

## Cultural Tourism: A critical building block towards sustainable environment in Sikkim

**Tanusree Chaudhuri**

Assistant Prof. in Geography, Vivek College of Commerce, Goregaon(West) Mumbai-400-062, Maharashtra, India.

### Abstract

Tourism is one of the most flourishing industries in the world. Because of its high forward and backward linkage and heavy employment generation capacity, government policies across the globe have focussed on this avenue. India with rich natural beauty and strong historical background aspire to be the hotspot in the international tourist map. Moreover the domestic tourist also contributes its tourism industry. In India the Himalayan belt has always been a favourite tourist destination. The unplanned heavy influx of tourist has converted favourable tourist destinations like Shimla, Darjeeling, Shillong to be urban centres with concrete jungle replacing natural forests. In search of alternative tourist destination, tourists are now flocking Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh. So these areas too face the threat of environmental degradation in near future.

This paper proposes to examine how rich tradition and culture of Sikkim can be used by the certain areas of Sikkim to maintain its own identity and resist environmental degradation and bring about sustainable environment.

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Tradition, Sikkim

### Introduction

The temporary short term movement of people to destination outside the place where they normally live and work is known as tourism. It not only covers travelling to a particular destination but also includes all activities undertaken during the stay. Today tourism is a major aspect of global economy. Be it developed or developing countries it provides increasing opportunity to participate as a host or guest in the socio-economic phenomena of the tourist location. Tourism industry has tremendous potential in the field of employment generation and foreign exchange earning capacity. Because of its high forward and backward linkage and heavy employment generation capacity, government policies across the globe have focussed on this avenue. But unplanned extensive tourism activity in a tourist destination affects the quality of resources be it physical or cultural which lead to a decline in the growth of tourism. In India the Himalayan belt has always been a favourite tourist destination. But the unplanned heavy influx of tourist has converted favourite destinations likes Shimla, Darjeeling, Shilong to be urban centres with concrete jungle replacing natural forest. In search of alternative tourist destination tourist are now flocking towards Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh etc. These areas too face the threat of environmental degradation in near future. Thus a tourist destination follows a life cycle; the boom and then bust.

## Objective of the study

Sikkim is now becoming one of the best hill destinations at the global level. Sikkim is now the only organic state of the country. This article examines how rich culture and tradition of Sikkim (A small Himalayan state of India) can be used in certain areas of the state to maintain its own identity and resist environmental degradation and bring about sustainable environment.

## Data Sources and Methodology

The study is based on the secondary data. The secondary data has been collected from the official website of Ministry of tourism, Govt of Sikkim and especially the policy related papers of Govt of Sikkim. To complete the study, information has been collected from books and other research related published works.

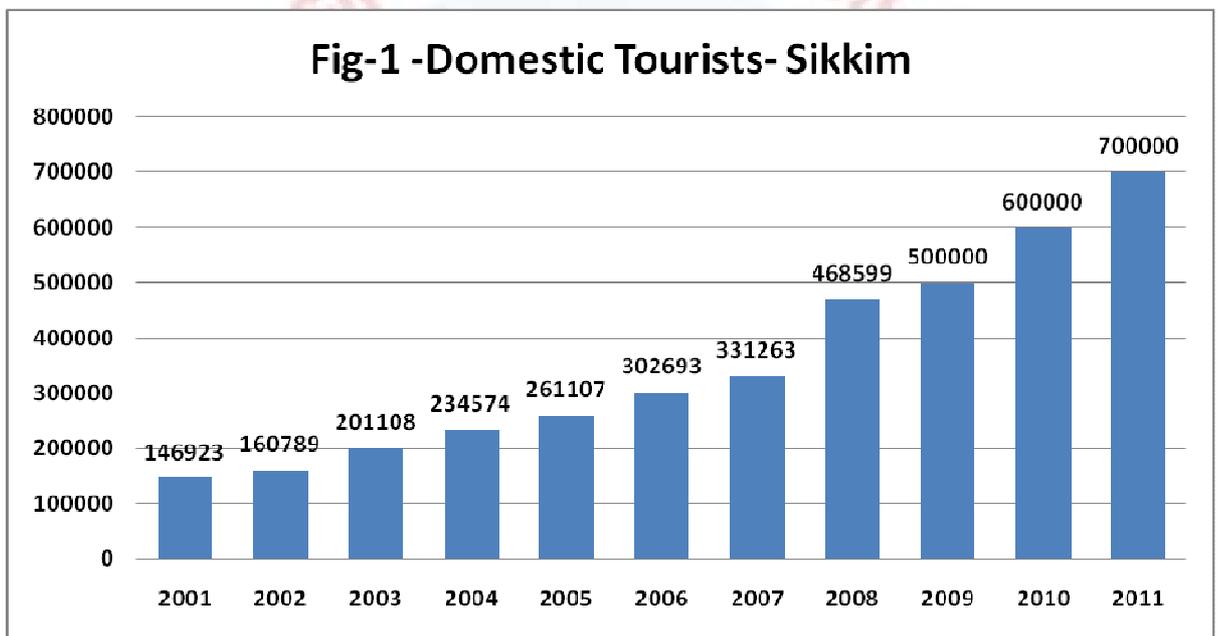
## Physio-Cultural Profile of Sikkim

Sikkim became a part of Indian Republic as the 22<sup>nd</sup> state on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1975. It is situated in the Eastern Himalayas, lying between 27° 5'N and 28° 9'N and 87° 59'E and 88° 56'E covering an area of 7096 km<sup>2</sup>. Sikkim is endowed with tremendous natural beauty with lush green valleys to snow capped mountain. It is located north of Darjeeling in West-Bengal, and shares international border with Bhutan in the east, China in the north and north east and Nepal in west. The state has twenty eight mountain peaks, twenty one glaciers, five hot springs, over 100 rivers and streams. Eight mountain passes connect the state to Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal (Chakrabarti, Anjan, 2009). Sikkim comprises of four districts viz, North, South, East and West. North district is the largest district which covers 60% of the total land area but contains only 8% of the total population. The density of population in this district is only 10/sq km. North district is inhabited mainly by Lepchas and Bhutias. South district is the smallest of all districts and is densely populated (175/sq km against a state average of 75/sq km in 2001). South district covers 10.57% of the total land area and 24% of the total population of Sikkim. South district is inhabited by Lepchas, Limbus, Bhutias and a very large number of migrant Nepalese. East Sikkim covers 954 sq. Kms and the density of population in East Sikkim is 187/person per Square km. East district inhabited by mainly Nepalis and followed by Lepchas and Bhutias. Many Marwaris and Bengalis are also resides in East district. West Sikkim covers around 1166 sq. Km of the total land and 84 persons live in per sq km.

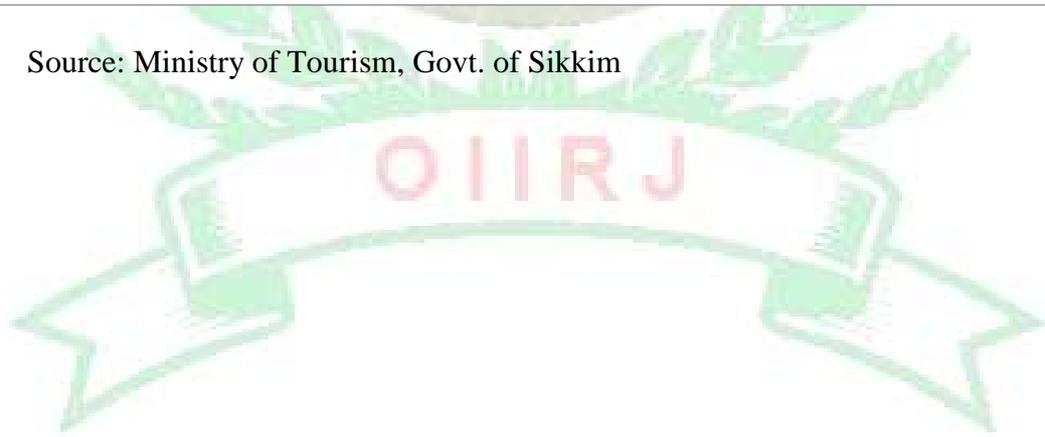
The culture that developed in Sikkim is the outcome of three distinct societies and two great religions. The mixing of indigenous Lepcha, Limbu customs with those of Buddhist Tibetan and Hindu traditions has given rise to a distinct culture that is precisely Sikkimese. The cultural activities of all these ethnic groups are heavily influenced by the religions they profess and the cultural activities of the Lepchas, Bhutias, Limbus and Nepalese have distinctive stamp of their root.

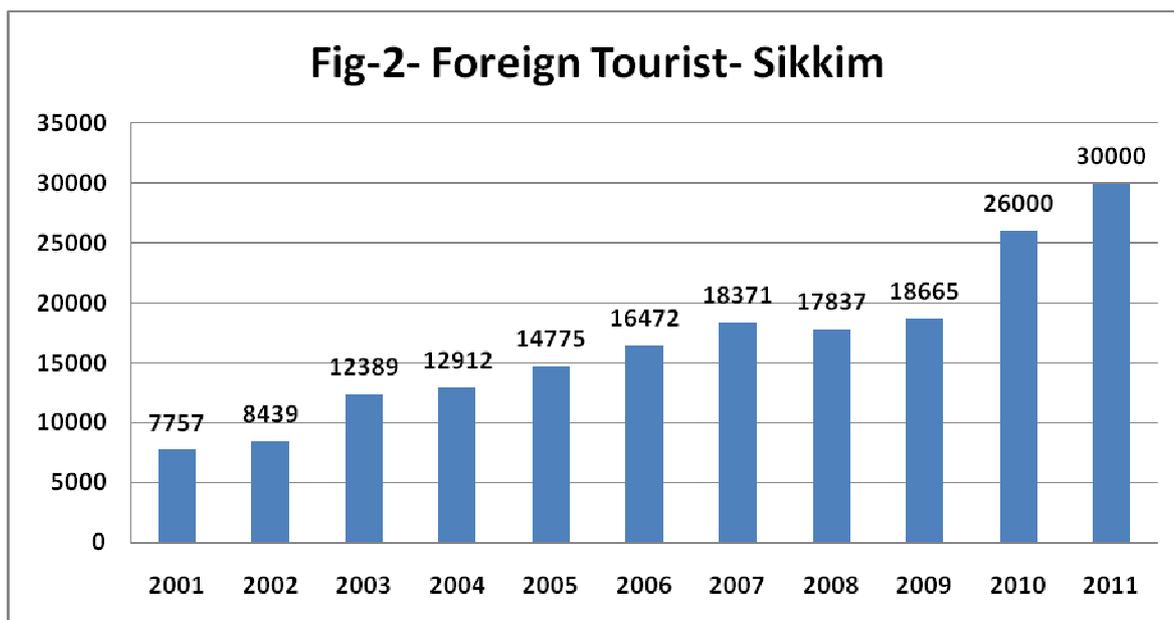
## Tourism scenario in Sikkim

The state has a rich biodiversity, scenic beauty, vast forest resources, medicinal plants, varied orchid, waterfalls, trekking trails, Buddhist monasteries, artefacts, fair and festivals of different community which helps the state to mark as famous tourist destination in India's map. Sikkim thus provide a wide range of tourism, from urban to rural tourism, nature to adventure tourism, heli to flori tourism, tea to spa tourism and obviously very rich cultural tourism. Tourism is one sector which has been unanimously identified by all concerned - economists, development planners, social scientists, environmentalists, politicians, government and the people - as one of the most important, suitable and most feasible industry for Sikkim - with tremendous potential for growth. Last nine years tourism in the state has come up in a large scale. The number of tourists both domestic and foreign is continuously increasing (Figure-1&2).



Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of Sikkim





Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of Sikkim

Tourism sector in Sikkim is one of the best and convenient platforms to educating people. It provides an opportunity for cross cultural communication and eliminates social barriers which help in the progress and harmony between nation and people. Tourism is opening new areas for national integration and international understanding. In Sikkim people are mainly trying to practice environmental friendly tourism in any field. Tourists are being taught to respect local culture and tradition. In Sikkim, many rural areas are untouched by tourists therefore many rural areas are having a huge scope to promote cultural tourism with rural tourism.

### **Cultural tourism in Sikkim**

Cultural tourism is “The practice of travelling to experience historic and cultural attraction to learn about a community’s culture in an educational and enjoyable way”. It is not a new concept as even in ancient times it has been a motivation for travel. Sikkim has immense potential to promote cultural tourism because of presence of wide variety of customs and traditions, indigenous knowledge, folklores. In Sikkim near about 200 monasteries which can be symbol of cultural heritage and lifestyle of the people, where they practice ancient ethnic rituals. Some of the unique monasteries in Sikkim are Pemayangtse Monastery, Rumtek Monastery, Tashiding Monastery, Khechopari Monastery, Do-drul Chorten (Buddhist Stupa) which are evaluated as monasteries of extraordinary and great importance and scattered different parts of Sikkim. Sikkim has its unique experience food habits life styles which they can sell to the whole world. Today a number of fairs and festivals are organized by all the ethnic communities (Lepchas, Bhutias, Limbus and Nepalese) in some parts of the Sikkim. Tourism department promote these festivals to highlight the rich culture of different communities to the domestic as well as foreign tourists. In west Sikkim since 2005, the ‘Hee Barmiok Tourism Development and Heritage Conservation Society’ organizes heritage festival every year in the month of May. The features of the festival are – exhibition of traditional items of domestic use, multi ethnic cultural dances by all ethnic communities, exhibition of traditional huts, traditional of dhinki

(traditional wooden husking machine), Jhato(stone grinder) traditional sugar extracting machine 'Kol', exhibition of traditional grain storage system, etc. The Hee-Barmiok village in west Sikkim has become a model village for cultural tourism for many tourists.

### **Result Discussion and Conclusion**

The feature of tourism in Sikkim is mostly created by domestic tourists and majority of the domestic tourists are from West-Bengal, followed by Northern and Southern States in India. Foreign tourists are mainly from U.K., followed by Germany, France, France, U.S.A, and Japan. Fig-1 and Fig-2 showed that numbers of domestic and foreign tourist are escalating in Sikkim because of its environmental friendly features. Sikkim has a unique cultural heritage. But till now the state could not project properly its rich culture to the world. It should not project cultural tourism only in one part of the state, the example of Hee-Barmiok cultural tourism can be adopted by all districts of Sikkim. For the success of cultural tourism fairs and festivals should be spread throughout the year. The relationship within culture, tourism and environment has received a great amount of attention throughout the world and is not an exception for Sikkim. With the proper promotion of culture and heritage, number of tourists obviously will increase, but that will affect the natural resources as well as tourism carrying capacity of the state. The intelligent tourism management can contribute in large manner to the protection and development of the physical environment and cultural resources of the region. It is therefore advisable that tourism development and sound environmental management should be integral concerns of Sikkim tourism developmental policies which will lead towards the sustainable environment.

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