

## Is Tourism Driven Poverty Alleviation ‘Rhetoric’ or ‘Pragmatic Ideal’? Scanning the Academic Discourses

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PRIYAKRUSHNA MOHANTY\*, ANU CHANDRAN\*\* and ARNAB GANTAIT\*\*\*

\*Mohanty, Priyakrushna, Research Scholar, Department of Tourism Studies, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

\*\*Anu Chandran, Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism Studies, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

\*\*\*Arnab Gantait, Research Scholar, Department of Tourism Studies, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

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### ABSTRACT

Poverty is ubiquitous in the nook and corner of the globe despite the efforts of international agencies including the UN to offset the issues pertaining to it. The challenges are increasing day by day. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) hence highlighted poverty eradication as one of its main mottos. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the apex body of tourism development also advocated the MDGs and quoted Tourism as a ‘War on Poverty’. Since then, Tourism has been widely considered as a tool for poverty eradication and economic equity. Many organizations like United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), World Bank, Department for International Development (DFID), International Labour Organization (ILO) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have endorsed the power of Tourism in alleviating poverty. However, the voice is not unanimous across the academic community across the world. Various studies conducted by notable authors and also the publications have accused Tourism as a capitalist sector and also a threat to the indigenous cultures and economy of the third world countries. Many a debate on the theme point out that the influences of tourism on mitigating poverty are just superfluous. This paper is an attempt to highlight and analyse the discourses existing in the theoretical frameworks of tourism’s role in poverty elimination. This paper will also attempt to envisage channels for ideally bridging the contrasting points present in the theories.

**KEYWORDS:** *Tourism, Poverty Alleviation, Pro-poor Tourism, Sustainable Development*

### Introduction

Poverty is a disturbing and distressful situation and poses major challenges to the world. At the end of the year 2015, 12 % of the world population lives below the poverty line estimated as \$1.25 a day, which means 836 million people don’t even make it to earn the basic needs required for survival. The condition is still worse in Sub-Saharan Africa (41%) and Southern Asia (17%). Despite the well organized efforts of UN, half of the employed categories of people are still working in vulnerable conditions (**United Nations, 2015b**). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which was the product of various agreements and resolutions at world level conferences carried out by the UN in 1990 was mooted as one of the first

organized attempts to eradicate poverty. Following the formulation of MDGs various attempts in the form of loans, grants, sanctions, projects, programmes and structural adjustments have been drawn upon to eradicate poverty; yet all of them have shown limited progress (**Scheyvens, 2008**). The total number of countries having Least Developed Country (LDC) status was 24 in the year 1971 (**"The Least Developed Countries : Historical Background," N.D.**), but despite of the efforts taken it has risen up to 48 by the year 2015 (**United Nations, 2015a**).

After the formulation of Millennium Development Goals, UN urged the major industries to act towards the achievement of the eight goals developed in September, 2000 in accordance with the postulations devised in the UN MDGs. Tourism, as one of the major sectors driving the world economy accepted the Goals specified in the UN MDGs. It may be argued that tourism has a specific mechanism of working that supports poverty alleviation as in many of the developing countries or under developed countries, which are home to most of the poor in the world, tourism is either a major or growing sector. The growth rate of tourism which is stagnant in developed countries is increasing in a huge ratio mostly in developing countries of the world. That apart, tourism also accounts for 3.6% of the world's employment directly and 9.6 % in total i.e. the sum of all direct, indirect and induced employment (**World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015**).

However, the voice stating that tourism helps in poverty alleviation isn't echoed by all of the stakeholders especially in the academic works. Tourism is criticized as a sector that is capitalistic making the poor poorer and rich richer. It is also accused to be a threat to the magnificent destinations and the indigenous culture and heritage of those destinations. Yet another argument is that the impact of tourism on the poor is only studied from the economic perspective ignoring many other dimensions like environment, culture, society and politics, etc. The portrayal of tourism as an agent of exploitation is quite explicit in many an academic writing. At the same time, while analyzing the successful case studies of the positive impacts of tourism on destinations' upliftment and enhancement of the quality of living index of its peoples, the fact comes to fore that tourism has certainly given fillip as regards teeming effects on livelihood sustenance

This work commences by providing a historical background of the studies conducted to access the impact of tourism on poverty. Subsequently, the narratives bring forth the contradicting views, theories, and philosophies in vogue in the area of tourism and poverty alleviation through concrete and extensive reviews. In the latter half, the study traces the gaps that exist between the pro-active course tourism ought to take and the actual engagements with poverty alleviation in the present while also proposing suggestions with respect to the necessary measures to fill that gap.

### **Study Objectives**

Modelled as a conceptual study with a multi-dimensional review focus, the core aim of this paper is to present the academic as well as intellectual perspectives and theories of pro-poor and other forms of tourism with a similar intent of poverty elimination and its pragmatic ideals and impacts. Yet another objective of this study is to underscore the dimensions of sustainable tourism mooted by practitioners, authors, and institutions that lay stress on mitigating poverty. The critical points of view as regards tourism being more exploitative and inflicts harm on local communities are also brought to light and discussed.

### **Research Methodology**

The data for this study was compiled and organized from archives of journals, media reports, and periodicals. Content analysis of academic works was carried out to lay accent on the opinions, arguments, differences, debates, viewpoints, etc., aired by the experts, practitioners, and academia. Definitive points and commonalities were identified during the process and a solution driven recommendation approach was adopted so as to derive vital points from compilation of published literature that aid in addressing the gap areas, objections, critical views, flaws, and deficiencies

### **Sketch on Historical Background**

In the post world war scenario, the economic growth and development were the focal points for third world countries and there was a lot of hue and cry regarding which method (theoretical frameworks, ideologies and policies etc.) would achieve the purpose in the most effective and efficient way. The debates were in the limelight for almost three decades (**Harrison, 2008**). But development through economic growth alone wasn't enough for poverty alleviation. By the advent of 1970s, it was evident that people gave importance to socio-cultural and psychological factors as the criteria for development. Thenceforth, the scenario changed and social scientists were of the view that alleviating poverty, inequality, and unemployment followed by self resilience and cultural independence was the best possible way to attain development for the poor (**Seers, 1977**). Such ideas were the base for many of the huge organizations like International labor organization (ILO) and World Bank for adopting a bottom-up approach to development.

It wasn't long before international tourism, which had shown substantial progress in the 1950-70 eras, was recognized as a potential tool for poverty alleviation. World Bank was one of the first organizations that promoted tourism for poverty alleviation by financing international projects towards building tourism infrastructure and by providing institutional credit for foreign investment. However, later it moderated its efforts in tourism development showing the concerns of influence that tourism had on the culture and environment (**Hawkins & Mann,**

2007). Later, the UN formulated the MDGs in the year 1990s with poverty alleviation as the foremost motto. Thereafter, tourism as a growing industry also tried to advocate the cause.

UK- sponsored research works under the umbrella theme of sustainable livelihoods in southern Africa (see e.g. Ashley & Roe, 1998) was one of the pioneer research works published aiming at projecting tourism as a poverty alleviating agent. In these papers the potential of tourism as a means of eradicating poverty in the rural areas were highlighted. In that line, UK's Department for International Development (DFID) in association with the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) ventured for a paper to be made under the banner of Sustainable Tourism and Poverty Elimination (Goodwin, 1998). This paper served as the basis for the British delegations to UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD7) of 1999 to emphasize and recommend tourism as a means of poverty alleviation, and further as a result of these recommendations, Governments of different countries urged to 'maximise' the potential of tourism for eradicating poverty by developing appropriate strategies in cooperation with all major groups, indigenous and local communities' (IIED, 2001b: 41). In the year 2000, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) assigned Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership (PPTP) a collaboration of Dilys Roe of IIED, Harold Goodwin of International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) and Caroline Ashley of ODI, to initiate a research project to analyze the theories of Pro-poor Tourism (PPT).

After the successful formulation of PPTP, the institution or so to say the idea of PPT got thrust thanks to the collaborative effort of World Tourism Organization and UNCTAD which initiated the idea of Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. Since then the concept has been developed in three major ways: Development of a foundation to generate funds for poverty-alleviation through tourism; Development of a network of researchers to link poverty alleviation and sustainable tourism; and a mechanism to provide seeding money for model projects (Sofield, Lacy, Lipman, & Daugherty, 2004). Eventually, a lot of organizations (both large and small scales) came to support this idea of poverty alleviation through tourism. They include development agencies and donors (e.g. German agency GTZ), tourism industry organisations (e.g. Pacific Asia Travel Association – PATA), NGOs (e.g. IUCN – the World Conservation Union), research centres/Universities (e.g. the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism in Australia and London Metropolitan University) and multilateral organisations (e.g. the Asian Development Bank). Other UN agencies supporting poverty alleviation through tourism include the United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Environment Programme (Scheyvens, 2008).

### **The Engagements of Tourism in Poverty Alleviation – The Academic Commentaries**

There has been a wide range of contradicting views about the role of tourism in alleviating poverty since 1970s. Tourism is often considered as an economic driver (**Rogerson & Lemon, 2002**) and a vital tool for poverty alleviation (**Muganda, Sahil & Smith, 2010**). **William (1998:1)** regards tourism as a catalyst for modernization, prosperity, and growth of the economic condition of a world and in special poor nations. It is an industry which is a cash cow of job opportunities and foreign exchanges. It also exposes the people belonging to the poorer sections of the society to a whole new 'modern' ways of life. This statement falls rightly in connection with the works of **Jafari (2001: 29-30)** on tourism, who calls it as the advocacy approach of tourism. Tourism is undoubtedly a fastest growing industry of the world (**Mowforth and Munt 1998, Goodwin 2000**), and also an integral tool for economic development in the developing nations (**Harrison, 1992**).

Tourism has been looked upon as a universal panacea to eradicate poverty, inequality and to an extent conflicts too (**IIP, 2004**). It is quoted as an informal sector that is labour intensive and that which fosters the inclusion of women based on the natural and cultural assets of the poor (**Ashley & Roe, 2002:61**). Also, for each unit of capital invested, tourism creates more number of jobs than for the similar capital invested in any other industry (**Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997**). **Dann (2002, p. 236)** has quoted tourism as a 'passport to development'. The WTO has endorsed the potentials of tourism as a poverty alleviating agent by advocating the principles of MDGs and has even stated that upward movement of tourism will result in a 'war on poverty' (**WTO, 2005**).

The major thrust for the idea of devising tourism as poverty alleviation tool was after the formation of PPT since 1990. The UK sponsored research work conducted by Caroline Ashley of ODI and Dilys Roe of IIED on the aspect of sustainable livelihoods in southern Africa in the year of 1998 highlighted tourism as an industry that has ample potential to foster the well being of the rural areas. Eventually, the major portions of the people living in the bracket of poor reside in rural areas. PPTP through some of its research papers highlighted the aspects linked to the pro-poor approach through linkages with private sector. In the later works of **Goodwin (2005)**, pro-poor tourism is promoted for providing three types of benefits: economic benefits; livelihood benefits involving improved living conditions such as good health care; and empowerment of poor.

#### **The Critics' Points of View**

The works of **Britton (1982)** and **Brohman (1996)** turns the spotlight on the fact that the chances of international tourism to eliminate poverty in the different

parts of the world are very feeble. Instead, what tourism does is quite opposite to that i.e. tourism acts more on the principles that actually highlights, entrenches, and exploits these differences. It has been also criticised by a group of radical scholars that the development of poor countries as tourism destinations comes with a price of exploiting the unspoilt and untouched natural and cultural heritage of the host community. **Enloe (1990:31)** notes 'Tourism is promoted today as an industry that can turn poor countries' very poverty into a magnet for sorely needed foreign currency. For to be a poor society in the late twentieth century, is to be **unspoilt**'.

It is also argued that instead of carrying out long term efforts to eradicate poverty, developing the poor countries and generate equality among the nations, tourism actually is a means to tactically accept the neoliberal philosophies of development where only a few segment of the poor gets developed in the host community (**Hall, 2007**). The best example of it are the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), in which indebted developing countries were actually suggested by the so called developed countries to accept tourism as a means of economic development to get a way out of poverty which in return will provide them the strength to repay back the loans taken from varied multilateral institutions like IMF and the World Bank (**Brohman, 1996**). However, it was observed quite often that the policies of the state which were concerned with the development mechanism of tourism to make economic growth were heavily influenced by the multilateral funding agencies mentioned before (**Carbone, 2005**). Good number of scholars challenges the very idea of tourism automatically eliminating poverty (**Nash, 1977; Smith, 1977**). It is also argued that tourism amplifies commoditization of culture, disruption in the society, and degradation of environment (**Pluss & Backs, 2002: 12**).

Tourism is accused that it feeds up the poverty of the poor countries that are a source of the cheap labour force (**Pluss & Backes, 2002: 12**). **Ritcher (2001: 50)** comments that when Governments of the host communities invest hugely to build the infrastructural facilities for the tourists, the poor host citizens will be starving to make the basic needs. Thus, in this way there will be a lot of fresh waters in the swimming pools of the tourists to take bath than in the drinking pots of the local community to quench thirst. Pro-poor tourism, tourism's very own approach to eradicating poverty is based on blurred ideologies whereby it is not specified that which modes of tourism shall be used for alleviating poverty, since even sex tourism also alleviates poverty (Harrison, 2008). Scholars of the post colonial era comments that tourism makes the inequalities among the developed and underdeveloped nations grow stronger resulting in the unequal power embodiments between 'the West' and 'the Rest' (**Hall & Tucker, 2004**).

### Plugging the Gaps – Major Suggestions

Many a people think Pro-Poor Tourism is a form of niche tourism though the fact is that *it is an overall approach to tourism development and management that aims at opportunity enhancement for poor to obtain benefits from tourism (Jamieson, Goodwin and Edmunds, 2004)*. It provides “*Net Benefit*” for the economically poor and marginalized people and also ensures that the allocated funds can be used to relieve poverty rather using it for accomplishing broader goals like sustainable development, economic development, or marketing of tourism; those may or may not have significant benefits to the poorer ones from local community. One may encounter overlapping of the two terms ‘*Sustainable Tourism*’ and ‘*Pro poor Tourism*’ with each other, but there is a thin line in between these two terms as the former one leads to management of all resources in such a way that the three basic dimensions of tourism (e.g. – social, economic, and environmental) can be balanced in a proper way ‘*through maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological process, biological diversity and life support systems*’; whereas the later one *has a core focus on poverty* and environmental sustainability is a prominent means to achieve that.

Tourism is a growing industry that already has affected millions of people around the world by creating employment for about two hundred million people and almost striking that one and half times faster than other sectors. Investment attraction, foreign-exchange earnings, youth employment, community enrichment, gender equality, prevention of cultural pollution, and enhancement of opportunity for wide participation of all stakeholders coming under the common umbrella of tourism system, are a few of many other positive impacts of tourism. However, tourism can only be pro poor only when it intensifies economic benefits to the local community by means of (1) increasing business opportunities as alternative sources of earning, (2) enhancing collective or community income, and (3) providing easy access to avail basic services – and all these are intended to support tourism towards having an ultimate focus on benefiting the poor.

In this connection, the key stakeholders of tourism play a cardinal role. Community leaders, the police, local governments, guides, the tourism industry, tourists, weaker sections of the societies engaging in some way or other with tourism, and promoters should synergise to take joint action to tackle local issues. *Building local groups can help a destination to become a better place for tourists to visit and a better place for people to live*. Albeit each person can make a difference by putting the efforts individually, yet much more can be achieved if all the stakeholders work in tandem.

Tourism business enterprises can purchase local goods (e.g. food products like vegetables and fruits for local hotels and restaurants, building materials for local construction, local handmade crafts for souvenir shops etc.) and services (e.g. local

guides, local artists for entertainment, security persons, etc.) at comparatively lower price. Such approaches will support local businesses, encourage comparatively poorer communities for active participation in tourism and also ensure overall satisfaction of tourists by serving unique local products and thus these business enterprises can also avoid importing the same goods and services from distant place, what they generally do to gain more profit. Tourism in a particular destination often creates employment opportunities for the host communities. The barriers to entry faced by the poor in accessing employment are often lack of education and skills. Besides Corporate Social Responsibility, if stakeholders (like tourists, travel agencies, tour operators, NGOs, Government bodies, etc.) invest in training for skill development and capacity building programmes for local people, it can be a more significant contribution for local economic development and there will be profound chances of reducing poverty to some extent.

Travel Agencies and Tour Operators should encourage their clients to take local excursions that can enable the tourists to enhance the overall holiday experience by residing in local hotels, purchasing local products and crafts, hiring local guides, availing local transport, etc. that will boost up the morale of local tourism industry as local communities can sell their products and services directly to the tourists. It will also be a kind of direct contribution to local communities to raise their household income. Tourism businesses should also encourage their clients to make charitable contributions to local communities. Thus they can play a crucial role in stimulating and collecting voluntary donations from guests and other businesses for local community projects so that the local natural and the cultural heritages can be properly maintained and the well being of residents of a particular destination can be ushered by those contributions from tourists' and business enterprises' philanthropy.

Framing of more supportive policies and strategies, which have become already successful in other sectors like MSME's along with good governance and poverty analysis can be put to great effect in tourism to make it more pro poor. It is also required to identify the specific benefits to poor communities and to point out which community has benefitted and by how much. The transparent analysis will encourage the private sector, banks, national and international aid agencies engaged in development projects to be more active in pro poor partnership- that can also be beneficial to the local communities. Workshops may be organized to help the poorer sections collaborate with organizations/companies having the expertise to nurture and nourish their talents. Direct procurements can avoid exploitation by intermediaries. Overall, a simple but effective outlook on all these is the need of the hour.

Moreover, the overall approach should be taken in a way that will also enhance non-economic benefits like capacity building, empowerment of community especially women to take the mantle and be the decision makers for upgrading their own livelihoods, improving accessibility, health care, education, and infrastructure (in forms of electricity, telecommunication, roads, potable water, etc.) and such efforts will also mitigate the negative environmental impacts of tourism on the poor.

### **Conclusion**

This work attempts to briefly document the ongoing debates over Tourism and Poverty. The projections of poverty in the world and the emergence of tourism as a tool for alleviating it has been delved upon elaborately, taking cues from the academic discourses. An account of the historical background of *Tourism acting as a tool for poverty eradication* throws many an insight that can aid in better and sustainable management of tourism. The academic discourses on the lead question ***Is Tourism Driven Poverty Alleviation 'Rhetoric' or 'Pragmatic Ideal'?*** Are expected to clamber to a well-defined pathway through this attempt of the researchers. The constructive criticisms are codified and analysed. This has been done by highlighting the arguments for and against Tourism as a poverty eradicating agent. In the final section of this study, quite a few suggestions have been provided as to ways and means by which tourism can become more pro-poor. However, this paper has only been able to portray the debated views and bring it in a single umbrella. Further studies may be conducted in prospect to trace out empirical evidences (which are scarce) supporting the arguments.

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