



Contradictions Of Conservation And Sustainable Development Strategies In Protected Areas (Pas): Ecotourism Prospects And Park – People Conflict In Nanda Devi National Park

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Abstract

Protected Areas (PAs) are last bastion of nature in the Anthropocene era. However, the economic development of local people in these areas are major issues worldwide. Ecotourism projected as panacea, promised to fulfill the conflicting goals of the nature conservation on one hand and providing economic benefits to the local people on the other hand. The ground level experience has somewhat different story. The present research work examines the conflicting goals of ecotourism and nature conservation in the Nanda Devi National Park area.

Introduction

Nanda Devi National Park is a high altitude glacial area of unique flora and fauna with international recognition for adventure tourism. Apart from its natural wonder, the place is also popular for its cultural and religious significance. Nanda Devi worshiped as the Goddess of Uttarakhand. The temple of Nanda Devi situated in the Lata that attracts large number of disciple from all over Uttarakhand to the village.

The Nanda Devi peak is named by the most revered deity of Uttaranchal, 'Parvati' is surrounded by a ring of 12 high-rise mountain peaks. Shrines dedicated to Nanda Devi are scattered all across the Central Himalayan range but the most popular one is located in Lata village. Deity Parvati believed to reside on the Nanda Devi peak. The 'Trishul' peak a trident-shaped hilltop next Nanda Devi is considered Lord Shiva's abode. The rings of peaks are believed to surround the deity's bed (Nanda khat), her veil (Nanda Ghungit) and her kitchen (Nanda Kot). The clouds floating around the 'Nanda Kot' are often attributed to the smoke coming out of the deity's kitchen.

The Nanda Devi Jat is celebrated annually in the temples of Nanda Devi across Garhwal and Kumaon. The festivities originate with the Nanda Devi's visit to her maiti (parents' home) and conclude with her arrival to her husband's home. This tradition is beautifully rendered in the local folk songs. An annual pilgrimage, called the 'Chhoti Jat Yatra', is celebrated in August - September. In every 12 years, it becomes Nanda Devi Raaj Jaat Yatra; three weeks long journey originates from Nauti Village in Karnprayad to Rookkund involves 280 km of trekking.

The park comprises the Nanda Devi peak, the second highest peak in India, was the "world's most popular peak among mountaineers and trekkers, after Mount Everest."

Nanda Devi peak was scaled successfully for the first time in 1936 by Tillman and N.E. Odell. Their descriptions about the peak make this area world famous among mountaineers and led to become a game sanctuary in 1939. In the post independent period, virgin glaciers and lure of high peaks (Nanda Devi, Trishul and Dunagiri etc) made this area hotspot for organized expeditions. Traffic increased in all the newly opened trekking routes, and by 1982, around 4000 travelers and porters were treading the sanctuary annually. The uncontrolled tourism led to serious destruction of flora and fauna, caused deforestation along the trekking routes and near the timberline. Poaching of wild animals, extraction of medicinal herbs, and accumulation of garbage (polythene bags, toilet paper and tin containers), forest fires, soil erosion, and erosion of cultural values forced the government to undertake remedial measures.

To save the park from these disturbances and to curb the anthropogenic pressure, the catchment of Rishi Ganga River declared as Nanda Devi National Park (NDNP), and human activities, including adventure tourism, were banned in 1982. However, ban could also be imposed due to failed CIA spy mission of installing nuclear device by USA to spy china. The mission failed due to loss of nuclear device in Nanda Devi glaciers. The dangers of radioactivity in the region is still looming upon the area. The area declared as a National Park in 1982. In 1988, UNESCO declared the region a Biosphere Reserve with the network of World Heritage Site. The Nanda Devi National park becomes core area of the Nanda Devi Bioreserve (NDBR). Again, in 2004, it renamed as Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Parks with two core areas. One of the main objectives of the NDBR is to encourage ecotourism in the buffer area.

After the formation of Uttarakhand in 2000 and after the sigh of recovery, regeneration of flora and fauna in the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve again opened in 2003 for a limited number of tourists.

Park authorities permit only 500 tourists annually in the summer season. However, entry into the park needs high level of physical fitness and very few tourists prefer such a demanding trail. Even for scaling a peak in the biosphere reserve, the main base camp at Sarsopatal is almost 20 km away from the boundary of Nanda Devi. Hugh Ruttledge a noted mountaineer who could not climb Nanda Devi in repeated attempts mentioned that the Nanda Devi “Sanctuary alone was more inaccessible than the North Pole”.

Actually, the state forest department is not permitting mountaineering in NDBR but only trekking allowed into the park up to 9 km. from the Lata Kharak. The starting 5 km of the track lies in buffer zone while last four km track is part of the core area. The core zone of park comprises is strictly prohibited for human access

To insuring the protection of visitors as well as park, The NDBR authorities permit pass not more two group consist of maximum five people in each group and maximum five groups are permitted in a week. Each group must be accompanied with one registered guide. Minimum age requirement of the visitor is 14 years all tourists will be bound to obey the provisions of wildlife protection act inside the park area. Tourists are encouraged to leave only footprints and take only memories.

Impact of Conservation Policies: Park - People Conflict

The NDBR area is close to Tibet border and inhabited by Bhotia tribal community. The towering Nanda Devi peak is a natural temple for mountain dwellers. Nanda Devi is the deity here. There are temples of Nanda Devi in every village of the national park area, on which the local villagers have great faith. This bowl-shaped national park is surrounded by more than two dozen snow-capped peaks with half a dozen being over 7,000 meters high. Bhotia habitation generally has two settlements to practice transhumance to avoid harsh climatic conditions as well as insure pasture land for their livestock. Till 1962 war with china, their main occupation used to be international barter trade with Tibet. But the war has totally shattered the economy of Bhotia community. They had to adopt adventure tourism business with subsidiary occupation of animal husbandry, rudimentary agriculture and wool based handicraft business.

Bhotia people of the study area (Lata and Reni Villages) also credited to the initiation of world famous, female dominated, Chipko Movement.

I met Bali Devi who actively participated in movement in 1974, remembered, “The women of Reni village stopped a contractor's men from felling Deodar trees above the village. It was the time when male members of the village were out station. She also joined them in this struggle. The small step of hugging trees to save them from felling spread a powerful environmental conservation message worldwide.

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perplexed villagers that how come such a huge project of mass destruction is running but they are not even allowed to enter in the NDBR. The intervention of governmentalities is clearly visible in this case as government is more interested in territorizing the area and using natural resources rather taking care of requirements of local people. The local people question the conservation efforts of government too. They do claim that no official ever visit the core area to review the actual condition. Local people, who, since ages, remained custodian of the NDBR, never consulted in any planning activity. These steps of government have brought resentment in local people towards government, officials and specialists. The restrictive forest policies in this context were like the proverbial salt on wounds.

A local people narrated the condition that those government-deployed agents having axe in hands successfully defended by Chipko Movement now came with scientific knowledge and legal language that conquered us and doing more damage than axe. Those agents perceived the jungle as a timber now talking the language of conservation and bio diversity. Now handful of park employees were supposed to protect thousands acre of park and the real protector of the land was denied to enter into the area. Earlier Bhotia shepherd regularly visit the inaccessible areas of Nanda Devi for grazing and trading and keeps an eye on poachers and hunters. But the legal restrictions escalated the illegal activities into the park.

Ecotourism Potential in the Area

Although the most popular peaks of the National Park lies in the core zones where tourism was banned but the buffer zones of the NDBR still have remarkable potential for ecotourism such as Dronagiri (7070 m) , Hanuman (6071 m) , Changbang (6864 m) , Rishi Pahar (6693 m), Nanda Ghungti (6366 m) and Kalanka (6934 m) peaks.

Joshimath is the gateway to many Himalayan expeditions, trekking trails, camping and pilgrimage centers. It is one of the four Moths or monasteries of Hindus established in the 8th century by Adi Guru Sri Shankaracharya. At a distance of 23 km from, Bhavishya Badri is situated on the way to Lata. According to the legend of Bhavishya Badri, at the end of Kali Yuga, Badrinath will appear at the Bhavishya Badri temple and be worshipped here, instead of the Badrinath shrine.

Auli near Joshimath is famous for winter games. Auli offers winter sports, skiing, trekking and other adventure activities. It is also the entrance point to Malari and Niti Valley. A Ropeway to Auli is popular among tourists and one of the longest ropeways in Asia. Auli is 14 km by road from Joshimath and 3000 m above sea level. It is a wonderful resort which hosts winter games by Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN) and provides skiing facilities to tourists for Indian at nominal cost.

Tapovan is famous for hot water sulfur springs. This area has potential to be developed as a health resort.

Kuari Pass Trek is a well known for one of the famous trekking trails in Uttarakhand, 20 km from Auli and 27 km from Joshimath, Kuari Bugyal is a famous meadow known for untouched beauty of Himalayas. Kuari Bugyal is perfect place for trekking. During summer season, tourists come to this place to explore the trekking trails of this beautiful region. Lord Curzon made the trek to Kuari Pass, and since then it has come to known as Curzon's trail. It is very popular among European and American travelers.

Action Plan for Ecotourism

Development of Ecotourism is one of the basic reasons to sustain conservation practices and supporting livelihood of local people dependent on the national park. Practicing tourism activities in ecosensitive area needs institutional, environmental and technological support that suits to the carrying capacity of concerned area. The first step is to identify feasible ecotourism activities to be popularized considering ecological, social, economic and cultural considerations of the region.

Policies promoting and regulating ecotourism in sustainable way needs to be formulated by state government. Rules and regulations for private sector to develop infrastructural facilities should clearly be stated while considering requirement and ecosensitivity of the area. Aspiration and requirements of local people need to be considered to insure their support and participation in ecotourism. Area of Natural resource conflicts must be identified, resolved and avoided. Critical factors and limiting factors of carrying capacity need to be identified and resolved. The ultimate aim of ecotourism policy is to benefitting local people livelihood by prioritizing nature conservation of the protected area.

Pitfalls of Ecotourism Activities

Despite of wonderful prospects of ecotourism, the touristic activities in the NDNP reduced to almost zero. The possible reasons to this situation might be-

Indifference of Government: The feeling of disinterest from government side is one important reason because a region that was once closed due to over burden of tourists now waiting for tourist. The most important factor for ecotourism development is basic tourist facilities. The area has no tourist facilities. The local people said that the Chipko Movement people are paying the price of their activism. They guess that their objection to permission of private players into the field of tourism might be disinterest government also.

Permission for only Trekking, not mountaineering: earlier, the NDNP was world's most famous mountaineering ground but after reopening, it opened for trekking only. For trekking, the park is one of the toughest tracks in the world. Generally, such a tough trekking destination is not so much popular in the absence of basic tourist facilities in the area. Therefore, the area needs a through planning for ecotourism development.

Ecotourism is a market ploy ruled by brutal forces of competitive market. Therefore, MSI has to face harsh realities of market and now the splendor seems fading away. There is no update of trekking activities on the website after 2012. Sunil Kaintola, the Dehradun based Director of MSI interviewed by researcher. He elaborates the multilevel challenges of ecotourism in India. The problem is not only at supply side but at demand side also. At the demand side, nature of ecotourist changed considerably. Most of the bookings are website dependent and tourist prefer package tour. Nature of new age jobs has flooded the domain with weekend tourist who wants to see many things in very limited time. Fewer tourists desired to experience the ethos of ecotourism; most tourists are coming under peer pressure with main purpose of clicking photographs for social media. Nanda Devi is very tough trail and needs longer days and high endurance to accomplish. On the supply side, most daunting task is to retain youth, as trekking is very limited period task providing employment for two to four months in the year is inadequate to support annual expenditures. Therefore, local youth are more attracted towards easy money works as Keedajadi (*Cordyceps Sinensis*) extraction that fetches Rs.15 to 20 lakhs per Kg.

Further, technical, communication skills; hygiene, food and water issue in home stays are challenging issues. As a professional tour company, MSI lags behind in terms of handling, costing, and marketing and promotion front. Noncooperation of administration and forest department is also a crucial issue for stagnant growth of MSI. Thus, the monumental task of establishing a community managed ecotourism enterprise of MSI seems unsuccessful.

In August 2018, Uttarakhand High Court banned night stay in Bugyals (high meadows) in the state. Trekking and adventure tourism in the study area become zero; witnessing a major blow to hundreds of families depends upon in mountaineering expeditions and trekking jobs.

Analysis and Results: Tracing Eco-governmentality – People vs. Park Conflict

Different and slippery parameters for villagers and projects are creating a more vibrant atmosphere in the historic land of Chipko. Villages falling in the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, which have lost their ancestral rights after the national park was built; the residents are now confused with the proposed 'Critical Wild Life Habitat' scheme. A generation of these villages in Uttarakhand, witnessing many changes, is unable to digest

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Till now even the Forest Department officials have not understood the nature and objectives of Habitat. Like other parks and biosphere areas of the country, the people of villages here are apprehensive about the issuance of the notification of critical wild life habitat in Nanda Devi Biosphere. There are 55 villages within the entire Biosphere area. Villagers of village Lata of Joshimath tehsil of Chamoli district have sent a memorandum to the governor opposing the format of the committee constituted to hear objections on the formation of the proposed Wildlife Habitat. In the memorandum, either the villagers have said that all the members in this committee, except one, Forest Department officials or retired from the Forest Department, hence the expectation of justice and fairness from this committee is negligible.

On November 16, 1982, the area abruptly converted into Nanda Devi National Park. This led to the grazing of cattle grazing and the traditional rights of the people here. Dhan Singh Rana explains, 'In the year 1974, the department which wanted to cut our forests for more revenue on the strength of the police, in whose view the forest meant only timber, now started talking about biodiversity and conservation.'

While making the park, the government had also made many promises to these villagers but they have not been fulfilled yet. The role of 'natural guardian of nature' was taken away from 'these soldiers of Chipko' by making the park and the responsibility of protecting this beautiful area was given to the Forest Department. The restrictions imposed by the park had the most impact on the Scheduled Castes, who had little land. He used to earn the livelihood by making the things needed by the local people with the skill of forest based wood art.

On the other hand, the formation of the park has created an opportunity for middlemen and hunters, because now no one can legally enter this inaccessible, vast and deserted Himalayan region. The security of the park spread over an area of 632 sq km was on only half a dozen forest employees. Previously, local people used to stay in the pastures located in these inaccessible places during the summer. After the restrictions there was no one there. Taking advantage of this, smugglers and poachers turned this protected park into hunting area. Many hunter-gatherers were also caught around the park area over the years.

The anger of the people of the village was increasing due to poaching inside the park and deprivation of Charan-Chugan and traditional rights. Seeing dissatisfaction, in 1987, then Joshimath block chief Comrade Govind Singh called a meeting in Raini and sent a memorandum to the government discussing the effects of becoming a national park on local public life.

The villagers do not understand that while the area above the road is declared to be a very sensitive area for them, the project being constructed under the road is excavating million tons of soil. In 1993, three government teams went to the core zone of Nanda Devi after many years banning the movement of common people. The locals went with these teams as Porter. Vijayapala of Lata recalls, "Hanging noose and stoves were used to kill animals everywhere in the park." The local residents were shocked to see that on one hand they were killed by censoring the interests of extensive bio-conservation. Going and robbed of their valuable property on the other side. They were also angry that smugglers and middlemen were looting the natural wealth within Nanda Devi and on the basis of information received by departmental officials in Dehradun and Joshimath, journalists of some national papers, Lata, Raini and Tolma, who opposed the anti-people protection policy Adi was telling the villages whereabouts of smugglers.

Saraswati Devi of Lata says that in 1998, it was during the month of May that bears and tigers broke the cow shelters of the villages and killed many of their pets. Here, the much-hyped doctrine by the Forest Department also succumbed that it is only due to the deforestation that the wild animals move towards the villages or settlements, that they kill the animals due to the lack of food in the forests. Here, wild animals were doing indiscriminate damage by escaping from within a protected area of hundreds of square km. The villagers say that due to the gathering of poachers in the protected park area, these wild animals were fearfully moving towards the villages. At that time, the forest department did not provide compensation for animals killed by bears.

These developments in May 1998 gave dissatisfaction to the choking villagers for years. Under the leadership of Comrade Govind Singh, the villagers unilaterally announced that if the government does not restore the traditional rights of the villagers, they will enter the restricted core zone on July 15, 1998 and restore their rights. At the general meeting held at Lata Gram Sabha on May 31, 1998, the talk of 'starting the Chhinto-Jhpto movement' for the restoration of traditional rights and rights came out automatically.

But where was the government supposed to agree. He sent police and PAC contingents to bring crushing villagers. Where have even the villagers who have survived government policies for years were afraid.

On the morning of July 15, those who could not walk left old in the villages. The rest of the villagers moved towards the core zone of the cattle. On the first night when the villagers arrived for a rest stop at Bhelta, they saw that the police and PAC men who had brought them to chase them were coming down with puking. In fact, these soldiers, unaware of the height conditions, had fallen victim to high altitude sickness. On the second day hundreds

of villagers entered the restricted core zone. The Chipko agitators for the protection of the forests had now taken to the movement like snatching and slapping due to the stagnation and maladministration of the forest department. Rana says that the snatch-movement movement was actually the practical side of Chipko. He says, "Both these movements had the support of all sections of the society and political streams, so they were successful too." Along with this, the government and big tourist companies, who taught the ban to the villagers, were eyeing possible tourism in the Nanda Devi region. In May 2001, the state government, with the support of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) directed the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) under the leadership of noted mountaineer Harish Kapadiya to find out the viability of reopening the park to restricted tourism activity. The study team was still in the Nanda Devi Park area when KE Adventure, a major travel company based in the US and England, published an advertisement on the Internet that the government had authorized it to do tourism in the Nanda Devi Park area. The company also claimed that Chiwang Motup is their Indian representative. Motup was also included in this study team.

That is, the members of the study team took commercial advantages from Nanda Devi National Park on the pretext of study. Lata residents were apprehensive that earlier the government had denied locals rights and now in the name of opening tourism, tourism work of this pristine area could be given to a big company.

Frequent protests by the people may not helped to restore the rights of animal grazing but in 2001 the Nanda Devi National Park has been opened to a limited amount of tourists. According to forest officials, tourists can now go to Debrughetha and camp at Lata Khark. Nevertheless, villagers have been demanding to open the park's core zone for tourism within a limited range. The rural youths of these villages have also undergone tourism related training to compete with potential big companies starting the tourism business in the region. Sunil Kanthola, who is engaged in connecting rural youth to global tourism, says, "All the well-trained youths of these villages, who were earlier considered to be excellent guides, can now provide good services to tourists from outside companies."

The duplicity of government policies does not end here. A large hydroelectric project is under construction in Raini village itself. It is beyond the understanding of the villagers that while the area above the road declared a very sensitive area for them; it built below the road.

Conclusions

The creation of protected areas in the global south could not effectively meet their desired goals. The study of Nanda Devi national Park shows that imposition of protected areas has

