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Problems Of Ecotourism In Similipal

***Dr. Ratan Kumar Acharya**

*Assistant Professor in Geography, Government of Odisha (DHE)

Abstract

“Wanderlust is the basic nature of humans” (professor A.H.Kalro). Men in the prehistoric age have been wondering far off destination and exploring unknown land for purposes like spread of religion, study of various culture, acquisition of knowledge and experience and for quest of wealth, in view of their natural instinct for adventure and love for nature. Ecotourism provides this opportunity to the stressed and strained people who love to tour. Tourism is now identified as one of the fastest growing and pollution free industries in the world and is viewed in terms of political and economic development tour. Odisha, being a coastal state, is the treasure house of nature, having mountain ranges, dense forests, rivers, lakes, waterfalls and water reservoirs, long and enchanting sea beaches and what not. Talking about Similipal Biosphere Reserve in particular, is the sixth largest Biosphere Reserve in the country and forms a major part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. It is the home for diverse flora and fauna and most of them are endemic in nature. Besides this, it is also the abode of tribes like Eringa Kharia and Mankidia, living in and around the biosphere reserve and critically depend on the reserve for livelihoods. After a detailed study, it was observed that the present poor level of ecotourism activity in Similipal area are mainly due to lack of planning, interest and commitment by the Government agencies. The air, railway and road connectivity, availability of hotels and ecofriendly guest houses outside and inside the core areas, other facilities like electricity, water, sanitation, food, entertainment provisions and facilities for ethnic and cultural studies etc. were poor and neglected by the authorities concerned.

In this paper, it is analysed, what are the constraints for the promotion of ecotourism and why the ecotourism development of Similipal Biosphere Reserve is not a part of international standard. And hence, what measures can be adopted in Similipal Biosphere Reserve region.

Keywords Ecotourism, Sustainable development

Objective

The present study is an attempt to identify the lacuna and shortcomings for which the Similipal Biosphere Reserve has not yet been recognized as a ecotourism destination of international repute, and to formulate a strategy which would enhance ecotourism in Similipal Biosphere Reserve, resulting in increase in tourist flow.

Database and methodology

Data for this research work has been obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Here, secondary data is given more priority than primary data. Secondary data was collected from various sources such as books, project documents, official reports, leaflets, maps, websites, statistical reports from Directorate of census operation of India, information from Forest and Environment Department, Tourism Department Odisha Tourism Development Corporation, Project Tiger Office (Baripada), District Level Offices of Forest and Tourism, Similipal Ecotourism Zonal Office, local travel agencies and other local offices within the Similipal Biosphere Reserve. For primary data, structured interviews were conducted. The officials and people who were interviewed were D.F.O Tiger Reserve (Baripada), assistant tourist officer (Baripada), ranger of Chahala, forest of Guruguria, Forest Guard – Crocodile Project at Jashipur, a member of ecotourism society- Similipal Zone and many others. The interview was a kind of discussion rather than a interview. Some locals were also interviewed. Data analysis was done with the help of Excel and SPSS Programme,

Study Area at a glance

Location

Located in the northeast India, the Similipal Biosphere Reserve lies within two biogeographical regions : the Mahanadian east coastal region of the Oriental realm and the Chhotanagpur biotic province of the Deccan Peninsular Zone. It is situated in the northern part of Odisha's Mayurbhanj district. Geographically, it lies in eastern end of eastern ghat.

Map 1. Location map of the study area

Coverage

The biosphere is spread over 4,374 sq km has : 845 sq km Core area(s)

2,129 sq km Buffer zone(s)

1400 sq km Transition zone(s)

Location : 21° 40' N - 86° 19' E

Climate

Similipal has a subtropical climate. It experiences three distinct seasons i.e., summer, monsoon and winter. The summer season is confined from March to May with a maximum temperature of 30° C and is very pleasant. The rainy season starts from June and continues upto October, maximum precipitation is 2000 ml. In Winter season, November to February temperature goes upto 2.5° C with experience of frost in pockets. The air of Similipal is quiet humid. The relative humidity varies from 70% to 100% with 30% at midday in summer.

Flora and Fauna

The biosphere is a treasure house of 1076 species of plants belonging to 102 families. 96 species of Orchids have been identified here. It lies in the eastern highlands' moist deciduous forest eco region, with tropical moist broadleaf forest and tropical moist deciduous forest with dry deciduous hill forest and high level sea forests. The grasslands and the savannas provides grazing ground for the herbivores and a hiding place to the carnivores. The forests boasts of innumerable medicinal and aromatic plants which provide a source of earning for the tribal people over there. Eucalyptus planted by the British during 1900s are found. Similipal is home to a wide range of wild animals. A total of 42 species of mammals, 242 species of birds and 30 species of reptiles have been recorded in Similipal National Park. The major mammals include – tiger, leopard, Asian elephant, sambar, barking deer, gaur, jungle cat, wild boar, chausingha (four horned antelope), giant squirrel and common langoor. 231 species of birds nests in this forest. Red jungle fowl, hill mynah, peafowl, alexandrine parakeet, crested serpent eagle are the commonly found birds. The grey hornbill, Indian pied hornbill, Malabar pied hornbill and Indian trogon are also found in this reserve.

Tribe

Two tribes, the Eringa Kharia and the Mankidias, inhabit the reserve forest and practice traditional agricultural activities (collection of seeds and timber).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Problems of Ecotourism in Similipal

The concept of ecotourism is an integration of two different concepts i.e., 'ecology' and 'tourism', which is an effective measure to ensure economic growth of an area without harming and disturbing the natural environment.

Similipal is the land of the roar of the tigers and trumpet of elephants. It draws the attention of nature lovers, wildlifers and conservationists for its rich and diverse flora, fauna and splendid natural beauty. The meadow of Chahala, magnificent waterfall at Barehipani, Nawana valley, bank of the river Khairi and river Budhabalanga near Jambu, waterfall and majestic hills at Joranda, Lulung and strine at Deokund attracts the people far and wide. Being one of the finest and largest protected area as of the state, it not only attracts the visitors from places like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Rourkela etc. inside Odisha, but also tourists from other states of India, especially the curious Bengalis. In addition, a significant number of foreign tourists also visit the reserve every year.

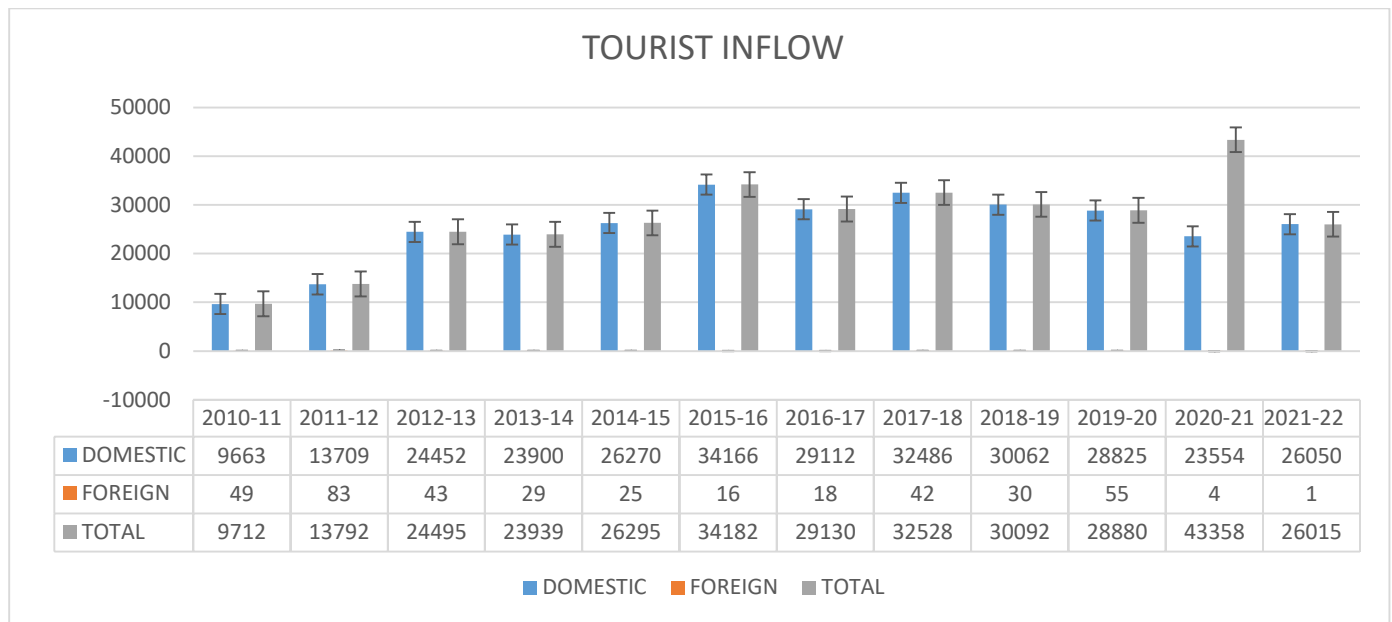
TABLE-1
TOURIST INFLOW

YEAR	DOMESTIC VISITORS	FOREIGN VISITORS	TOTAL
2010-11	9663	49	9712
2011-12	13709	83	13792
2012-13	24452	43	24495
2013-14	23900	29	23929
2014-15	26270	25	26295
2015-16	34166	16	34182
2016-17	29112	18	29130
2017-18	32486	42	32528
2018-19	30062	30	30092
2019-20	28825	55	28880
2020-21	43354	4	43358
2021-22(till March)	26050	1	26051

Source: Statistical Bulletin, Annual Report (Similipal National Park)

Fig. 1

TOURIST INFLOW



Now the revenue generated from these tourists not only adds to the National Income, but also, it is recycled for the development of Similipal. The revenue collected from tourism here is listed below in 12 consecutive years.

TABLE-2
REVENUE COLLECTED

YEAR	REVENUE COLLECTED (in rupees)
2010-11	6,84,020
2011-12	13,36,450
2012-13	20,06,642
2013-14	23,37,250
2014-15	37,25,342
2015-16	38,44,530
2016-17	68,37,481
2017-18	95,66,349
2018-19	2,11,03,167
2019-20	1,48,02,263
2020-21	2,34,99,003
2021-22(till March)	1,22,89,979

Source: Statistical Bulletin, Annual Report (Similipal National Park).

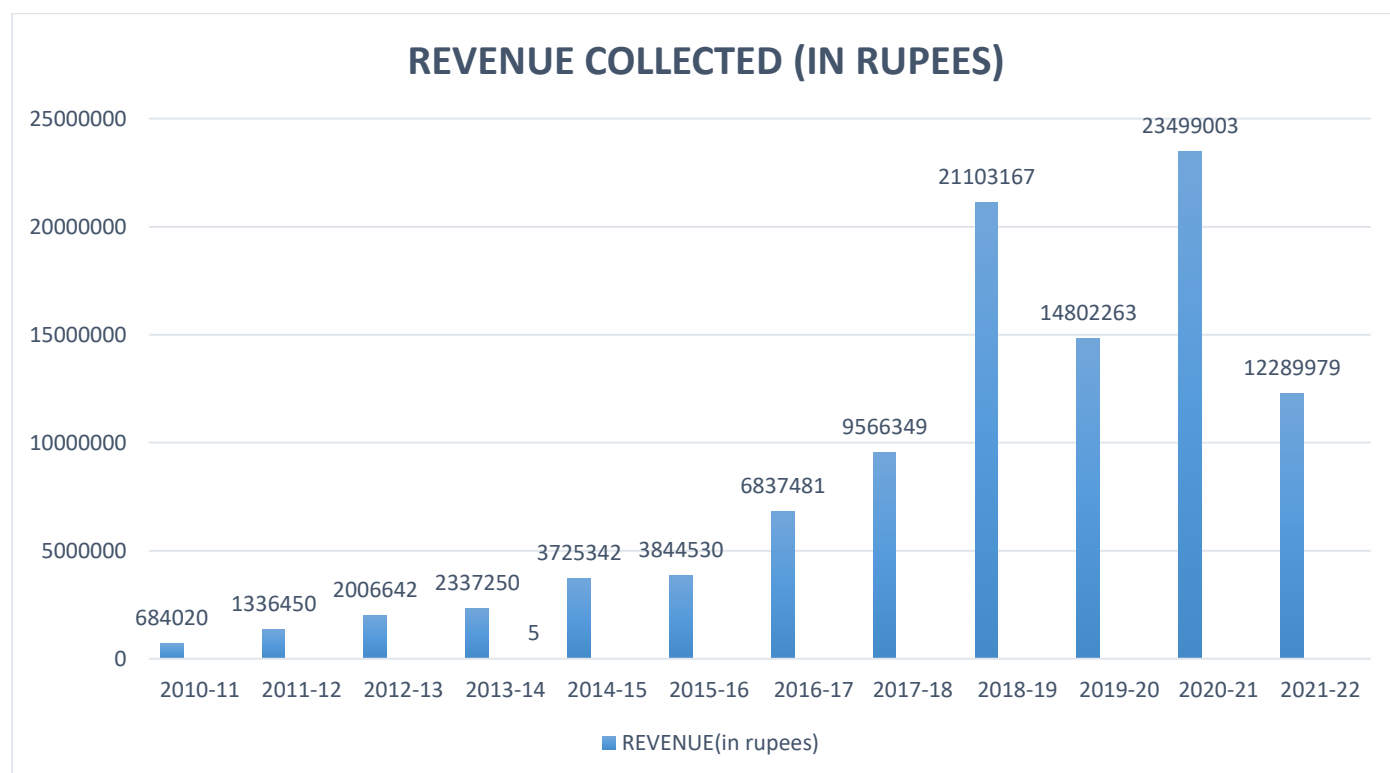


Fig. 2 / REVENUE COLLECTED

Keeping in view the data presented in Table 1 & 2, it can be observed that the tourist inflow and revenue collection in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve area, has gradually increased in the years. Yet it is not enough to meet the developmental goals of Similipal Biosphere Reserve. Although it comes under the 13 Biosphere Reserves of the country, still it has not yet become an international tourist destination.

Some of the problems seen and felt in Similipal are listed hereby, which is reducing the ecotourism chances in the Similipal Biosphere Reserve region.

1.1 DESTRUCTION OF FLORA AND FAUNA

1.1.1 FLORA

In the core areas, illicit felling of trees is mainly confined to two economic species namely *Dalbergia Latifolia* and *Pterocarpus Marsupium* and their intensity is not high except in the north-eastern fringe area in and around Pitha-bata. But buffer areas are more prone to illicit felling and illegal removal of timber. The situation in certain pockets near Talabandh, Pithabata, Baniabasa, Dudhiani, etc. is quite alarming. Kharias, a primitive tribe inside the sanctuary subsist on collection of non-wood produce. Honey, gum, arrowroot and wild mushrooms are collected by them illegally. Besides bark of Paja tree (*Litsea Monopetala*) is collected by the professional smugglers. Collection of Mahua flowers and seeds and sal seeds also cause disturbance to the area. Forests are deliberately burnt to clean the floor to collect these items. Wild fires are common and frequent due to high deposition of combustible materials like dried grass, a mat of leaf litter and other debris like fallen trees. Barring certain moist valleys, entire Similipal hills comes under conflagration although fires generally confine to ground only. The cause of fire is purely biotic by minor forest produce collectors,

hunters, poachers and callous tourists. Fire season commences in mid-February and continues up to mid-June normally. Lower order fauna like pangolin, peafowl, partridge, quails and other invertebrates suffer most in this fire. Insect attacks also cause great harm to the trees. The trees like *Madhuca Latifolia*, by *Buchanania Lanza* and *Terminalia tomentosa* are often infested by *Dendrophthoe falcata*. During May July, a green caterpillar defoliates the economically important sal trees. It is also seen that large patches of lands are cleared up for agriculture purpose, both for food crops and fodder crops.

1.1.2 FAUNA

Hunting has always played negative role and still has, in the ecotourism growth in Similipal. Professional poaching is not well known in the tract. Sporadic cases of organised poaching for elephants are reported. Crop raiding by the wild animals prompts poaching and poisoning and killing with arms. For hares and jungle fowl, snakes are used rarely. The pressure of poaching is more prominent on the south-east fringe of the sanctuary. Specifically from the foot hill villages of Balma, Dengam, Podadiha, etc. Monsoon is the right time for elephant poachers in Similipal. Hunting animals like deers and monkeys by the remote villagers is a common practice seen there even in present times.

Therefore, both hunting and poaching also discourages ecotourism in the area. Grazing in the vicinity of enclaved and fringe villages cause serious problem to wild herbivores for fodder. Spreading of diseases like food and mouth disease, Anthrax, Haemorrhagic, septicemia, Ranikhet disease, Black Quarter disease, etc. from domestic animals to wild animals do exists here.

1.2 INFRASTRUCTURAL AVAILABILITY

1.2.1 TRANSPORT FACILITY

There are two main entrances for Similipal Tiger Reserve, one through Jashipur and other through Pithabata. N.H-5 (Howrah - Chennai) runs close to Similipal Tiger Reserve in North-East directions and NH6 (Howrah - Mumbai) runs very close to Similipal Tiger Reserve in North-West direction. Till Baripada and Jashipur, all type of vehicles can travel, but only four wheelers like Marshals and Tata Jeeps can travel within the reserve. No other vehicles are allowed within. No Government vehicles are seen inside the reserve. All the visible vehicles inside are private ones i.e. hired ones in which the tourists travel on their own risks. Besides roadways, there is a rail head at Baripada connecting Rupsa on Howrah-Chennai main line. Balasore at a distance of 52 K.M. from Baripada is situated on Howrah-Chennai main line of South-Eastern Railway. Railway facility at Rarangpur, at a distance of 37 km. Similarly Kolkata and Bhubaneswar are the airports from which one can reach Similipal National Park.

1.2.2 ROAD CONDITION AND TYPES

Road till Jashipur, through Baripada is in good condition. But roads within the reserve are in extremely bad condition. All are kachha roads which become almost inaccessible in rainy days, mainly due to formation of

wet mud and water logging, with absolutely no drainage facility inside the reserve. The width of the roads within the reserve is also very less, which causes difficulty for the big vehicles like Sumo, marshal jeeps, etc. to pass across each other, all together.

1.3 ELECTRICITY

Electrification is a parameter to study the level of development of any place. Within Similipal Tiger Reserve, there is no electricity. In some FRH/ lodges only thing available is solar light and electric generators, that too for a limited period of time. During rainy days, that is also not available. It causes a great deal of problem for the tourists who move in vehicles inside the reserve; as except for the headlight of their own hired vehicle, no other light sources are visible. This also affects the security system within the entire reserve and encourages illegal activities by smugglers and few local residing there.

1.4 RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES FOR THE TOURISTS

Although residential facilities are available in Similipal, but the condition of these places is not good and they are not well maintained. The FRH/ lodges are in bad condition One of the major problems in these stay houses is the unavailability of electricity connection. Only solar light is used throughout, which is dependent on sunlight. In rainy days, there is no light and fan because solar energy is also absent. and All these problems lead to less number of tourists here, who come from far off places just to stay here and explore the surrounding, thereby affecting the ecotourists' visit in Similipal. The list of Forest Rest Houses/Lodges in Similipal for tourists is given below.

TABLE-3

FOREST REST HOUSES/LODGES IN SIMILIPAL

<u>Name</u>	<u>Suite/Dormitory</u>	<u>Beds per suite/Dormitory</u>	<u>Attractions</u>
Chahala			
E. Villa	1	5	Wildlife at Satt lick
Dormitory	2	5	
Nawana			
FRH	2	2	Bird watching frost prone valley.
Pine Villa	1	2	
Dormitory	2	3	
Joranda			
FRH	2	2	Waterfall.
Barheipani			
Fall view FRH- 2	2	2	Waterfall
Jashipur			
Dormitory	2	10	Crocodile rearing center

1.5 MEDICINE SHOPS

NO medicine shops were seen within the reserve, except a few at Jashipur.

1.6 WATER SUPPLY

Although many water sources are seen within the reserve, still there is no drinking water facility available for the tourists. Initiatives have been taken to provide packed drinking water facilities to the tourists.

1.7 SANITATION

There is no provision for sanitation inside the reserve for the locals as well as tourists, except in few rest houses which are situated in far off places from the actual visiting spots. This again creates problems for the visitors to the reserve.

1.8 FOOD AVAILABILITY

Catering facilities in the area are provided by the locals. There only local foods can be found not as we expect in cities and towns, which is a matter of disinterest for non-oriya tourists, who may not acquaint themselves with the local foods.

1.9 PUBLIC HEALTH FACILITY

No public health facility is found within the reserve although there are many villages inside. No special provisions are made for the tourists who visit the place, even in case of any emergency. In case of any sudden health problem, or accident, they have to go all the way to Jashipur and Baripada for check up and treatment. No first aid facilities could be seen within the reserve and villages, except in few FRH and a few tourist lodges. Initiatives have been taken to provide health care workers.

1.10 MARKET FOR TOURISTS

Tourists, especially foreigners are greatly attracted to tribal or local village products like food items, tribal cloths and jewellerys, other local products like honey, soaps, aromatic products, handicrafts, etc. and they find all these products in market places or local "haats".

No such attractive markets was seen inside, except a large one at Gurguria which had no such eye-catching local products. Moreover prevalence of duplicate goods was found there.

1.11 CULTURAL ATTRACTION

NO such cultural activities are seen within the reserve, either by the locals or by the hired artists by the Government which can attract tourist's attention. This is very essential in forest regions like Similipal because tourists, particularly foreign tourists enjoy the tribal village cultural folk dances, songs, eatables etc. and also equally participate in those cultural functions.

1.12 MISCELLANEOUS

- No provision for fixed and regular salary for tourist guides.
- Lack of proper and trained guides.
- Illiteracy in the area discourages interaction of locals with the tourists.
- Network facility is not available.
- Lack of job opportunities for locals creates disinterest among them.
- No jungle safari or sanctuary type arrangements.
- Poor people participation with government and non-government agencies.
- More of the animals are concentrated in South zone of the reserve, where entry is banned for visitors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Details regarding transportation and accommodation facility should be uploaded in the website.
- Officers and grass root level workers, well trained about various aspects of ecosystem as well as meeting the needs of the tourists should be engaged to take of the tourists visiting the area.
- Arrangements like installation of rope ways, use of elephants, high rising watch towers, etc. should be arranged so that the tourists can visit interior pockets without causing sound or disturbance to the wild animals.
- Organize some animal parks or safaris or sanctuaries inside the vast biosphere region and arrange facilities for the tourists to watch these wild lives in the vicinity.
- Primary health centers should be maintained, both for the tourists as well as, for the animals for their speedy recovery from diseases and accidental injuries. Alternatively, mobile medical units should run in the travelers route.
- The project authorities should make available their own vehicles for the tourists to travel within the forest areas and such vehicles should be sound proof and pollution free, using modern technology and gas fuel.
- An all weather route should be constructed and tourists should be allowed to visit the project area throughout the year.
- Specific picnic spots should be organized with facilities for cooking and rest shades, away from the wild animal zones which would attract students and office employees from far and near and the fees collected can be utilized for maintenance.
- The undue and tourist repulsing restrictions like eating of vegetarian food only, should not be imposed. The foreign tourists helping in income generation become highly dissatisfied for such unreasonable restriction.
- At present the tourists are left to attend the call of nature on the road sides, which is not liked by the affluent tourists. So the public convenience system should be installed and reasonable distance in the road sides.
- The local cultural troops should be allowed for their programmes at tourist centers without causing disturbance to the wild lives as far as possible. Such centers should also have shops for selling the local cottage industrial and handicraft products to the visitors.
- The number of N.G.Os should be allowed to work inside the project area for generating awareness not only among the villagers, but also the tourists for preventing over exploitation of the forest wealth, animal hunting, deforestation, preventing forest fire and smuggling out of timber, medicinal plants etc.
- Since there are large number of rare plants including medicinal and aromatic herbs, shrubs and trees, an ayurvedic and biochemical research center can be set up within the biosphere which can provide research facilities to the students, apart from providing pleasure to the inquisitive tourists.

CONCLUSION

Similipal Biosphere Reserve is a very unique ecosystem having rich diversities of floras and faunas and has innumerable tourist destinations, scenic beauties and natural tourist spots like waterfalls. Very beautiful place which can be developed into a ecotourism destination of international repute, and handsome amount of revenue can be earned. But due to various problems which we have already discussed in this article, the tourism industry has not flourished as expected in this area. Therefore, in this research work I have come up with various recommendations to develop this spot as an ecotourism destination, resulting in increase of tourist inflow. I have come up with a list of way, putting sustainable development as the key priority, without hampering the ecological sanctity of the area, resulting in making it a ecotourism hotspot of international repute.

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