

Green Tourism Management in India- ‘A 3D Study of the Seven Sisters States of North-East with Special Reference to Eco-Tourism’

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ABSTRACT: The ecotourism has registered its presence as a significant part of the tourist industry across the globe. The three pillars of sustainable development namely social, economic and environmental advantages is deliberated by it.

The north-eastern region of India comprises of a unique plethora of ecological marvels, also have high prospects externalise itself as a hub of eco-tourism in the country. Therefore, ecotourism can be a significantly tool for the economic development and community ownership in the region. However, challenges, which create roadblocks for the ecotourism industry need to be addressed. The paper is an attempt to know about the challenges and opportunities of eco-tourism in north-eastern part of India with a three-dimensional study. The first part focused on the tourists' point of view, second, the travel agencies views and third, views of the local residents of North-East states. A structured interview schedule, and purposive sampling were adopted for all the three dimensions of the study. The data analysis was done on quantitative technique. The study through its experiential nature suggests, that there are enormous prospects of ecotourism in north-eastern part of India, through which the people of the respective state can take economic benefits and become an instrumental to the overall development of the region.

KEYWORDS: Eco-tourism, seven sister states, green consumerism, sustainable tourism, north-east India

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism has been a major source of revenue to the government of India for the last few decades (Devi, 2012, Chutia, 2015; Duarah & Mili, 2013). The eco-tourism as a major subset of tourism has created a way for humans to interact with the nature without harming it. The eco-tourism as a model for the sustenance has supported sustainable development in the 21st century where environmental issues have prompted up at large. This kind of tourism is favorable in places with rich natural sites. However, the region is not completely safe from ecological and socio-cultural challenges. As number of tourists increase, research should be carried out in order to know the tourism-specific problems (Kirstges, 2003, Pedersen, 2002). Eco-tourism, due to its significance, is now an integral fragment of the tourist industry in major part of the globe. It has been observed that more number of tourists are looking for an opportunity to experience living with nature and make themselves sang-froid from the picturesque beauty and abundant flora and fauna (Leung, Spenceley, Hvenegaard & Buckley 2015; USAID, 2012). Ecotourism is a new form of tourism based on the idea of sustainability and promotes conservation of natural resources. Due to its sustainable nature, it got currency globally, and therefore the year 2002 was declared as the International Year of Ecotourism. It was all intended to highlight the relevance and recognition of ecotourism all over the world (Devi, 2012).

The people have started to discuss about nature based tourism, and identifying new places which can be a new source of nature based tourism, but it is not a new phenomenon, and has already been a point of discussion among the

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stakeholders and admirers of nature based tourism (Dhami, Deng, Strager, & Conley (2016)). Due to its location in the vicinity of world's richest bio-graphic areas, the north-eastern is a naturally blessed region of India, and hence, can easily become a hotspot for national and global eco-tourism. The region has enormous prospects to generate economic opportunities due to having exceptionally rich bio-diversity (Chutia, 2015; Das, 2012, Devi, 2012; Duaraha & Mili, 2013, Hingham, 2007). Many scholars have long studied the place as a rich mine for tourism but have failed to implement these strategies in place with the government and the local people. The real challenge lies in penetrating their indigenous borders and making room for green economic understanding. Management studies may have failed in this respect to fully understand and penetrate the market of NE in India, where there is a constraint of political, economic and several other aspects integrated into one (Sharma, 2000, Sundaram, 2013). However, people are discussing sustainable management and tourism discourse which is passing through a paradigm shift in the era of management, where green management studies are showing prowess. Green Management is a subset of management, which caters the need of sustainable development along with maintaining profit base margin for entrepreneurs. Eco-Tourism is such a field, where the concept of green management can be incorporated. In present-day world, everyone is looking forward to have a future where human beings and nature can cohabit without unnecessarily exerting pressure on each other (Bjork, 2002; Pedersen, 2002).

As the era of 2000 started, the concern for environmental sustainability takes the top priority among the policy makers, academicians and civil society. The concept of sustainability has gained the momentum and so is the case with eco-tourism development. By that time, tourism has been identified and proven itself as a source of direct and indirect economic benefits to all its concerned stakeholders. Therefore, nature based tourism has got the currency to the most possible extent. The people have started to deliberate on the issues of need of nature based tourism in the era of 1970s, but it took almost a decade or two to make it as a theme of academic discourse (Briassoulis & Straaten, 2000; Devi, 2012). The deliberations, based on nature based tourism have eventually made people sensitive and opt for their tourism destination. In relation to it, this paper attempts to discover the extent of eco-tourism in North East India (Seven Sisters States) also, how travel agencies can contribute in enhancing its scope. Along with that, the same is also aimed to know what impact does eco-tourism left on the people of the north-eastern states.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As soon as the report titled "Our Common Future" launched in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), the same has set a milestone in terms of the development of the world (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The issues related to sustainable development become imperative to human survival and means of economic too. Hence, tourism industry expanded to one of the largest industries, adopted the idea and is striving for a Sustainable Tourism Development (Luck, 2003). Hetzer (1965) (cited in Devi, 2012; Hingham, 2007) referred to a form of tourism '*principally based upon natural and archeological resources such as caves, fossil and archeological sites*' (p.2). It was 1980s era, when issues related to the global environment and in consequence of it, the term 'ecotourism' had been firmly established. Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) (Cited in Hingham, 2007) related to ecotourism was of the view that, "*tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals*". He also made reference to '*any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas*' (p.2) as an essential part of the ecotourism resource. Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) in the 1990s got associated with tourism with conservation of nature and have developed it as an asset for all round development. After looking the impressive and innovative approach of development with conservation of nature, scores of non-governmental organizations and other similar agencies have started taking interest in the development of communities through this way only in order to work for overall sustainable development of the region (Butcher, 2007; Cater, 2007; Devi, 2012). IUCN (1997) (cited in USAID, 2012; Kumar, 2014) came out with a concept that successful ecotourism involves "*mutually supporting partnerships among three key elements: the natural environment, the local communities, and the tourism system*" (p.45). Whereas, Convery & Convery & Flanagan, (2000) taken tourism as the generic concept and defined it as the activity done by a person which involves traveling to some places and staying there away for

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homely environment for not more than a year time, specifically directed for having leisure or business purposes and did not receive any remuneration for the same.

Buckley (2010) while defining features of eco-tourism was of the view that the main characteristic of the term involves environmental inputs and outputs. The environment inputs signifies the geographical features which attracts the tourists to visit the place whereas, the outputs stands for what benefits coming out for the natural and social milieu of that particular place. Therefore, eco-tourism can also be viewed as geo-tourism with a positive triple bottom line. It was stated that the concept of ecotourism requires a precise accounting of environmental, social, financial costs as well as benefits.

Hingham and Carr (2003) (cited in Hingham, 2007) stated that the businesses related to ecotourism and experiences of visitors have successfully made people sensitive and created awareness, along with a sense of advocacy for environmental issues among them from local to global level. There were people who tried to restore ecological environment by reintroducing regionally extinct species into protected areas in their businesses (Voeks & Ramatian, 2012 p.3). The sustenance of ecological settings is also beneficial from all aspects, because ecosystems provides many intangible benefits including maintain the equilibrium between the requirement of nature and its benefits to the mankind. The economic rewards of development most of the time offset the expenses of environmental protection (USAID, 2012; Voeks & Ramatian, 2012). The term 'eco' in ecotourism has mostly been associated with ecologically sustenance. On the contrary, the sustainability dimension of ecotourism presents many other advantages than just preserving the maintenance of biodiversity of the concerned area (Bjork, 2007).

In relation to it, Donohoe & Needham (2008) were of the view that due to the voluminous definitional discourse of ecotourism, it has no clarity in its disparate nature. Therefore, in the absence of a common definition set of key tenets the challenge has been to ensure operational ecotourism that adheres to the theoretical underpinnings of the concept. The concept of ecotourism will only remain a precarious discourse if consensus is not built on its definitional aspect. However, in order to provide a framework for the development of ecotourism policy and applications, they have identified some recurring themes through the application of content analysis methodology to select contemporary definitions. They then introduced those most frequently appearing themes as an ecotourism conceptual framework based on key tenet, that are meant to represent a set of established fundamental beliefs central to ecotourism and are based on nature, preservation/conservation, education; sustainability, distribution of benefits, and ethics/responsibility/awareness.

Mowforth and Munt (2003) (cited in Cater, 2007) were of the view that there is a multiple union amongst three variables namely sustainability, globalization and development and therefore, all should go hand in hand. Those institutions which play important roles in mainstreaming sustainability at global level as they involve the production, but most importantly the enforcement of an ideological framework which matches global standards (Hartwick & Peet, 2003). In relation to it, the tourism industry in north-eastern region in India, could generate revenue and would act as a catalyst for inclusive growth and development. In order to harness the tourism potential in the region, there is a need for a secure environment. Due to abundance of flora and fauna, the north-east region in India has a huge potential for the ecotourism. However, there are numbers of factors which are need to be addressed in order to promote ecotourism in the aforementioned region (Duarah & Mili, 2013). The study revolves around achieving the below mentioned specific objectives and these are as follows

- To find out the extent of eco-tourism in North East India (Seven Sisters).
- To find out how travel agencies manage eco-tourism in North East India.
- To find out how eco-tourism have affected the regional people of the seven sister states.

Many scholars have worked on the concept of "ecotourism" and have found that this would be extremely valuable in terms of economy to all the nation, who promote it in their respective countries.

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III. RESEARCH DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The researchers have used the exploratory research design to fulfill their objectives which required analyzing the topic from an exploratory angle due to the magnitude of research problem. The researchers have taken a threefold road to reach to a consensus. The universe of the study was seven sister states of north-east in India.

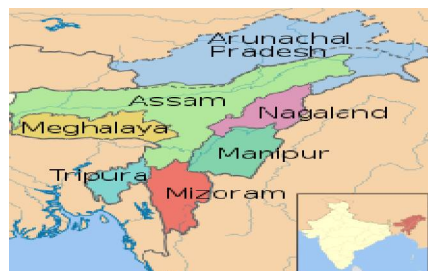
Firstly: The researchers have conducted a status survey of eco-tourism in the seven sister states. The status survey has been mainly based on participant observation and secondary data collection.

Secondly: The researchers have framed an interview schedule for the respondents to fulfill their objectives. The conducted research has been two-dimensional in nature, where the tourists (visited or not visited) have been interviewed along with the local people of the states. The two-dimensional approach has been taken to find a connection to the extent of tourism and how it has affected the regional people of the seven sisters.

Thirdly: The researchers have also conducted in-depth interviews with travel agencies who have been managing eco-tourism trips to the seven sister states to understand the managerial problems that lead to tourism in the North Eastern parts of India.

The universe of the study was the seven sister states of India keeping in mind the number of tourists and affordability of the researchers from the universe, the study was based on purposive sampling and therefore the respondents have been chosen according to the availability of time and space. The survey area includes Assam (Guwahati), Arunachal Pradesh (Tawang) Nagaland (Dimapur), Manipur (Imphal), Mizoram (Aizwal), and Tripura (Agartala).

Fig: Seven sister states of India



There were total 50 interviewed respondents for tourists and 50 interviewed respondents for local people of the area. In-depth study was done, taking into consideration only 10 major Travel Agencies in West Bengal (Kolkata). The simple random sampling method has been adopted for the interviews which were scheduled and snow ball sampling for the travel agencies. The quantitative data analysis using SPSS and similar statistical tools was adopted in data analysis.

Sample of the data collection

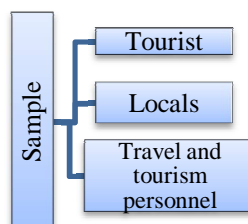


Fig: Different participants of the study

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IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study results: Fulfillment of Objective (To find out the extent of tourism in North East Indian States, the seven sisters).

See Figure 1: Number of tourists have visited north east?

The collected data explicitly demonstrates about the number of people visited north-east states. It is revealed that the majority of the respondents, i.e. 70% of them have not travelled to these places and whereas, only 30% have travelled.

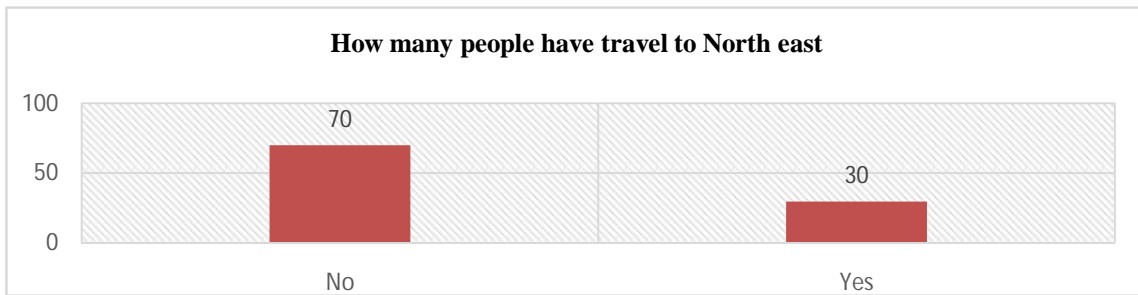


Figure 2: Popularity of the respective states

The researchers focused their interest into the popularity of the states and their tourist interests, to understand the micro perspective of the extent of tourism in these states. The state of Arunachal Pradesh held the highest 40% of tourist interests, followed by Assam 20%, then Meghalaya 20%, Tripura 10%. The states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur shared 10% among themselves. The data demonstrate that interests of tourist are relatively lower in these states. Only people who visited these places were largely interested in buying wooden products in majority and made 70% of the total respondents. The 15% respondents have also shown their interest to buy products made by tribal people, 10% silk product and 5% woolen products. Apart from tourism, these products are the main sources of income for the local people.

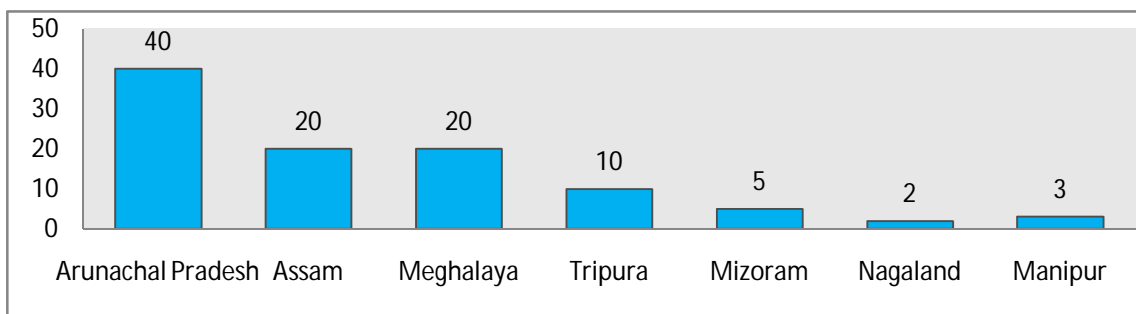


Figure 03: Constraints of Tourism in NE

The Major Constraints of Tourism in North East areas of our country involve: Government (G), Communication (C), Hotels (H), Food (F), Geography (G), People (P), Economics (E), and Politics (P). To bring closure to the objective of finding the extent of tourism in the north-east, the researcher ends with the vital point of constraints. The main constraint stated by the respondents is availability of food as per the likings of the tourists. 50% of the people have stated that food is the reason why people face constraints in places of the north east. Then 20% is the people of the place, mostly respondents have found that they are not friendly towards them. 10% communication is responsible for

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much of the constraint faced by the tourists visiting these places. The other not so noteworthy constraints are like economics, hotels, geography, and politics etc. which comprise 20% of the respondent answers.

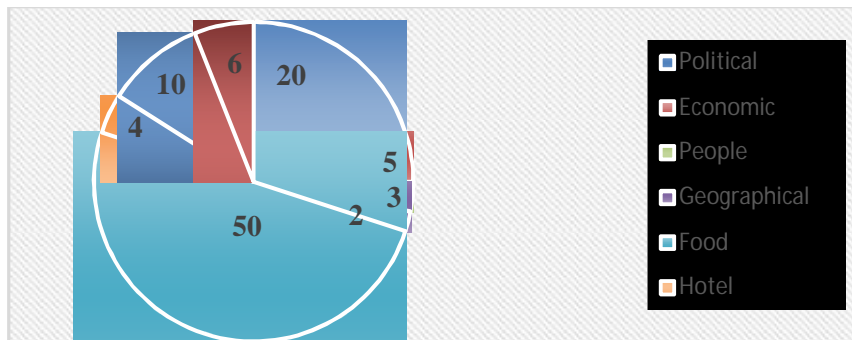


Figure 04: The use of different kinds of media for the advertisement

The Secondary In-depth study done with the Travel agency and their management of tourism in these places (Findings 2): Fulfillment of Objective (To find out the experience and medium of advertising used by travel agencies to cater to north east tourists).

The researchers moved on to the second dimension of study where they have taken few travel agencies who cater to the needs of travelling to north-eastern states of the country. The researchers surveyed agencies ranging from 5 years of experience to 10 years and more. Around 80% of the agencies surveyed had minimum 5 years of experience in the field. 25% of the agencies had 5 to 10 years of experience. 5% of them had 10 years of experience. So we can see from the findings that the tourism business in north east is relatively newer, as the majority of the businesses are not older than 5 years.

Medium of communication for advertising is vital for any travel agency business. There was an equal share of 40% among newspaper and television advertisements. Incredible India had taken up much of the hard work to promote north east India, and is still doing so. 10% shared by hoarding and brochure. Advertisements attract the audience who want to spend their holidays in the cradle of nature.

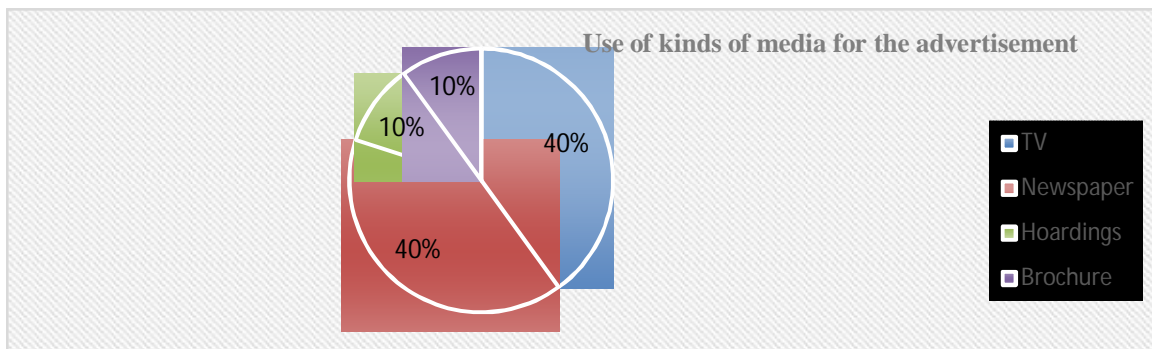


Figure 05: Indigenous Crafts Demand

The Final Study results (Findings 3): Fulfillment of Objective (To find out how tourism has affected the regional people of North East)

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The majority of the respondents, 50% stated that the demand of indigenous market products, 40% chose hand woven textiles. It combine, it was found that 90% of the tourists demand bamboo and hand woven textile products from these places. These products are purely environmental friendly and indigenous. The rest 10% respondents, liked silk made outfits and others items, including head gears, jewelry and ivory products.

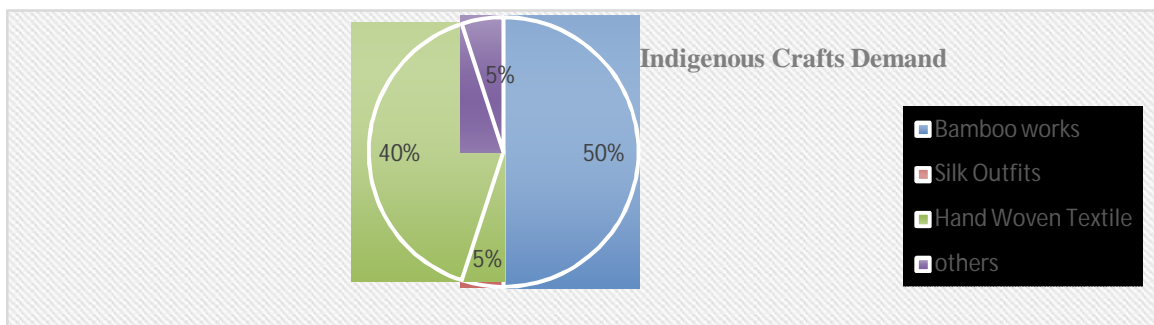


Figure 06: Has tourism affected the development of the state and perception of the People?

In response to, does tourism has any impact over the development of the north-eastern states, the majority of the respondents, i.e., 85% of the people were of the view that eco-tourism is rightly facilitating in the development of the state, whereas, 15% were not of the view.

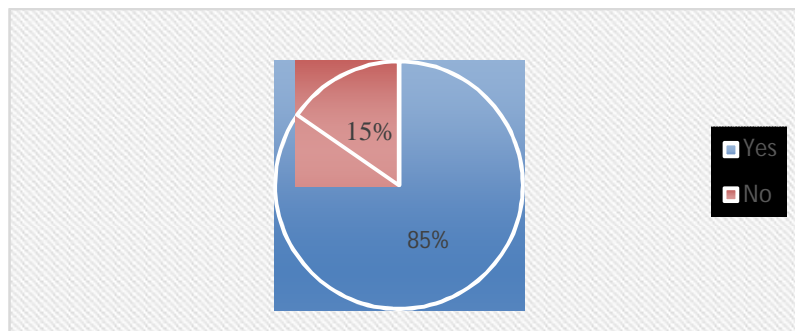


figure07: level of Impact

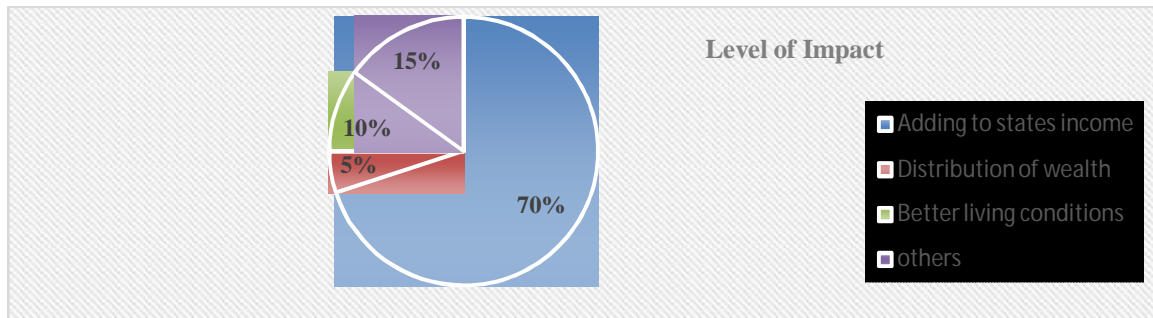
When the researchers enquired about how much eco-tourism is adding to the positive impact of the place. 70% of the respondents stated that tourism industry was accumulation in their income. 15% viewed that good communication, 10% of the respondents stated that the better living conditions for the residents and remaining 5% supported other factors affecting their lives.

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V. SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

The tourism industry has been emerged as one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries and also employs largest workforce across the world (Jreat, 2004). Ecotourism as a tool of Sustainable development (Barkin, n.d.) is the main goal set by tourism stakeholders to bring and meet the need of the hour. Ecotourism has got the potential to address the twin issue of giving benefits to the indigenous community and protect the rich cultural heritage and environment of the host region. The tourism potential of the Northeast has not been fully exploited. This region popularly described as 'paradise unexplored', has been booming and future projections show that this trend will continue. The rich natural beauty and its diversity, exotic cultural and ethnic diversities, flora and fauna, unexplored rich biodiversity, provide tremendous potential for development of ecotourism in this region (Sharma, 2000). The Government of India recognizes that socio-economic and infrastructure development in this region can be brought largely through tourism. The role of North Eastern states in the Look East policy has started building the region. The Look East Policy (LEP) of northeast is expecting to enter into a new era of development through inclusive growth covering up a network of pipelines, well-constructed roads, well connected railways and air connectivity, channels of communication and trade (Sundaram, 2013). NEC has constructed an eco-tourism park at Langkawet, east Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya, an adventure tourism camping cum recreation site at Huto village, Doimukh, and other sites in Arunachal Pradesh (Annual Report 2015-2016). However, there are several roadblocks which need to be addressed before any meaningful activity can take place (Upreti, 2015). As the North-East States are rich in ecotourism resources, but are lacking the much needed infrastructure and a strategic outlook and planning. The small share of the region in the tourism industry is disproportionate to its potential. Therefore, the North-Eastern States must realize the need of the hour to aim for sustainable development of tourism as a key marketing solution, in which eco-tourism will assist to achieve the same. Apart from it, there must a coordination among different stakeholders related to the tourism industry. Herein, the public-private partnership model will boost the outcomes of ecotourism. (Chutia, 2015; Sharma, 2000). Along with that, there must be an inclusive tourism development policy which should promote and encourage people's participation in the same.

The establishment of a north-east tourist development corporation has already been recommended by high powered Shukla Commission. The corporation will be primarily focusing on improving the air services in order to promote tourism in the region (Das, 2012; Duarah & Mili, 2013). From the above study, it can be understood that there is a great opportunity for eco-tourism in north-east states. This could well be availed if certain things are improved. Though, an opportunity is there but some challenges need to be worked out through better communication and managerial efforts. The green economic understanding can be utilized in these areas as a method to help generate revenue that does not affect the sustenance of the place. Here, the people's participation is the most sought after if promotion of ecotourism is the objective to work on. In this series, the people have recognized about the economic and conservatory prospects of ecological tourism. However, certain issues related to access to tourists, capital enclave and employment need to be addressed (Goodwin, 2003). The awareness of the people is lacking which again requires a strong action communication plan supported by managerial efforts. The people should be engaged in policy making to implementation phases. From the in-depth three dimensional analyses, an understanding has been achieved that green

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way of management is the response to sustainable development based tourism. As, it can generate green revenue and support foster development which keeps the integrity of the place intact and does not affect the indigenous nature of the people and the socio-economic landscape (Das, 2012; Duarah & Mili, 2013, Sundaram, 2013). Hence, it can be said that green management of tourism in north east India is the way to harness the nature's true value and not to rescind, rather help conserve and protect it. Communication has been the one aspect which needs to be improved if efforts are to make north east an eco-tourism heaven, so that people would be welcome to harmonize with the rhythm of the north east 'a paradise still to be explored'. In the end, all tourism-related activities should be well designed, executed and managed in an environment friendly manner so that the environment is not degraded (Ebrahim, Ponde & Ravindra, 2012).

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