

RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN PELLING AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

Pelling, a magnificent place with beautiful natural scenery, situated in West Sikkim, is rapidly emerging as a giant attractive tourist spot of Himalayan range in the recent years. Due to the recent political turmoil running in Darjeeling and Dooars region, a heavy tourist flow has recently been taken place in Pelling with its entire counterpart in Sikkim. A number of hotels are being constructed along the both sides of the single narrow road from Lower Pelling to Upper Pelling. It is basically a sloppy land and hence, due to the growth of hotel and tourism industry, local environment is being degraded. Being a landslide prone zone, soil erosion is a common phenomena and mass tree felling due to over construction of new hotels; this phenomena is increasing at an alarming rate. But, tourism industry is an emerging industry in the current decade and of course, it increases the state income with small investment. Moreover, employment opportunity has also been increased at a large scale for the local inhabitants. Hence, to maintain the geological stability and natural ecosystem; tourism industry in Pelling should be developed in eco-friendly way.

KEYWORDS: Ecosystem, Environment, Landslide, Tourism Industry

INTRODUCTION

Geography is essentially a field science. It deals with the study of spatial pattern of different models of human occupancy and the same time connotes the casual aspects of it, relating the physical environments and the cultural attainment of the human groups of the society. How much a region is geographically sound should be testified in the fields of intensive study. Since local factors also play a major role, broad generalization of the facts is not enough for satisfaction, so, a careful study is required to investigate the micro-order adjustment of the people with the physical environs. Man has got intellects with which he wants to make his way of life comfortable. He uses to do this by obtaining something from the nature; but, nature is too miser. She exerts resistances. When techno sphere is too much, these resistances become also the resources and it is exploited and distributed and word as conditioned by the total system. This system is a unique one. To examine all these one has to study both the physical and cultural environments. But since, the present field study is not a detailed one, the ultimate does not show a very elegant firm, still the facts remain the same. The entire study has been generated through primary data collected from the hotel survey of the study area.

Methodology

Methodology simply implies the way of analysis of the data collected in the field. Actually, a geographer requires some fundamental tools viz. geological map, contour map superimposed with the drainage network (i.e. topographical sheet). All these have been collected firstly so that the physical environments can be guessed vividly. All the parameters of analysis have been examined in the field and have also been shown either with the help of photographs, primary survey or

of sketches. For the cultural patterns, the analytical tools are somewhat sophisticated since the types of cultural response out of a typical terrain cannot be made out directly within a very short time. It is because of the fact that culture is essentially an evolutionary phenomenon. So the time dimension must not be overlooked as in the case of geomorphic landscape. The demographic status of the area has been studied very intensively and it has been analyzed through different techniques. The transport and communication system, the various fields of production, the trade system incorporated with the distribution pattern all have been determined in a systematic manner. The behaviour of the developmental plan and methods also indicates the channels and the ways of subsequent development. The economic basis of the people, educational spheres, medical facilities enjoyed by them has also been investigated. Broadly speaking, the resource utilization within different functional limits of the region is taken under this short study project. Lastly, all these have been shown with the help of maps, diagrams, graphs, sketches and photographs in course of analysis for illustration. The conclusion and the future prospect of the region have been optimized keeping a close view to the existing patterns.

General Description of the Study Area

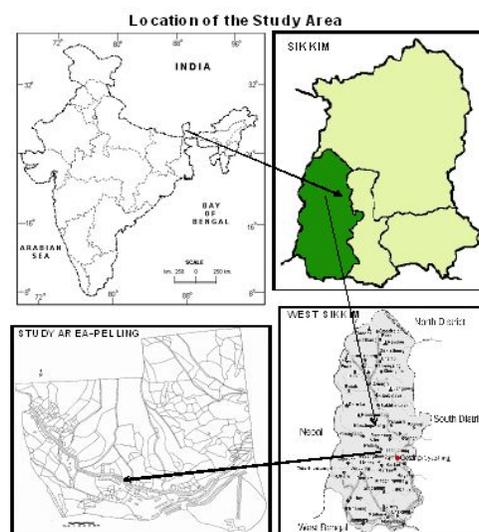


Figure 1: Location of the Study Area

For the present study, Pelling, the famous tourist spot of West Sikkim and its surrounding village upper and lower Naku have been selected as study area. The study area is extended from $27^{\circ}18'04''$ North to $27^{\circ}18'36''$ North latitude and from $88^{\circ}13'48''$ East to $88^{\circ}14'24''$ East latitude. The total area is near about 78 hectares. Pelling is nestled at an altitude of 2,150 m (7,200 feet). The town is located at a distance of 10 km from the district headquarters of Geyzing. A regular bus service connects the two towns. However with the influx of tourists, the region is undergoing a metamorphosis, with the roads being repaired and hotels being set up. The mighty Himalayas and the Kanchenjanga may be viewed at close quarters from Pelling. Pelling also forms the base from where trekkers and other peripatetic adventurers undertake the strenuous and arduous treks in West Sikkim. The land around Pelling is still a virgin territory and is bathed with alpine vegetation, with numerous waterfalls lining the hillside. In the months of winter, Pelling is sometimes covered with a blanket of snow. Pelling is 115 km from the state capital Gangtok and about 135 km from Siliguri, the nearest railhead and airport. Regular jeeps connect Pelling to the towns of Jorethang, Kalimpong and Namchi. The nearest airport is Bagdogra airport. Most of the people of Pelling are Buddhists and speak the Sikkimese language. Other spoken languages are Nepali, Hindi, and English.

Development of Tourism Industry

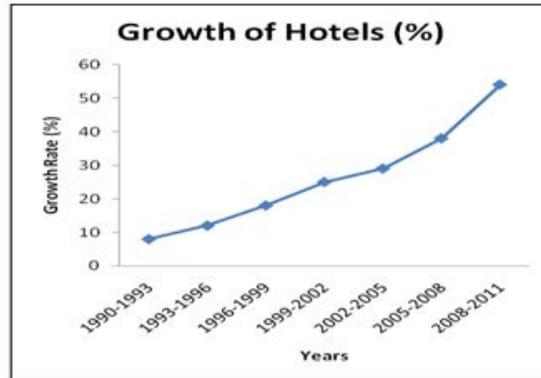


Figure 2: Growth of Hotels

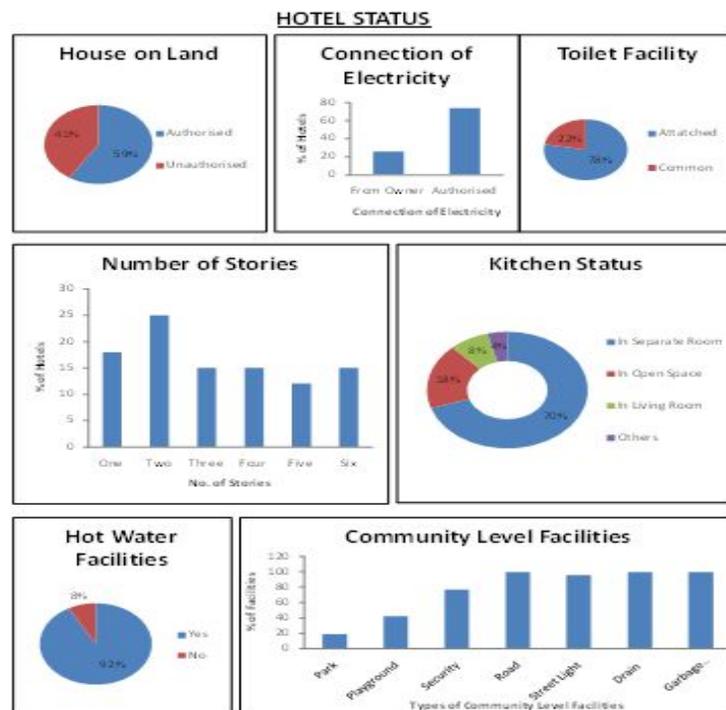


Figure 3: Hotel Status (Source: Primary Data)

Tourism is considered as the economic mainstay of Pelling. Pelling has already achieved a successful trend in terms of incoming tourist. Tourists are coming from the different direction of the country throughout the year. Kolkata is the main source of tourist flow. A number of hotels have been developed here and there. Figure 2 depicts the growth rate of hotels from 1990 with three years interval. The rate is gradually increasing. The highest rate is found in 2008-2011 and the social-political turmoil in Darjeeling district of West Bengal is one of the main reasons behind this. In the very recent days, a number of tourist facilities bring a boom in tourism industry in Pelling. Basically, the tourists are mainly arrive in three different seasons, i.e., April-June, July-November and December-March. First two seasons have maximum number of tourists due to the summer and puja vacation.

Winter season is normally considered as the off season in Pelling despite the educational excursions of field sciences like Geography, Geology, Botany or Zoology. A number of tourist facilities e.g. traffic and transport, linkage with other centres, market facility, number of quality hotels, scope for recreation, availability of water, adequate supply of food, connection of electricity, medical services etc. is very much available in Pelling.

Hotel Status and Hotel Condition

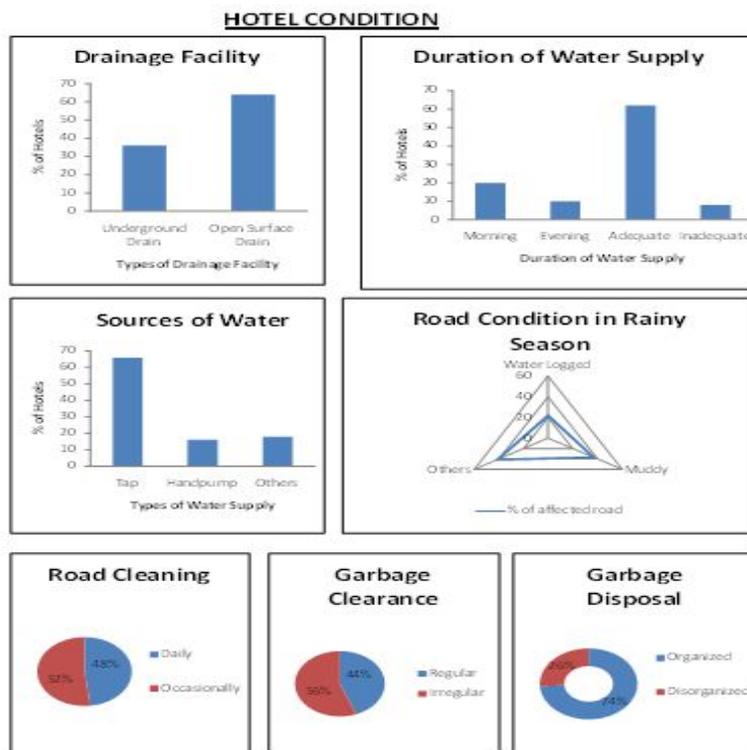


Figure 4: Condition of Hotels (Source: Primary Data)

The growth rate of hotels during the last two decades is gradually increasing but in the last three years (2008-2011) the growth rate is maximum. Hence, it can be said that as a tourist spot Pelling has achieved good success. The overall condition of the hotels has been keenly observed in the field study. 59% of the lands are authorized which is a good sign. It is an impressive fact that one to six storied hotels are available here and hotels under all the stories are almost equal in number. Since it is a landslide prone zone, permission for the construction of high storied hotels must be immediately stopped. Most of the hotels have authorized connection of electricity. 78% hotels have the provision of attached toilet. Kitchen status of the hotels indicates that 70% hotels have a separate room for kitchen purpose while in 18% it is done in open space and living room is used for 4% hotels. 92% hotels have the 24 hours facility of hot water connection. Figure 3 represents the hotel status based on primary survey.

Different types of community level facilities e.g., park, play ground, security, road, street light, drain, garbage disposal etc. have been considered as a part of the study. Apart from park and play ground all the facilities are found in around 80% hotels. Underground drainage facility is available in only 36% hotels which should be increased. 62% of the total hotels have adequate water supply. Tap water is the most common source to get the water (66%). Among the roads in front of the hotels 22% come under water logged condition, 37% is muddy and remaining 41% is others. 48% of the roads

are cleaned daily while 52% are occasionally cleaned. Regular garbage clearance is observed in 44% hotels. 74% of the garbage disposal centres are organized. Figure 4 reveals the hotel condition.

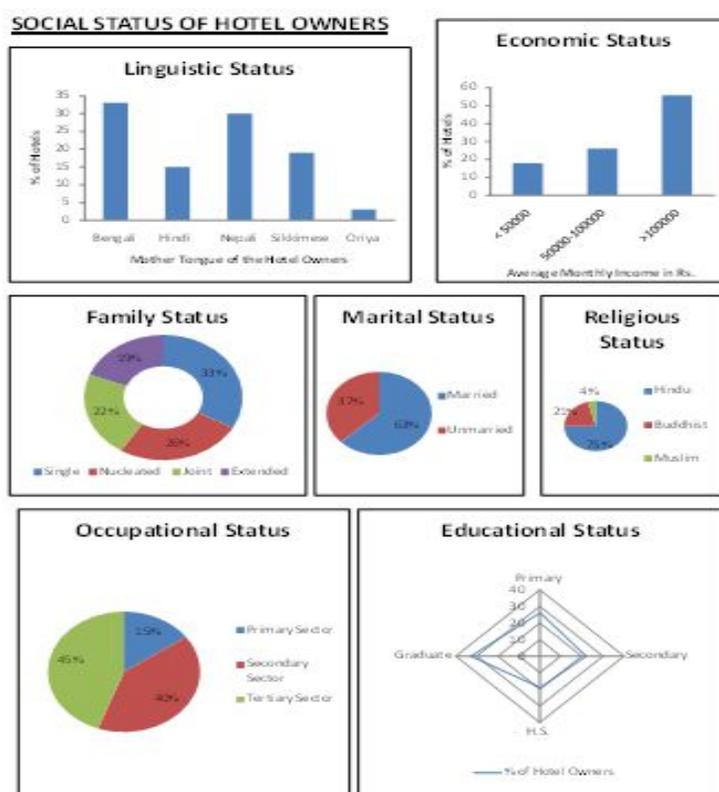


Figure 5: Social Status of the Hotel Owners (Source: Primary Data)

Social Status of the Hotel Owners

It is a multi-lingual society. Bengali, Nepali, Sikkimese, Hindi and Oriya are the most common language of the hotel owners. 56% of the hotel owners have a monthly income more than 100,000 rupees. If we look after the family status of the hotel owners then it is seen that 33%, 26%, 22% and 19% of the hotel owners are single, nucleated, joint and extended respectively. 63% hotel owners are married. It is seen that 75% hotel owners are of Hindu origin followed by Buddhist (21%) and Muslim (4%). The occupational status is almost balanced. Secondary and tertiary sectors have 40% and 45% of the hotel owners respectively. But in the educational sector the picture is slightly different from the local inhabitants. More than 30% of the hotel owners are graduate and 20% are higher secondary pass. Figure 5 shows the social status of the hotel owners.

Impact on Local Environment

Pelling is a landslide prone region. Heavy rainfall and soil erosion are the catalysts of landslide formation. Due to the construction of hydro power plants, hotels and new roads; sloppy region like Pelling is going to become a danger zone. Large scale deforestation has been taken place for a long time. Rocks become unstable due to the construction of motorways. Pressure of increasing population alongwith environmental pollution is to be seems like a threat to the natural mountain ecosystem. Many rock structures are being collapsed here and there. Moreover, the recent hotel owners are mainly outsiders. They do not bother about the physical environment of biologically rich west Sikkim. Loss of biodiversity

has become a major environmental problem during the last 10-15 years.



Figure 6: Severe Impact on Physical Environment Due to Rapid Growth of Hotel

CONCLUSIONS

Pelling is well-known for a fantastic tourist place. So, tourism industry is obviously the economic mainstay of the local people. From the given data it can be concluded that there are a lot of facilities to be provided by the sikkim government and also by the hotel owners. Overall condition of the hotels is above average. The hotel owners are rich and quite educated. So they know the actual demand of the travellers. At last, it is a tourist spot of Himalayan Mountain. So, natural beauty is a part of the life of Pelling. Hence, it can be said that the tourism industry will be well developed in the very near future. But hotel and road construction has to be checked due to the protection of the natural ecosystem. In order to maintain a healthy environmental condition in Pelling, government should imply the preventive measures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my deepest sense of gratitude to Dr. Subha Roy Choudhury, Former Head of the Department of Geography, Rammohan College, Kolkata, for giving valuable suggestions and supervising the entire field work. I must acknowledge the great help of Executive Engineer, Tikjuk, West Sikkim, who gave various data regarding the study. I offer my special thanks to Irrigation officer, Tikjuk, West Sikkim, for providing me the valuable maps and information for the present study.

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