



Nature Queen Chilika and Eco-Tourism

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Tourism is one of the major sources of income of country. The word tour is derived from the Latin word 'Torous', meaning a tool for describing a circle on turner's wheel. Though the word dates back to the 13th century, tourism became popular only in 1800 as people began to travel from one place to another for recreation and sightseeing. The prime motive of tourism is pleasure and leisure, however, there can be other social motives also. Travel and tourism has been an important social activity of human beings from time immemorial. Tourism is a tool to create employment for both the skilled and un- skilled people. Different government and non-government organizations need to be involved in the process of developing sustainable tourism. Today, tourism is the world's largest industry. Sustainable tourism is synonym to that of ecotourism. Eco-tourism means management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to maintain the fine balance between the requirements of tourism and ecology on one hand and the needs of the local communities for jobs, new skills, income-generating employment and a better status for women on the other hand.

The term "ecotourism" was originally defined as "traveling to relatively undisturbed of uncontaminated areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery, its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas." "Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas

that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people." According to international union for the conservation of nature ecotourism is "environmentally responsible to travels and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature; that promotes conservation, has now visitor impact; and provides for beneficially active social-economic involvement of local populations. "The ecotourism includes the biosphere reserves, mangroves, coral reefs, deserts, mountains and forests, flora and fauna, seas, lakes, rivers and caves. Orissa has enormous potentiality for growth and development of ecotourism. The Chilika lagoon is not only one of the mega biodiversity of Orissa but also one of the hotspots of India. Orissa forms a part of the global biodiversity hotspot with varieties of flora, fauna, rare and endangered species that provide strong base for promoting ecotourism industry.

Queen of natural beauty, Chilika, the largest brackish water lake in Asia covering an area of over 1100 Sq.K.M. is a great attraction for tourists for fishing, bird watching and boating. In winter Chilika flutters with thousands of indigenous and migratory birds of many varieties from far and near even from the distant Siberia. The fabulous beauty of Chilika which has inspired many poets and philosophers to sing its glory is quite evident in the poems written by Radhanath Roy and Pandit Godavarish Mishra. It was one of the outlets of maritime trade through which the

traders of Orissa used to sail for south-east-Asian countries like Java, Sumatra and Bali. The atmosphere is just serene and undisturbed amidst the blue expanse of the water on one side and an evergreen range of hills on the other. Dotted with a host of islands with romantic names, a cruise in Chilika will be a life-long memory. But now-a-days the lagoon is facing a number of problems sung as salutation, shifting of Chilika Mouth, loss of salinity, extensive weed growth and depletion of fishery resources, increased aquaculture activities, changes in species composition, and many more. There is a tale that is often told to explain the birth of Chilika. The 4th century pirate king Raktabahu was believed to have traveled across the seas in an armada to plunder the rich and holy town of Puri. The citizens of Puri deserted the town in anticipation of the attack. Raktabahu was enraged that the approach had proved futile and therefore directed his fury towards the sea that had betrayed him. The sea parted to let the army march in before the waves turned inn and smothered the entire lot in its tides. The Chilika lagoon is the largest brackish water lagoon in India and is located between the latitudes 19.28' and 19.54'N and longitude 85.51' and 85.38'E. It stretches over Ganjam, Khurda and Puri district. The water-spread area of the lagoon varies between 790 sq.km at its lowest water level and about 1050 sq.km at the highest water level, including 42 sq.km. total area of channels connecting the lagoon with Bay of Bengal.

The major attraction of Chilika lagoon for the tourists is its natural beauty with the pleasure of boating, bird watching and cavorting dolphins while the religious Kalijai and the mouth-watering delicious dishes are incidental attraction. The important tourist spots of the Chilika lagoon are Barkul, Rambha, Satapada, Nalabana, Somolo, honey moon, breakfast and birds islands. Rambha, Barkul and Satapada have been chosen as the tourist site for the study. One of the main attraction of Chilika lagoon is the sighting of the

Irrawaddy dolphin, once abundant but now an endangered species. The lagoon has immense potential for development of ecotourism. It witnesses the largest congregation of aquatic birds, particularly during winter. Flocks of migratory water fowl arrive here from as far as the Caspian Sea, Baikal Lake and remote parts of Russia, Magnolia, Lakah and Himalayas.

Chilika has a lot of potential for the growth and development of tourism in Orissa. Tourist centers such as Konark, Chandravaga, Puri, Brahmagiri and Satapada fall in one line. Chilika- this natural beauty spot can attract a large number of visitors both from outside and inside the country. To some extent Satapada caters to the need of tourists, yet more things are to be accomplished. Environmentally responsible tourism is a new concept of the world over. More stress is being given to make tourism eco-friendly with an orientation in perception and an acceptance of the basic tenets of conservation. Tourism today represents around 6% of the world trade and almost 13% of the total global consumer spending. It is a fast growing sector and is the third largest generator of foreign exchange in India. Chilika provides an excellent opportunity for ecotourism and the participatory eco-tourism can generate adequate alternate employment opportunities for the local community and create desired awareness amongst the stake-holders as well as the visitors for the conservation and wise use of its natural resources. Major concentrations of birds are seen from November to mid-February when large numbers of migratory birds come from far off places of the globe. Nalabana and its neighborhood are the major eye catching bird concentration area harboring lakhs of birds. Chilika Lake is famous for the vast numbers of migratory waterfowl that flock-there every winter, and the lake is reputed to support the largest concentration of migratory waterfowl in India. The migratory birds during winter attract the tourists and "Bird watchers". It is well understood that

the congregation of large numbers of water bird species at Nalabana for feeding, resting and roosting, is due to various reasons such as the abundance of food, accessibility to food resources due to the shallowness and drawdown, availability of exposed mudflats and shorelines for roosting in an area well protected from 9.59 lakh resident and migratory birds visited Chilika lake during 2004-2005. The irrawaddy or snub fin dolphin (Bhuasuni magor) is somewhat elusive species, found in various large rivers, bays and estuaries in south and south-east Asia. These dolphins in Chilika Lake are likely to be affected by the various recent changes in Chilika Lake and their long-term survival appears threatened. Most abundantly, dolphins are spotted along the outer channel up to the Satapada.

Chilika, is the largest brackish water lagoon in the Indian subcontinent, presents unique ecological features, the lagoon embodies marine, brackish, freshwater environments and it is the home of fish, prawn and crab which enrich the fishery resources of the lagoon. Fisheries have been the natural resource of the Chilika lagoon. A total of 225 fish and prawn species have been recorded from Chilika lagoon, of these, 28 species are marine, 38 are freshwater and 159 are brackish water. Fish species that are commonly caught by fisherman in the lagoon comprise mainly 11 groups of fishes which are commercially important and contribute to the quantity of landings. These consists of brackish water prawn, mullets, clupeids, perches, threadfins, catfishes, fishes belonging to beloniformes, sciaenid, cichlids, tricanthus and miscellaneous ones including freshwater fishes, freshwater prawns and brackish water and marine fish species. The commercial fishes of the lagoon contribute to more than 54% of the total annual average landings. All endemic fishes breed in the lagoon during April to September. Mullet, sea bass, threadfins and pen acid prawns migrate from the lagoon to the sea for breeding and their progeny migrate from sea

to the lagoon, providing a major means of requirement to fishery.

Chilika, A wonder creation of the nature, is a vast and picturesque lagoon in the heart of coastal Orissa. It displays lavish scenic beauty and is famous for which biodiversity including the migratory birds that discover in this unique wetland ecosystem a "Home away from home". The rich biodiversity of the lake and its tourist importance have enabled the state of Orissa to earn a lot of foreign exchange for socio-economic development of the people. Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world. The functions of wetlands include flood control, aquifer recharge, nutrient absorption, sediment retention and erosion control. Therefore, it is high time to work hand in hand with other stakeholders working in the area for over all conservation of the lagoon.

It is said that any visit to Orissa remains inconclusive without a visit to Chilika Lake. Chilika provides an opportunity to visit nature and natural beauties through its vast coverage of wavy bluish water, vegetation rich small mountains and islands in it and the clean bluish sky with floating clouds hanging over it. Thus, a visitor can visit and enjoy the beauties of three important spheres like, water, land and the skies if he/ she visits Chilika. That is why Chilika has attracted many poets, philosophers, nature lovers and even the general public and tourists from time immemorial. Chilika is such a place that, one can feel nature and natural process in a simple and enjoyable way. Really, what we call mystery of nature, is greatly seen and felt in Chilika. These definitely give a picture of its tourism importance as government of Orissa and government of India have recognized it as a place of importance in eco-tourism.

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