

Exploring the Potential of Ecotourism in Bhudargad Tehsil, Kolhapur District, Maharashtra, India

Gayatri Dhananjay Jadhav^{1*}, Madhav B. Kumthekar², A.N. Swaminathen³

Abstract

Today, tourism is one of the main industries that produces income and jobs in the Indian economy. India is endowed with an abundant, naturally rich, and rich cultural legacy. India is a tourist haven because of its diverse biodiversity, topography, and geomorphology, which are found in many of its locations. The Kolhapur District of the Maharashtra region attracts many tourists because it is rich in historical sites, cultural offerings, and natural landscapes. Although India's tourism sector contributes significantly to the country's economy, several issues must be resolved. Conventional tourism has resulted in several issues such as increasing trash output, cultural erosion, overcrowding at popular places, and environmental deterioration. It is now imperative that tourism is developed without compromising the quality of the environment, as this leads to ecotourism. The true beauty of nature can be experienced through ecotourism. It emphasizes sustainable travel to preserved areas and provides an opportunity for tourists to reconnect with the environment. It entails going to locations close to the natural world without significantly altering local flora and animals. Thus, with the aid of sustainable tourism development, stronger family bonds have been established. Although Bhudargad, Tehsil in Kolhapur District, has a lot to offer tourists, it has not yet been thoroughly investigated as a potential tourism destination. The concept of ecotourism is examined in this study, highlighting the potential for ecotourism in Bhudargad, Tehsil, and Kolhapur districts.

Keywords: Ecotourism, tourism, ecotourism, biodiversity, natural landscape

INTRODUCTION

There are many tourist attractions in and around Kolhapur District. The Kolhapur District contains temples, ancient caves, forts, stone inscriptions, statues, and other remnants that reflect its long-lost

heritage. Likewise, the district is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, making it one of the 35 Biodiversity Hotspots globally [1]. The region falls in the Western Ghats and is interspersed with rivers, dams, lush thick forests, national forests, and wildlife sanctuaries. The landscape offers a range of peaks, valleys, waterfalls, rivers, and large trees, as well as a diverse array of plants and animals. Tourism is experiencing rapid growth in the Kolhapur region, but this growth has a detrimental impact on the local environment by increasing the number of recreational facilities and accommodation units [2]. Consequently, the ecosystem is being harmed, and wildlife and unique plants are being wiped out. Therefore, it is crucial to implement sustainable tourism development. This has given rise to ecotourism, which focuses on biodiversity as the primary resource.

*Author for Correspondence

Gayatri Dhananjay Jadhav
E-mail: thecreators14@gmail.com

¹Assistant Professor, College of Architecture, Shri Prince Shivaji Maratha Boarding House's (SPSMBH's), Kolhapur, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India

²Professor and Head, Department of Civil Engineering, Dr. Daulatrao Aher College of Engineering, Karad, Maharashtra, India.

³Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Adi Shankara Institute of Engineering and Technology, Kalady, Kerala, India.

Received Date: May 05, 2024

Accepted Date: July 11, 2024

Published Date: July 20, 2024

Citation: Gayatri Dhananjay Jadhav, Madhav B. Kumthekar, A.N. Swaminathen. Exploring the Potential of Ecotourism in Bhudargad Tehsil, Kolhapur District, Maharashtra, India. Research & Reviews: Journal of Ecology. 2024; 13(2): 8–13p.

Bhudargad is in the Kolhapur District of Maharashtra, India, and is considered a tehsil. Endowed with untapped natural resources, which is a fortunate occurrence. This area is still unspoiled and has enormous potential for development into an ecotourism centre. Owing to its virginity and the increasing economic growth of the area, this region has distinct potential.

Concept of Ecotourism

Ecotourism represents a novel perspective on tourism that aims to explore natural areas while respecting the cultural and natural heritage of the environment. It is important to maintain the ecosystem's integrity and ensure that no harm is caused to it in any way. In addition to that, ecotourism provides economic opportunities that benefit the local community and encourage them to preserve and protect natural resources.

Ecotourism can be defined as a type of tourism program. Its primary feature is the emphasis on the environment. In other words, they aim to promote conservation and sustainable development. To accomplish this, ecotourism aims to reduce its adverse effects on natural resources and local communities. It is nature-focused and environmentally sustainable, with education and interpretation playing a significant role while ensuring that local communities receive benefits. Ecotourism is a term used to describe a combination of these factors. If a journey fails to meet any of these elements, it cannot be classified as a true ecotourism experience [3].

Importance of the Study

In recent decades, there has been a disturbing trend in which the pursuit of material wealth and economic progress has come at the cost of exploiting nature in all forms. The current situation has resulted in a worldwide emergency that jeopardizes our planet's survival. Forests and biodiversity have been destroyed to make way for concrete structures, causing global warming and greenhouse gas effects. However, there is hope that people are beginning to realize the importance of preserving nature and taking responsibility for our actions [4]. All these factors highlight the need for ecotourism development in India. This is essential for the preservation of rich biodiversity, fragile ecosystems, and cultural heritage. Promoting responsible tourism practices that reduce environmental impacts will boost conservation efforts. By actively involving local communities in planning and management, ecotourism generates economic opportunities and empowers residents to participate and benefit from the tourism industry.

Bhudargad, situated amidst the picturesque hills of the Western Ghats, is a Tehsil of Kolhapur that boasts of natural beauty and has the potential to make it a sought-after ecotourism destination. The tahsil has a plethora of spots that can be developed and preserved, including forts like Bhudargad and Rangana fort, forests like Patgaon Vakighoil and Devrai-Pali, Patgaon lake and dam, historical places like Mouni *math*, temples or religious places like goddess Bhadrakali temple, and Balu Mama Temple Adamapur, as well as other important places like Chikewadi, and Shengaon. Moreover, Patgaon has the distinction of being the first honey village in Kolhapur District [5]. This tehsil began to encounter issues such as deforestation, excessive use of natural resources, unlawful hunting, rapid population growth, diminishing biodiversity, expansion of agriculture, and unemployment. As a result, we endeavored to propose a lasting solution to these problems through this project.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to identify the potential of Ecotourism in Bhudargad Tahasil in Kolhapur District.

METHODOLOGY

The study on ecotourism presented here relies on primary data, which involves visiting the relevant locations, taking photographs, and filling out questionnaires, as well as secondary data, such as reports, policies, and plan documents from the Government of India and Maharashtra, along with research

papers and related articles. The information was gathered from a range of sources, such as the official websites of the Government of India and Maharashtra, the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation, and the Ministry of Environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION - STUDY AREA: BHUDARGAD TEHSIL

Bhudargad, located in the Kolhapur District of the Indian state of Maharashtra, is a tehsil. stretching between 16°15'9.52" N and 74°8'27.56" E. The climate in Bhudargad (Figure 1) is very pleasant, and it is situated approximately 52 km from Kolhapur. The average annual precipitation in this region is approximately 5500 mm. Raja Bhoj II of the Shilahara Dynasty constructed the fort at Bhudargad. The most distinctive characteristic of the fort is that it offers unobstructed views in each direction. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj captured this fortification in 1667 and repaired it to be used as an officer's camp. The code for the Bhudargad Block (CD) was 04291 according to the 2011 census. The area of Bhudargad Tehsil is 636 square kilometers, and it is home to 150,368 residents, resulting in a population density of 236.6 people per square kilometer. There are around 33,654 households and 117 villages in the sub-district of Bhudargad Tehsil. Bhudargad is a renowned ecotourism destination that features a variety of plant and animal species, an ancient fort and architecture, and vast expanses of forests and deep valleys. The region is home to numerous ecotourism attractions that showcase its abundant flora, fauna, wildlife, and biodiversity.

Patgaon Village

Patgaon, a small village located at the heart of Kolhapur District, has been awarded the recognition of Best Tourism Village 2023 in the Bronze category. This hidden gem offers a serene environment where time seems to stand still, and the soul is serenaded by nature's symphony. Patgaon also referred

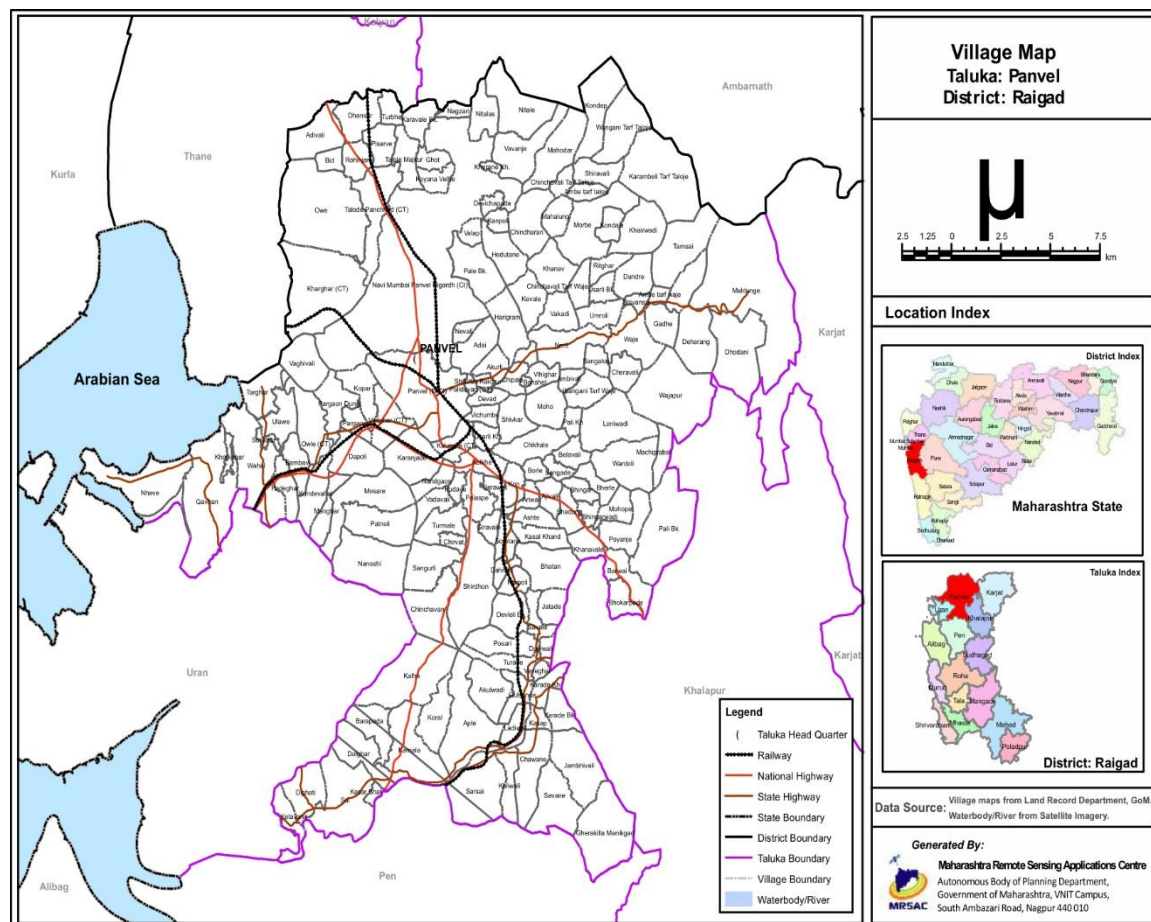


Figure 1. Location map of the Bhudargad Taluka study area.

to as the “Honey Village,” stands out as a destination that is more than just ordinary; it serves as a representation of sustainable agri-tourism. The village is now a prosperous center for beekeeping and honey manufacturing. The practice of beekeeping has been revitalized, and local farmers are now honored members of the Beekeepers’ Farmer Producer Company. Patgaon presents a distinctive mix of Konkani and Kolhapuri cultures, encouraging visitors to discover its abundant heritage and enjoy peaceful beauty [6].

Bhudargad

The fort of Bhudargad is approximately 63 km south of Kolhapur. The Bhudargad Fort, situated near Gargoti village, still has well-preserved remains. The fort houses a temple of Kalbhairava that attracts numerous tourists. Positioned at a high altitude, the fort offers panoramic views of the surrounding areas, including villages, rivers, and valleys. Bhudargad features various places of worship, such as Bhairavnath Temple, Ambabai Temple, and Cha. Shivaji Maharaj temple. Notably, the fort also includes a large palace constructed of laterite, which is a major attraction.

The fort has historical significance and is part of Swarajya. Rajaram Maharaj, the 2nd son of Cha. Shivaji Maharaj stayed in Bhudargad. The cave temple of Jakhubai is located in the southeastern part of the fort, and excavated steps lead to the ground. The fort spreads across 167 acres and is surrounded by a fortified wall approximately 4.5 km long. The white-water lake in Bhudargad is known as Dudhsagar because of the properties of the soil, which causes the water to turn white. The reflection of saffron shades at sunset in Dudhsagar Lake is another attraction that provides tourists with a peaceful and calming experience. The fort’s cool atmosphere, the chirping sound of birds, and overall tranquility provide a relaxing experience [7].

Rangana Fort

Rangana Fort is located deep within the core forests and on a peak. It is called Prasiddhagad in Maratha history and is located on the Sahyadri Mountain, on the border of the Kolhapur and Sindhudurg districts. The fort contained numerous water reservoirs. As per historical accounts, Shivaji Maharaj resided at this fort during his journey from Raigad to Kokan and Karnataka. Despite its strategic location, Rangana Fort remains unknown as it is constructed in an area that is not easily accessible. The dense forests and hills that surround the fort have kept their history hidden; thus, they have not received much attention. It is situated on Kokankada, which was a viewpoint of the Maratha Empire to watch out for attackers from the Kokan.

Patgaon Lake and Dam

Patgaon Dam comprises one main dam body and three saddle dams. The dams positioned on the saddle are located within the woodland behind the primary dam, resulting in an area with abundant flora, fauna, wildlife, and biodiversity. These saddle dams are located on the edge of the valley ranges of Sahyadri, which is also known as Kokankada. The valley is called “Shidichi Pach” locally and is geographically known as the Kurli River Valley. During the rainy season, the hills in the area are covered with thick fog and clear springs, adding to a pleasant atmosphere throughout the year. The dam attracts numerous visitors annually who come to enjoy cooking, taking strolls or hiking in the nearby forest, and experiencing serene, unpolluted, and untouched surroundings [8].

Historical Places Like Mouni Math

There is a *math* known as the Monastery of Mauni Maharaj, located in Patgaon. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is thought to have visited Mauni Maharaj at this *math* before heading to South Digvijaya. The history of Mouni Maharaj *math* also includes Chhatrapati Maharani Tarabai and Lokraja Shahu. Mauni Maharaj established a Chatrajagat Guru Peet and appointed Benadikar Patil as a Chatra Jagat Guru.

Goddess Bhadrakali Temple

An ancient temple was devoted to the goddess Bhadrakali. The temple is surrounded by lush greenery and houses the temple of Lord Hanuman with a deepstambh. Various religious rituals are performed

throughout the year at temples because of their religious significance. The goddess is considered self-manifested, which adds to its heritage value. Occasions like Navratri and Dussehra are celebrated with great enthusiasm at the temple [9].

Balu Mama Temple Adamapur

Balumama Temple is a pilgrimage site located in Adamapur, Kolhapur, Maharashtra. The temple is devoted to the revered saint, Balumama, who is worshipped by numerous devotees in Maharashtra and Karnataka. Balumama, also called Sant Balumama, is considered to possess divine powers and is highly respected as a protector and healer by its followers [10].

Shengaon

Shengaon, located in Bhudargad Taluka of Kolhapur District in Maharashtra State, India, is renowned for its oldest tile factory and as a place where mud refrigerators are made. It falls within the Desh or Paschim Maharashtra region.

Ekmukhi Datta Mandir

It is an amazing place on the bank of the river. You will forget everything and experience peace. The scenery around the place is also great. It is located very close to Kolhapur Gargoti Shengav and is an hourly drive from Kolhapur.

The region of Kolhapur houses Bhudargad, which has vast untapped potential for ecotourism, showcasing a mix of natural landscapes, diverse wildlife, and cultural legacies.

CONCLUSION

Bhudargad Tehsil has enormous potential for the development of ecotourism owing to its geological location, distinctive culture, and abundant biodiversity. Ecotourism helps protect the distinct plants and animals of the area while also creating jobs for people who live there. It also offers tourists the opportunity to explore natural and culturally rich destinations, including wildlife tours, food and beverage options, and lodging facilities, with sustainable development. The Bhudargad Taluka region is highly diverse in terms of climate and has rich flora and fauna, along with an ancient rock-cut cave architectural heritage, forts, ancient temples, and a rural culture. This region's varied character, originating from nature, provides it with a definite potential for ecotourism development, which can support the local economy and uplift the community.

Ecotourism is an effective way to minimize the carbon footprint and endorse the conservation of plants and animals. Moreover, it fosters a balance among environmental preservation, financial profitability, social justice, and cultural authenticity. These factors can tap into the unexplored ecotourism potential of Bhudargad, leading to an increase in the annual tourist rate and generating substantial revenue for the Indian economy. By capitalizing on these assets and implementing sustainable practices, Bhudargad can emerge as a premier ecotourism destination, benefiting both local communities and the environment.

REFERENCES

1. Babhulkar H. Eco-tourism: its sustainability in Maharashtra. Dogo Rangsang J. 2020;10:243–52.
2. Cabral C, Dhar RL. Ecotourism research in India: From an integrative literature review to a future research framework. J Ecotourism. 2020;19:23–49. DOI: 10.1080/14724049.2019.1625359.
3. Government of India. Eco tourism in India. (2024). Eco Tourism in India, Eco Tourism Guide, Nature Friendly Tourism, Ecotourism in India. Eco India. [online] Available from: <https://www.ecoindia.com/eco-tourism-in-india.html>
4. Government of India. Rural tourism. Available from: <https://www.rural.tourism.gov.in/Patgaon-Village-Bronze.html>.

-
5. Joshi M, Eco-Tourism – A Key to Protect the Biodiversity in Maharashtra. *Int J Innov Res Sci Eng Technol*. 2014;3:15167–74. DOI: 10.15680/IJIRSET.2014.0308015.
 6. Government of India. Rural tourism. (2023). Patgaon Village, Maharashtra. Rural Tourism. [online] Tourism.gov.in. Available from: <https://www.rural.tourism.gov.in/Patgaon-Village-Bronze.html>
 7. Savagaonkar S, producer. Bhudargad Fort [motion picture]. 2016.
 8. Collector Office, Kolhapur Tourism. (2021). Patgaon Dam, Bhudargad. [online] Available from: <https://www.kolhapurtourism.org/our-destination/patgaon-dam-bhudargad/>
 9. Patil P, director. Mouni Maharaj Math-Patgaon Dam. Hillstation in Kolhapur [motion picture]. 2021.
 10. Saint Balumama Mandir at Adamapur. (2024). About Shri Sant Balumama. Shri Balumama Mandir, Adamapur. [online] Available from: <https://www.balumamamandir.org/>