Heritage Management for Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract

Most conventional tourism plans are dominated by the growth requirements of the tourism industry. Sustainable tourism plans are based on a wider, more holistic, regional analysis. In the present scenario sustainable development has become an important challenge to deal with particularly in the age of modernization. Heritage in fact is regarded as one of the most valuable and fastest growing components of tourism. Conservation of heritage sites is considered to be a vital component of their management since they are irreplaceable resources for the tourism industry. The present study aims to highlight the factors to be considered for developing sustainable tourism specifically in the heritage sites through a case study of the culturally rich and significant temple town of Birbhum district in West Bengal. This paper discusses the reasons for writing these strategies, their main features, and how they can best be implemented.

Key Words: Heritage sites, Sustainability, Management

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been considered as a stimulant for rural economic re-generation and conservation. The rural environment is, very delicate in nature. It can be easily changed or damaged by external factors causing rapid changes and tourism can be a powerful agent for such a change. Such detrimental effects are of immense concern because of the role rural areas play as repositories of both natural and historical heritages. It also holds equal significance commercially.

The word Heritage, has become a 'buzz' since 1990s (Palmer 1999:315). It is in fact regarded as one of the most significant and fastest growing elements of tourism (Alzua, O'Leary and Morrison 1998; Herbert 1995). Nowadays heritage is referred to

as something which requires being managed (Cheung 1999) and uniquely marketed (Bennett 1995).

It is indeed a fact that heritage attractions are irreplaceable resources for the tourism industry. So conservation is considered to be a vital component of their management. Heritage sites must have their own unique attributes which should be emphasized and the interpretation and presentation of the attraction should be able to accommodate the needs of the visitors. Moreover the heritage management authority should undertake the responsibility to the community to preserve the site for posterity (Millar 1989).

The debates and discussions over the two burning issues pertaining to development namely the desire for economic progress and the need of conserving the environment led to the emergence of the concept of sustainable development (Bramwell & Lane 1993).

In order to confront the threats of unmanaged tourism the concept of sustainable tourism has been developed through the discussions and research over the last few decades. The figure (Fig-1) denotes the relationship among the elements of tourism. As a matter of fact sustainable tourism identifies tourism within destination areas through a triangular relationship among the habitats and people of host areas, holidaymakers, and the tourism industry.

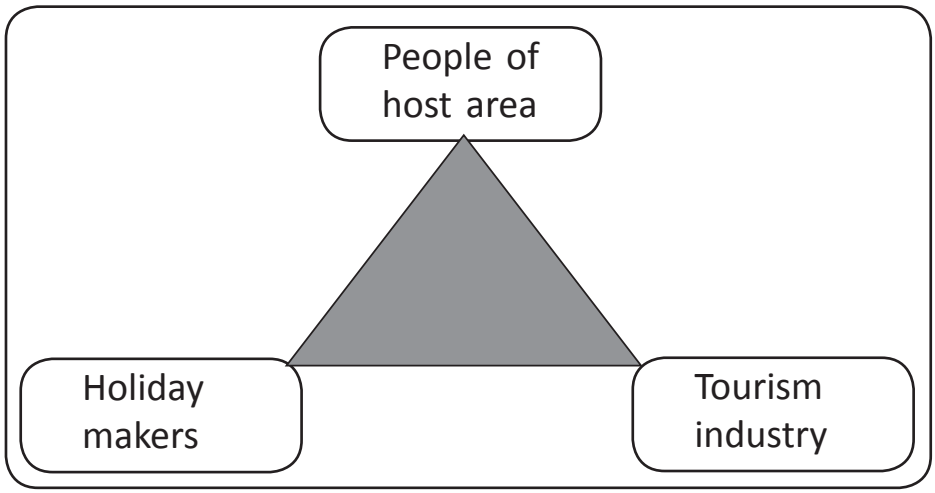


Figure 1: Relationship among the elements of tourism

It has been observed that the tourism industry primarily dominated the triangle in the past. The holiday makers have been seen to be strongly connected to motivation, attraction at the holiday destination, use of different types of media, and the general characteristics of touristic area. It may be observed that tourist destinations function as units at different geographical levels, without having any definite geographical boundary. The content of the destination consists of a dynamic assemblage of tourist attractions, culture, landscapes, events, services and the people of the host area. The

tourism industry consists of the service providers for different facilities. Accommodation and logistics services are provided by Government and private agencies. Tour operators have been functional in different destinations for facilitating mass tourism. In the present scenario the trend follows flexibilization of the tourist product which is done by way of customization, despite the demands of tour operators who still advocate and advertise packages of mass tourism (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003).

In order to reconcile the tensions between the three factors in the triangle (Fig-1), and to maintain the equilibrium in the long term, sustainable tourism comes into play.

Literature Review

The main objective of Sustainable tourism is to minimise the damage on environment and cultural objects, optimise visitor satisfaction, and maximise the economic growth of the region which can be sustained in the long-term(Lane 1994).The social and cultural aspects of a destination are very critical in attracting tourists and augmenting the significance of the destination. A destination may be an economic dwarf or bounded by political hindrances, yet it can be one of the most visited places (Ritchie & Crouch 2003). The socio cultural competitiveness plays a very vital role in developing sustainable tourism strategies.To sustain the longevity of a particular destination it is important to respond to market demand and address the competitive challenges. Sustainability of a destination in present scenario is critical for future destination development plans which should be compatible with market needs and environment integrity so that economic viability can be maintained (Hassan 2000). Hunter suggested that the concept of sustainable tourism should be redefined in order to incorporate a range of approaches to the tourism/environment system within destination areas (Hunter 1997).Any country can increase its development potential by harnessing its natural and cultural resources without, at the same time, destroying them. It is to be noted that without proper understanding of underlying factors, careful planning and management, rural tourism may usher in unsustainable elements (Cater 1993).

In order to make the concept of sustainability in rural tourism a success, it must be a multi-faceted framework. A practical way forward lies in the creation of Sustainable Management and Development Strategies (Lane 1994). In the present scenario sustainable development has become an important challenge to deal with particularly in the age of modernization.

Indian tourism, despite of its immense potential, has witnessedslow development, and shortcomings. A comprehensive and strategic approach is required to cater to the training and education needs of Indian tourism at various levels for the major target groups particularly in the rural areas (Jithendran & Baum 2000).

Research Gap

After reviewing the various literatures on sustainable heritage tourism, the research gap which has been identified is primarily related to the studies of sustainable heritagel tourism cases in India. There has been no significant research on sustainable tourism in rural areas , focusing on regional analysis, particularly the areas which are highly potential due to their cultural heritages of both tangible and intangible nature.

Objective of the study

Conventional tourism plans are dominated by the growth requirements of the tourism industry while sustainable tourism plans are based on a wider, more holistic and regional analysis. This paper will highlight the reasons for development of these strategies, their main features, and how they can best be implemented.The present study aims to highlight the factors to be considered fordeveloping sustainable tourism specifically in the heritage sites through a case study of the temple sites in the Birbhum district.

Methodology

The present study is mainly based on qualitative method using field research approach. This approach focuses on the observation of the phenomenon and condition in natural state and collection of qualitative data for analysis. The temple sites in the Birbhum district has been chosen for the case study since it can contribute towards potential rural development with the help of cultural resources.Such research is required to identify the cultural elementsof this region and highlight the present condition as well as the progress of community activities in temple sites in the Birbhum district.

Case study of the temple sites in the Birbhum district

Birbhum District:

Geographically the district of Birbhum is positioned between 23° 33′ and 24° 35′ north latitude and between 87° 10′ and 88° 2′ east longitude. It stretches over an area of 1752 square miles. The district shares its boundaries with two other districts of West Bengal itself viz. Murshidabad and Burdwan and the Santhal Pargana of the neighbouring state of Jharkhand as well. It is a triangular tract of land being bordered on the north and west by SanthalPargana (Jharkhand) and the district of Murshidabad, on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan. The southern part of Birbum district shares its boundary with the district of Burdwan. It is indeed a land of heritages bearing the rich history of different cultures and sects. There are a number of archaeological sites in this region. A few of the important sites of this region can be located at Nanur, Ghurisha, Supur, Surul, Kenduli, Itanda etc. Some of these sites are protected by ASI and state Government while some are private temples, unprotected till date. For the purpose of the present study some of the important temple sites have been selected namely- the Temple sites of Supur, Ghurisha and Jaydev –Kenduli on the bank of the Ajay river (Fig. 2(a) ,2 (b)).



Figure-2(a) : Map showing temple sites in Western part of Birbhum (Courtesy of P. Mukherjee)



Figure-2(b) : Map showing temple sites in the Eastern part of Birbhum (Courtesy of P. Mukherjee)

Temple site of Supur : The village of Supur is located on the eastern part of Birbhum district, 5 kms south of the small but famous town of Shantiniketan, the abode of the great poet Rabindrath Tagore. In this small village we come across the twin terracotta Shiva temple (Fig.-3) which dates back to 1717A.D.



Figure-3: Siva Temple at Supur.

Temple site of Ghurisha : Ghurisha is a small village in the district of Birbhum lying on the western side. It is situated at a distance of 30 kms from the town of Shantiniketan. Remarkably in this village we find a beautifully adorned terracotta temple. This temple is unprotected and privately maintained. The temple is locally known as the Gopal Mandir which is a ratna temple (Fig-4).



Figure-4: Gopal Mandir (Temple) at Ghurisha

Temple site of Jaydev–Kenduli : Jaidev-Kenduli is a village on the bank of Ajay river, on the western side of Birbhum. It is 35 kms south-west of Shantiniketan.). An exquisite Navaratna temple known as Radha-Vinod temple is housed in this village (Fig.- 5). It is a protected site by Archaeological Survey of India.



Figure-5: Radha-Vinod temple at Jaydev-Kenduli.

Ecology and present tourism infrastructure of the region under study

The district of Birbhum is one such potential area which is struggling hard to promote its cultural and heritage attractions in rural areas and generate its tourism products for the customers visiting the region. Marketing becomes a major problem for promotion of Heritage Tourism in West Bengal. Different constraints lie in the path of development of tourism or primarily due to insufficient financial assistance and poor awareness of the perceived value of heritage tourism in the areas beyond the popular and commonly visited destinations. While marketing a heritage tourism destination (village or heritage sites) there is a need of strategic approach on the following aspects: -

- Attractions – like promotion of cultural tourism around a heritage site
- Infrastructural development – such as accommodation, hygiene, clean water , cuisine, basic amenities.
- Accessibility – i.e., development of roads, modes of transportation
- Environmental aspects – monitoring pollution, eco- fragility of the surrounding region.
- Safety, security of the tourists
- Continuous maintenance and preservation of the heritage attractions.

The temples sites of Supur, Ghurisha and Joydev-Kenduli are remotely located in the interiors of rural area of Birbhum.

Factors	Temple site of Supur	Temple site of Ghurisha	Temple site of Joydev-Kenduli
Ecology and environmental aspects	Natural , less polluted environment but eco-fragility may exist	Pollution free, eco-fragile environment	Pollution free, picturesque landscape having the meandering river Ajay in the centre
Heritage Attractions	Twin terracotta Shiva temple	Gopal Mandir , other terra-cotta temples in the vicinity	Radha-Vinod temple
Accessibility	Moderately accessible by road. Located in the interior of the village.	Less accessible as the temple is located in the middle of the village ground.	Accessible by road connected through the surrounding village.
Preservation and maintenance	Heritage site is protected by ASI, lack of proper maintenance	The temple is unprotected and privately maintained, lack of proper maintenance	Heritage site is protected by ASI, Well maintained temple complex.
Infrastructural development	No infrastructure related to tourism products.	No infrastructure related to tourism products.	Considerable amount of tourism infrastructure such as well connected roads, local shops and guides.

Potentials of the region under study

The potentials of the region under study can be well understood after conducting the SWOT analysis of the temple sites.

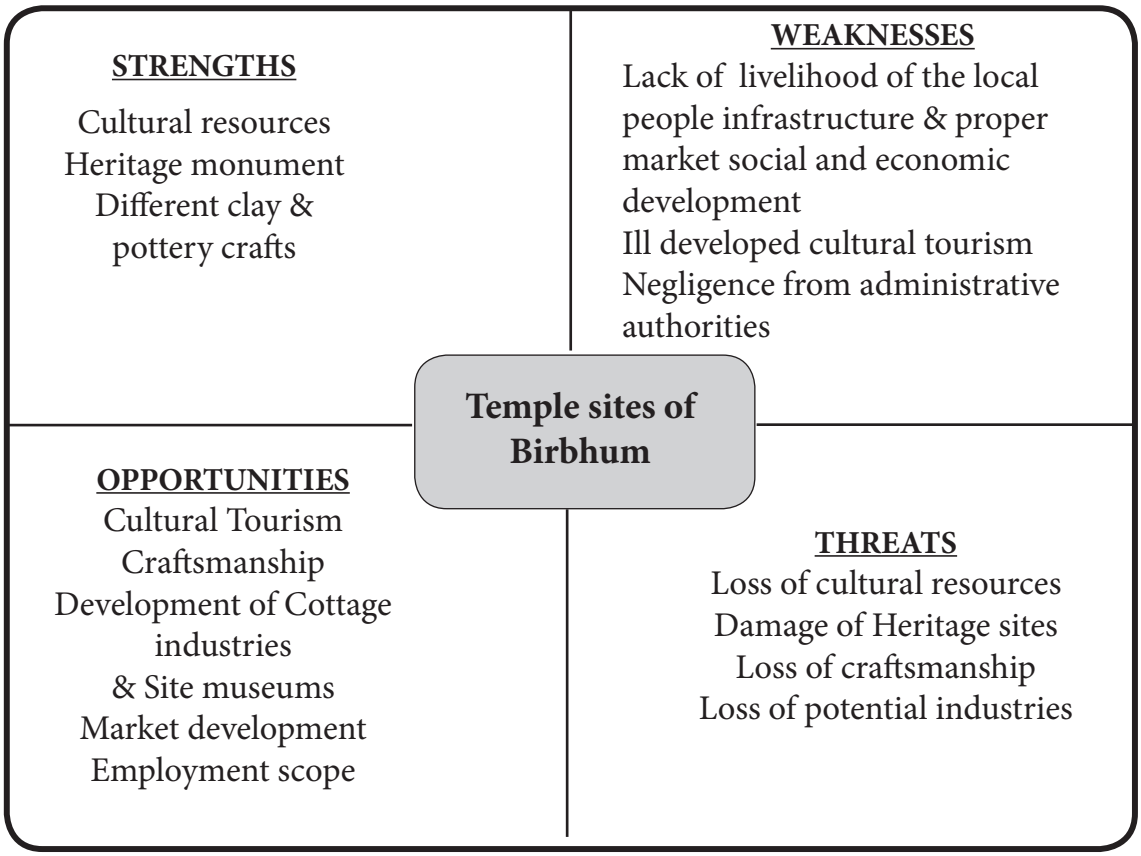


Figure-6 : SWOT analysis of the temple sites of Birbhum

By analyzing the SWOT matrix we can get an idea about the strengths and weaknesses of this region particularly of the temple sites chosen for this study. This analysis is conducted at the preliminary stage which helps to develop the strategic plan and competitive advantages for the heritage sites specifically chosen for this study. Furthermore the information obtained on the opportunities that are available, will help us to take adequate measures and construct a sustainable framework. This framework is not only meant for the sustainability of the temples but also the surrounding region and more importantly the people residing in that region. Since these villages are remotely located the transportation and communication networks are not well developed. People specially the tourists are hardly aware of such archaeological gems located in these villages. The SWOT analysis (Fig.-6) also indicates the requirement of collecting the

information regarding the two prospective areas- industrial development and tourism.

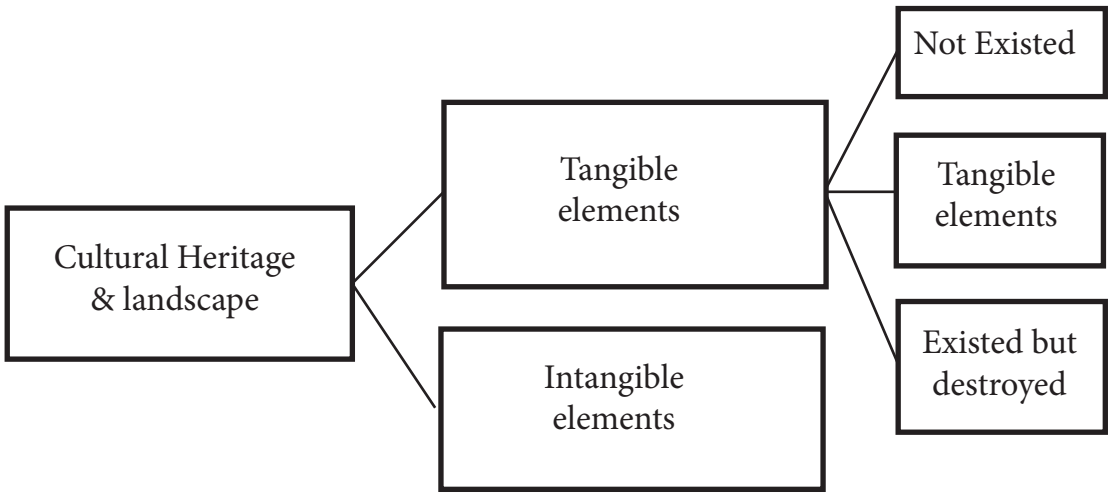


Fig -7:Diagram showing the Cultural elements before conducting heritage tourism activities.

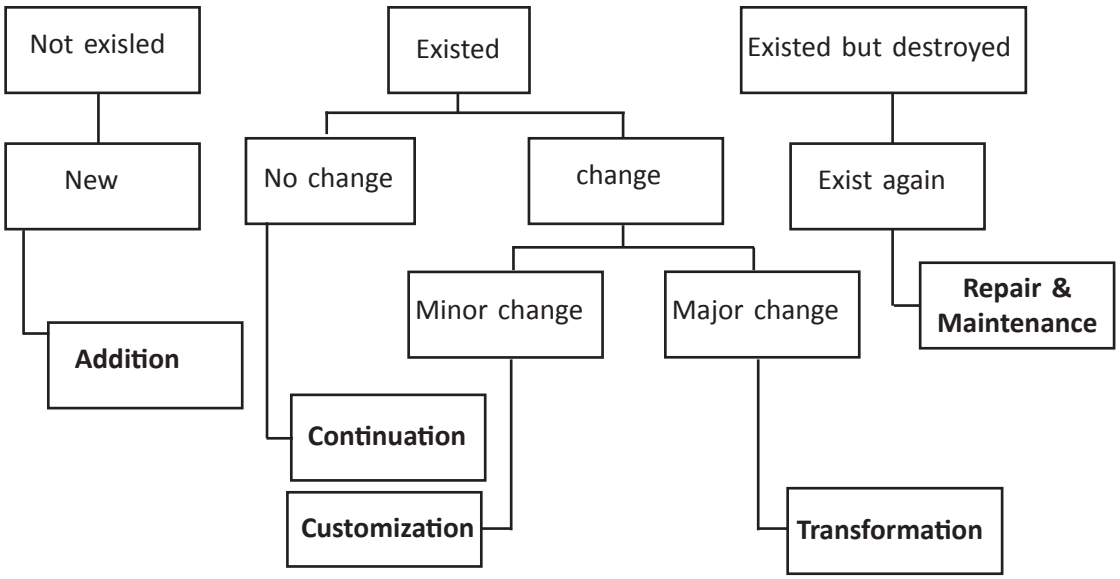


Fig -8:Diagram showing impacts of changes after conducting heritage tourism activities.

The impact of rural tourism activities can induce five categories of change of cultural element particularly the tangible elements. (fig 788).

1) Addition -The process of adding something new to the current object in order to fulfill some requirements or to make something functionally better,
2) Continuation- This implies a step to keep things as they are without any changes.

3) Customization -It is a process of making minor changes something to fit any requirements.
4) Transformation- It is a process which involves major alterations in an object.
5) Repair and maintenance –Sometimes an existing object that is damaged or out of date needs to be repaired or renovated. This is necessary to ensure that the object is able to carry out its function properly.

Need for developing sustainable tourism strategies

Almost all successful businesses harp on carefully worked out business plans and strategies. The plans seek to reconcile changing demands, to avoid wasteful investments and duplication of effort, and to research and seek out niche markets where leads to success. The study reveals that Birbhum has ample number of heritage sites which can be used as a base for sustainable development of the region. In order to achieve success in regard to sustainable tourism and rural development, formulation of strategies would be the key factor. It should be noted that the process of sustainable development needs a multi-disciplinary approach and cannot achieve its goal by a solitary endeavor.To sustain this unique cultural identity of the region, we need to develop a sustainable framework with the help of cultural resource management

The basic features of such strategies should pertain to the following conditions-

- Tourism businesses should gain in security and can invest for the long term-because they can develop in a more stable environment.
- Nature Conservation, the Arts and Cultural Activities can be drawn into thestrategy-making process. They will gain in stature from being recognised and valorised by being part of that process. The process should see conservationas a positive rather than a negative viewpoint. The human and politicalenergies behind the Arts and Nature lobbies should be used to guide tourism, not simply to protect their position against tourism of any kind.
- The strategy can protect the special scenic, historic and cultural heritage ofan area, thus preserving tourism's future seed corn. It should help to establishthe financial and political interdependence between conservation and tourism. (Lane, 1994)

Sustainable Tourism Strategies

The strategies developed for a similar study in Berwick Borough council in UK by Beranard Lane suggested various strategies (Lane 1994). The district of Birbhum being a potential area similar strategies with regional modifications can be implemented.

1. Developing technological competitiveness: Use of internet represents the impact of modern technology on the competitive advantage of the destination. Previously published materials used to be the only source of information about any destination. The access to internet has helped the visitors to search through a wide range of choices which were not available. The other benefit would be for the lesser known places which would have a global market and wide range of visibility to the tourists.
2. Regional analysis highlighting social, economic, ecological and cultural needs.
3. Identification of an area's tourism and cultural assets and the constraints on future tourism development.
4. Focus on how best tourism could be used as a tool for social, economic, ecological and cultural regeneration.
5. Community involvement and participation of local authorities in both the plan-making process and in any ongoing decision-making.
6. A meticulous consideration and analysis of the visitor carrying capacities, and the type and scale of developments suitable for each part of the region..
7. A market survey to establish opportunities and a marketing strategy. This strategy should both explain and use the Sustainable Tourism Strategy as part of its campaign.
8. Training programme aiming to encourage new localbusinesses in the tourism sector and help the local people to develop their business plans.
9. Awarenessprogramme designed to develop visitor knowledge of the area, increase insight and satisfaction, improve customer care and help ensure repeat visits.

(9) The setting up of local groups to monitor, advice, and assist future management.

(10) Apart from tourism industry , agriculture and cottage industries should be highlighted.

(11) To have effective strategies they should be long term in their approach. There must be quantifiable targets, prioritization of goals and regular evaluation process and regular up-dating of objectives.

Conclusion

Heritage tourism activities in the temple sites in the Birbhum district have great potentials to attract tourists and improving present condition of tourism in this region. The

identification of the cultural assets in the present state and implications after activities may bring some transformation on cultural landscape elements in the area, which influence the whole cultural landscape sustainability. Five types of changes are found: addition, continuation, customization, transformation and repair and maintenance. If these changes are effected then they will not only improve or increase the value of landscape elements, but will also harmonize the cultural landscape sustainability. Meanwhile, we should take the help of modern technology to make the visitors, local people and local authorities aware about the uncontrolled tourism development that will lead to the character changes. It is of utmost concern to sustain the rural environment, its cultural heritages, assets therebymaintaining the balanced relationship between human culture and nature systems to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

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