Sustainable Strategies for Boosting Tourism in Maharashtra Post Covid-19

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Abstract: *One of India's leading commercial and industrial states, Maharashtra, has identified tourism as a key driver of economic development. The Maharashtra government has identified tourism as a key sector for the state to provide both economic growth and new jobs. With an increase in foreign visitors, Maharashtra became India's second most popular entrance point in 2011. Additionally, the travel and tourism business, which includes transportation, storage, communication, trade, hotels, and restaurants, contributed 20–22% to the state's GDP and 3.5–6% of the state's jobs. Maharashtra's dedication to the tourist sector is shown in the state's promotion and development programs. Depending on the specifics, tourism can either help or hurt the economy, the environment, or both. It is common knowledge that the tourism industry plays an essential role in a country's overall economic growth. An area's natural beauty is a valuable asset, as it is a primary factor in deciding whether or not to visit a given location. Cultural and societal changes are brought about by tourists' contacts with locals, businesses, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the environment is a finite resource that must be protected for future generations. Future generations should be able to enjoy the benefits of tourism, so it's important to keep the carrying capacity and the level of growth in mind. Therefore, in order to have future growth in tourism and economic development, the environment, as the primary source of tourist products, should be maintained and sustained. This paper highlights the sustainable strategies for boosting the tourism sector of the state of Maharashtra post-COVID-19.*

Keywords: Tourism

I. INTRODUCTION

As of March 11, 2021, almost 119 million people were infected with COVID-19 throughout the world. Roughly 94 million individuals were still alive after the pandemic, whereas 2.6 million had perished. At the height of the epidemic, the tourist sector shut down, and the World Travel and Tourism Council issued a warning that 174 million travel and tourism jobs throughout the world are in danger (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020; Worldometer, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020; UNWTO, 2020). In spite of optimistic predictions that international travel and tourism would swiftly increase to 1.8 billion by 2030, the business as we knew it had collapsed by March of that year. (Holden, 2016; UNTWO, 2017) The information presented from this point of view is timely and important. The ever-increasing number of tourists flocking to national parks and the growing interest in encounters with exotic species are two factors that have greatly influenced the focus of this viewpoint (Balmford et al., 2009; Curtin and Kragh, 2014; Holden, 2016; Steven et al., 2020). The number of coronavirus (COVID-19) infections confirmed in India exceeds 11 million (Department of Health, 2009, 2021). The most recent instances of COVID-19 are consistently being reported from the state of Maharashtra. More than 22 million instances have been documented in the Indian state of Maharashtra so far (Department of tourism, 2021).

Damage to the wildlife tourism industry has been severe since the nationwide lockdown was proclaimed at the end of March 2020. The shutdown occurred during the peak season for ecotourism, which is April and May. An increasing number of people are visiting national parks and other wildlife preserves to witness animals in their natural settings.

These articles address a range of issues, such as whether wildlife tourist venues should consider the current dip in visitors as a problem or an opportunity, and if we may look ahead with optimism at these places even if things don't get back to normal very soon. This study aims to evaluate how the COVID-19 epidemic has affected wildlife tourism in the

Indian state of Maharashtra. The future of wildlife tourism in Maharashtra is talked about, as well as some of the good and bad things that could happen when the tourism business goes back to normal after the epidemic is over.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The influence of Pavithra Shetty's COVID-19 on the tourism sector states that in 2021, government involvement in the development of adaptability administrations and oversight of security conventions would be another important weapon to attract potential clients and provide constrained pricing (Shetty, 2021). The tourism industry can benefit from innovation in a number of ways, including by providing a more pleasant experience for visitors, embracing environmentally friendly practices, providing more individualized service to adventurers, facilitating last-minute reservations, and placing more emphasis on the health and wellness of its customers. Dogra T. 2020 suggests that organizations collaborate to guarantee the cleanliness of key tourist venues like hotels and restaurants in order to restore people's faith that tourist hotspots and services are typically secure from COVID-19 infestations. To be specific, Rajeev Mishra Future-Looking Suggestions for the Year 2020 The current monetary shortfall in the tourist sector will be impossible to overcome without government help. Urgent action is required from the government to reduce taxes on the tourism business, give additional funds for the industry, and maybe even provide some lenient credits at reduced interest rates. On behalf of Pravin Kumar Patel, Jaya Sharma, Shivali Kharoliwal, and Prashant Khemariyain the year 2020. This paper suggests that after a pandemic, governments and financial institutions should review travel industry patterns to avoid making the same mistakes twice.

2.1 Objective
- To study sustainable strategies for boosting tourism in Maharashtra post-pandemic.

III. METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on secondary data reviewed from various newspapers, journals, articles related to tourism, and documents from the tourism department of Maharashtra. This paper sets the scene and gives a perspective on the potential sustainable strategies of post-COVID-19 analysis on tourism services.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Sustainable Tourism: The Need of the Hour

The government of Maharashtra has been working on creating a variety of tourism circuits, such as the fort circuit, the Buddhism circuit, and the Bhakti circuit, to complement well-known tourist spots like Shirdi, Siddhivinayak, the three and a half Shaktipeeths, Pandarpur, Ashtavinayak, and Shegaon. MilindBorikar, Director, Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Maharashtra Tourism, said in a statement, "I can say that we have a very optimistic and futuristic atmosphere to invest in Maharashtra as well as to visit Maharashtra." He went on to say that the state government is working on an eco-friendly policy that discusses deploying cleaner sources of energy like solar power, wind power, and electric vehicles. As visitors, "what we are experiencing is the destruction of our environment, which is extremely harmful for our future generations," he said (Free Press Journal, 2022).

However, the administration has made it clear that the state requires additional tourism locations to attract local and foreign tourists, which would boost the economy and create jobs. The government has also stated its desire to promote flower-themed tourism on KaasPathar in Satara, much like Amsterdam has developed its Tulip Garden. As a result of the delay caused by the epidemic, the relevant agency has developed a number of new policies and streamlined the approval procedure. The forest industry, experts say, is likewise on the upswing, thanks to rising interest in exploring the great outdoors. The number of people traveling in caravans has increased. Much like in Tuscany, agro-tourism is thriving in Maharashtra. Staying on a farm, whether it is a winery in Nashik, a strawberry farm in Mahabaleshwar, or a mango farm in Konkan, is an unforgettable experience because of the peace and quiet and proximity to nature that it provides. There has been a meteoric rise in the popularity of the agro-tourism movement. Thackeray went on to say that "agro-tourism is emerging anywhere we have room and where farmers can extend their residences."

4.2 Facilitating Adventure Travel

Since Maharashtra ranks fifth in the country for adventure tourism, it stands to reason that the state's policies should prioritize the promotion of safe and exciting adventure tourism. Since the state's economy depends on tourism, it is promoting extreme sports like mountaineering, trekking, bungee jumping, mountain biking, cycling, canoeing, scuba diving, rafting, kayaking, zip-lining, paragliding, hiking, exploring, canyoneering, sandboarding, caving, and rock climbing.

Sinhagad, a property owned by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), has been updated to provide contemporary conveniences in light of the many options for water sports and outdoor exploration in the state. Additionally, the government has established a partnership with the Maharashtra State Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology in Pune to provide skill enhancement training to MTDC employees. When asked about the goals of these projects, Aaditya Thackeray remarked, "These efforts are focused on promoting Maharashtra as a highly sought-after tourism destination and presenting its distinct cultural character to the globe." Accidents were occurring, and there were no regulations in place for adventurous tourists. The policy is an effort to standardize adventure tourism across land, sea, and air modes. Every travel agency that offers adventure vacations will be included. Aaditya elaborated on his earlier comment by saying that this implies the tour operators "would have to follow all the requirements" while planning adventure excursions for inexperienced visitors.

The natural beaches, history, and culture of Maharashtra are just the beginning of the state's possibilities. When compared to the rest of Maharashtra, Mumbai's strength stands out. It serves as India's primary financial and cultural hub. A. R. Rehman's recent success with the soundtrack to Slumdog Millionaire has piqued the attention of people of Indian descent in the United States and the United Kingdom.In fact, 26% of all foreign visitors come through Mumbai because of its convenient proximity to a major airport. It also has the advantage of being the first Indian state to receive foreign tourists.And there's a newfound interest in wine among those who travel for agricultural reasons. Thanks to the efforts of an international research center, farmers now have a greater understanding of how to preserve farmland for future crop production and of the kinds of agricultural goods that may be exported successfully. When health is taken into consideration, medical tourism is in its early stages in major urban centers (Free Press Journal, 2022).

4.3 Sustainable Strategies

Sustainable methods rely on four primary components: the economy, the environment, society, and culture. As a result, all parties involved in the production and consumption of sustainable tourism, whether ruralization or urbanization, must work together if the industry is to succeed in the long run (Cooper et al., 2008).

A. Cultural Sustainability Strategies in Maharashtra

The government of Maharashtra adopted a cultural tourism plan with the expectation that unique facets of the state's extensive cultural heritage would be uncovered and marketed as an essential element of the state's tourist industry. with the goal of recognizing the state's folk arts and putting on programs featuring folk dance and music at popular tourist spots (Govt. of Maharashtra, 2006). However, there is less money available to help individuals working in the entertainment industry stay afloat. They are going to have to wait for the government to authorize the necessary funds. There is a lot of interest in Bollywood stars right now, and as a result, the culture of Maharashtra has been influenced by the celebrity culture of the state's major cities. No concrete action has been taken by the entertainment sector to provide local folk artists with a platform for public performance.

B. Environmental Impact and Sustainability Strategies in Maharashtra

Cities like Mumbai and Pune, which have experienced rapid growth in recent years, are now grappling with a pollution crisis brought on by an increase in both domestic and foreign visitors. Authorities in these megacities have put in place strict rules for transportation and traffic in an attempt to reduce the damage they do to the environment, but these steps have not been enough.

Every aspect of the natural and manmade environment feels the effects of tourism. Although there are many complexities involved, there are measures that can be taken to ensure that tourism and the environment can coexist for the foreseeable future. For example, the government has made plans to expand ecotourism in response to rising

demand, ensuring that protected areas like national parks, wildlife refuges, and scenic lakes and forests remain unspoiled. Hill station government lodging and sanctuaries are two examples of older buildings that might benefit from renovations. But in reality, those costs and expenditures on old structures are higher than they are on new development. Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide funding and information on eco-tourism to locals who rely on the land for their livelihood.

The government has designated a section of Mumbai's Konkan for environmental preservation, and locals there will get funding to improve their homes (huts and cottages) with modern conveniences so long as they take care not to disrupt the area's delicate ecosystem. This serves as a model for the next generation to learn about and appreciate rural life in harmony with the environment, and it's a strategy that attracts city dwellers who can boost local economies and raise living standards (GoM, 2006).

C. Economic Sustainability Strategies in Maharashtra

To ensure long-term viability, economic growth in both rural and urban areas must be equalized. Policymakers in both the public and commercial sectors should work to alleviate poverty in both rural and urban areas. Multiple authors (Shen et al. (2008) As previously stated, the government and various private organizations and institutions are currently working in the research areas of agriculture, nature (wildlife), medicine (health and safety), information technology and communication, and finally human resource development in Maharashtra in order to provide better employment opportunities for everyone and to generate and increase their income level and standard of living for everyone.

Recent competitiveness indicators point to uneven expansion across industries, such as temporary and part-time work. To sum up, when a peak season begins, businesses frequently hire from outside the area rather than within it. The result is a surge in tensions between in-house and outsourced workers.

India is a successful country, and the Japanese government has been helping to fix up the Ajanta caves in Maharashtra and the ruins of Nalanda University in Bihar. Between 427 and 1197 CE, Nalanda University was a Buddhist center of learning.

Long-distance and international visitors to Maharashtra, whose disposable income tends to be higher than that of locals, are crucial to the state's economy. As we've already said, stakeholders like the Taj, Oberoy, Hilton, Best Western Hotels, Hyatt, Thomas Cook, Cox & King, SOTC & Raj Travel, and other well-known tourism service providers are vital to the state's continued economic growth.

D. Social Sustainability Strategies in Maharashtra

Stren and Polese's (2000) definition of social sustainability is "development (or growth) that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society." This means that it promotes conditions that allow people from different backgrounds to live together peacefully and encourages their social integration, all while raising living standards for everyone (Davidson, M., 2009).

Cooper et al. (2008) state that "a network of facilitators ranging from pimps and brothels to the supposedly more respectable taxi drivers and hotel staff typically supports the spread of such activities." The internet has made the situation worse by providing a global communications infrastructure that can advertise these services on a grand scale. There are also youngsters who work in small companies alone because their families have moved away. These children are sometimes mistaken by visiting foreigners as being free of sexually transmitted diseases, although this is not the case (Nair, P., and Sen, S., 2005).

Residents of Maharashtra, it seems, split their time between a variety of communities, each with its own distinct culture and social norms. As a result, environmental sustainability, social progress, and quality of life enhancement can all result from cultural exchange and the adoption of new ways of life. For the people of Maharashtra, coming together in the face of natural catastrophes and other traumatic events is a necessity. However, there might be disagreements over the precise locations of cultural origin.

Kulkarni G. (2010), on the other hand, writes, "Some may claim that the issue of the environment is sufficient; the magnitude of the problem requires that, if each and every Maharashtra resident does their part toward conserving and sustaining the environment without accusing the government authority." Then it can help the next generation maintain the environment at a reasonable cost.

V. CONCLUSION

It is important for visitors and operators of tourist spots to be aware of the differences between sustainable and nonsustainable ways of life. Then, in the long run, only the targeted increase over the next decade to ten years will be possible without resorting to more intensive means. Constant adaptation, monitoring, and strategic planning are essential for effective tourist management in Maharashtra (GoM, 2006). Several approaches may be taken to boost tourism's competitiveness; all of them should be implemented with long-term sustainability in mind. Once people have a foundational education or understanding about environmental issues and how to live more sustainably, they will be better equipped to receive assistance in reaching their goals. The locals, for instance, may benefit from a training program designed to prepare them to work as tour guides, since this would help them learn about the area's rich history and its significance in modern times, as well as how best to assist tourists. Given its importance in providing education and training to those in need, it's no surprise that this government institution has four locations across India: Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, and Nashik. The private Taj and Oberoi institutions have the most sway over Maharashtra's tourist business management. Since the state's present policies are so focused on Mumbai alone, it's important that the government and private organizations not overlook the tremendous prospects in the state's other cities and towns. Their efforts could be better directed at niche markets like the agricultural and medical sectors, the historic and adventure travel sectors, the wildlife sector, and so on. Extra precautions should be taken by the local government and tour operator to ensure that tourists are not harmed in the event of a natural or manmade disaster. This is especially important in light of the fact that any vulnerability, such as a woman's pregnancy or a country's loss of human life, can have a significant impact on a particular destination and on the decisions future tourists make. Due to the compressed time frame, quick and flawless decision making to make changes or adopt original plans is required in the operation and management process. One way in which the tourist industry may demonstrate its commitment to transparency is by maintaining accurate records of all events and financial transactions. This information is useful for better predicting the state of Maharashtra's tourist industry.

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