 1991; Butler, 1991). The partners for sustainable tourism development are the tourism industry, owners and managers of tourism commercial enterprises, the environmental supporters, advocates for environmental conservation and the community groups and leaders and the local authority. The interaction among these partners are necessary to achieve improved quality of life for the community while still achieving conservation of environmental resources for tourism and reasonable profits for the tourism industry.

Keeping all these points in view, a new kind of tourism has come into being and is known as ECOTOURISM. Thus, ecotourism is a responsible travel to natural areas in harmony with nature, environment and local people and their culture.

According to Ecotourism Strategy, the three key elements of ecotourism are; nature based, involves education and is operated on a sustainable basis. On the basis of above mentioned definitions and taking into account the impact of environment, Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary has a lot of potential for ecotourism development which has yet to be realized in the right

prospectus. This unique bird sanctuary with its rich flora and fauna and pollution free environment has provided an excellent opportunity to travel loving people a wonderful destination for Ecotourism to enjoy experiences, understand and appreciate nature and the need to conserve wildlife.

To carry out present study, ecotourism auditing survey has been used as a potential tool in ecotourism with special reference to assess visitor's management in Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Agra.

This study for visitor management in Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary is relatively a new concept of ecotourism in the light of the assessment of problems and their respective possibilities on the basis of visitor management to make Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary an important ecotourism destination.

The specific objectives were:

- ♦ To locate the problems in Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.
- ♦ To assess the visitor management in Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.
- ♦ To find out the appropriate ways to tackle the problems.

Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary is situated in Agra, the Taj city of Uttar Pradesh. Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary is a freshwater swamp and lies at 27°15.5' 99" N and 77°50' 48.82" E with an elevation of 171 mt(561 ft). Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary was established in 27 March 1991, it covers an area of 7.97 km<sup>2</sup>, inside which is a pentagonal shaped lake called Keetham lake spread over approximately 300 ha. Inside the catchment woodland and developed shallow areas have been created.

Soils are alkaline and texture varies from coarse sand to clayey with the bulk density of 1.39 – 1.50 gm/cc and approximately 50% porosity. the area suffers the extremes of temperature i.e very low in winter and extremely high in summer with average rainfall of 500 mm – 750 mm between July to September.

The area is a natural habitat to a variety of migratory and resident birds. Some of these are woodland birds and others are wetland birds. The great diversity of flora is also present *Prosopis juliflora* the

most dominant one.

Besides, there are other structures of Bear Rescue center, Aquarium, Children's Park, Blind School, Krishna's Temple and on the basis of presence of different species of reptiles, a Python Point has been identified.

Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary is a fertile place of greenery. It is a living example that reflects the capacity of nature. The nature has risen to live for another cycle. The adjoining upper Lake adds immense beauty to its landscape. The Lake enlivens particularly when hundreds of migratory birds land in the lake at the onset of winter providing tremendous joy to the glories of nature to the visiting tourists and visitors.

The study was carried out on the basis of earlier studies (Buckley, 1990a and 1990b; Brown, 1994; Bhattacharya *et al.* 2003; Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2003). The standard methods were adopted to carry out the study and include:

- ♦ Collection of secondary data from records available for the purpose of verification.
- ♦ Collection of primary data in a structured questionnaire format.
- ♦ Focus group and individual discussions with the visitors and village people.
- ♦ Analysis of data to examine the problems faced by visitors.

The data regarding the visitor's response has been collected through a questionnaire survey format, which include:

- Questionnaire directly supplied to visitors.
- Spot survey and transect walk survey.
- Questionnaire survey in individual and in groups.

The questionnaire were supplied to the visitors entering to the sanctuary. They were requested to cooperate and give proper replies.

In this process, demographic information about visitors was collected. A questionnaire was also supplied to the villagers regarding their participations in sanctuary management. Finally the ecotourism auditing survey was carried out on the basis of entry of visitors and their vehicles.

*Age and sex ratio:* 41% of the visitors entering to the sanctuary were in age group of 21-30 years, followed by 24% in the age group of 10-20 and 18% in 31-40. The least percentage was shared by 41-50 and 51- above age groups with 10% and 7% respectively. Among the visitors 67% were males and 33% were females.

*Qualification:* The result showed that maximum number of visitors were graduates and post-graduates with 29% contribution, followed by 12<sup>th</sup> standard, undergraduates,

professional graduates and post- graduates with percentage of 19%, 16% and 5% respectively. Remaining 10% were illiterate and 8% did not responded.

*Occupation:* The survey indicated that 45% of visitors were students, housewives and retired persons. 25% were belonging to private sector. Remaining 30% were busy with either of public sector or business with 15% each.

*Annual Income:* Only 74% of visitors responded to this question, among them 56% have more than 100000 Rs, 33% have more than 50000 Rs and 11% enjoy a little income of upto 50000 Rs. Remaining 26% did not responded.

*Mode of transportation:* The survey indicated that 56% people visited by two-wheelers, 35% by four-wheelers and remaining 10% had no vehicle.

*Purpose of visit:* The responses revealed that 45% visit for Keetham Lake, 38% for Migratory and Resident Birds, 16% for scenic beauty and nature, and 1% for others.

*Number of visits:* The survey indicated that 56% of visitors visit once in a year, followed by 15% visit twice a year, 9% visit thrice a year and the remaining visit more than 5 times in a year.

*Facilities in Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary:* The sample data showed that 55% of visitors feel inadequate facilities and 35% feel adequate facilities. Remaining 10% denied to respond.

*Willing to pay for guide:* The visitor's responses showed that 50% of them would pay for guide and 50% denied to pay.

*Facilities to be provided by the sanctuary management:* Following facilities should be provided by the sanctuary management which are arranged in priority basis as:

- ♦ Trained guide.
- ♦ Proper drinking water at regular distances.
- ♦ Provision of proper canteen.
- ♦ Provision of battery operated buses/ rikshaws.

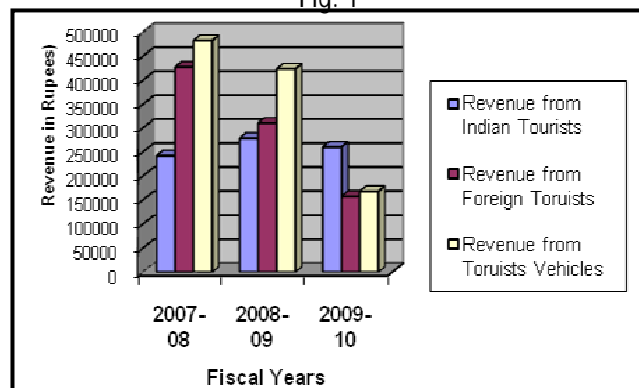
*Villagers perceptions:* On the basis of survey, most of the local people approximately 95% were interested in sanctuary management', if they were given chance to do so.

Finally and eventually, it is inevitable to include that there is also presence of political pressure in the sanctuary for the usage of sanctuary road to the surrounding village (Sengana).

#### Ecotourism Auditing Survey

Suggestions and opinions of the visitors towards conservation values in improvements in the sanctuary are mentioned below:

Fig. 1



Gross revenue from Indian and Foreign tourists  
(Ticket charges) and their vehicles.

- Appointment of trained guides.
- Proper drinking water at regular distances.
- Provision of proper canteen.
- Besides, it will be worthwhile to set up a flower garden near the lakeside.
- Finally the political pressure should be located and

removed.

Covering an area of 7.97 km<sup>2</sup>, no doubt a small bird sanctuary in size, Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary has a great potential for Ecotourism development. Number of visitors increase every year with the average of Indian 12,799 and 941 Foreign tourists in the last three years of 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10. Simultaneously observations revealed that the number of vehicles also increases.

Of course, there are some problems in the sanctuary e.g. unavailability of drinking water at appropriate distances, absence of proper canteen, absence of toilets, little air and noise pollution etc., but at the same time there are some adequate possibilities which can overcome the above mentioned problems. There are cultural, traditional, scientific and economic aspects present in the Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary as well.

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