

Chapter 49

Conservation and Development of Pre–Historic Geosites and Tourism: A Synergistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

History has always been a perennial source of man's keen curiosity and great interest. An ever-growing significance of Geosites, museums, monuments and sites of archaeological importance, the world over, is evidence to it. The tremendously growing tourism industry, in fact, has its origin in this very fact. Of late, alongside the concept of theme parks, the innovative idea of exploring the important sites revealing specific events (climatic, tectonic, thermal, magmatic, geomorphic, extra-telluric etc.) through geological history or associated with the evolution of mankind and the present day biodiversity as well, through the earth history of 4.6 billion years and also using them as a potential tourist resource is steadily getting ground. If exploration of prehistoric geosites and development of important sites for information, education and awareness of people could be judiciously integrated with tourism promotion, it may have synergistic implications as the sites would act as a unique touristic appeal and the tourism itself will support the former concept financially and otherwise, as well. India, on account of its unique geological history vis-a-vis physiographic, biotic and geoheritage manifestations of varied geo-events and consequently meteorological differences prevailing in, is one of the richest repository of varied geo-heritage sites including bio-sites studded with record and documentation of evolutionary lineages essentially needed to unravel the history of earth and understanding the palaeo-prevailed environmental scenario

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-2469-5.ch049

through earth's history and intensity of natural processes operating upon ever since the earth's origin. The present paper aims at comprehensively examining the prehistoric geosites in India, in an attempt to identify some of the areas with richer heritage in this regard. Some of the geologically more important sites with rich geoheritage and also prominent areas of tourism promotion are discussed in this paper, so as to conserve this invaluable treasure of earth history in the today's era of squeezing space on the face of rapid Industrialization and infra-structural developmental activities.

INTRODUCTION

A glimpse of disposition of continental land masses and oceanic water bodies invokes man's curiosity as to why and how the prevailing distribution has been attained through the Earth's history of approximately 4.5 billion years. The quest to know the history of the Planet Earth, we are inhabiting in, become more pronounced when an individual come across fascinating rock types and minerals varying from one place to another, picturesque sites, lofty mountain chains, deep gorges, peculiar geologic structures, mega and microbiological remains in the sedimentary rocks, glacially ravaged terrains, volcanic eruptions etc. each entombed with glorifying tourist appeal and ready to reveal volumes of information as to what has happened in the earth history. All these geological features acquire significance due to aesthetic appreciation of public in general and tourists in particular. Also, they act as natural laboratories of geological education and environmental awareness with attendant parameters of their being at place and means of perpetuation of knowledge and education to professionals, students, general public and the tourists as well. Realising the importance and significance of geoheritage sites, the knowledge and natural history information these geosites are endowed with, the aesthetic beauty, monumental and locale attraction they have for the national and international tourists with hidden and evident huge potential for tourism promotion, time now warrants a close coordination of Geological Survey organisations, Geoscience and Tourism professionals in universities, Tourism organizations, students and general public at the locale of particular geoheritage to come together to conserve and develop geoheritage sites to promote geotourism and boost up the socio-economic spectrum of local communities to facilitate the growth of tourism industry and develop local entrepreneurship in such areas.

Concerted efforts in this regard have already been made at global level as the 'Global Indicative List of Geological Sites' (GILGES) was established in early 1990's by UNESCO, the IUCN and International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). As a follow up of the IUGS, the Geo-site Working Group (GWG) was created in 1993. The GWG is poised to compile the Global Geo-site list in order to construct data base of Geosites to use it as inventory in furthering the cause of geoheritage conservation the world over. In 1995, the GILGES was replaced by IUGS with a more rigorous and comprehensive scheme known as Global Geosites which was subsequently endorsed by UNESCO. The IUGS meeting 2001 (Hydrabad) Minutes do mention that "an IUGS/IUCN joint proposal to UNESCO for identification of Geosites / World Heritage Sites received the attraction of GWG and the concordant between IUGS and IUCN on geological input in the World Heritage Series was finalized.

In view of the fact that many important sites are being destroyed due to human's interference and developmental activity, all the stakeholders of geotourism industry, geoscientists, NGO's and students need to act as an exponent that the Earth Heritage Sites are globally part of an integrated concept of protection, education and sustainable development envisioned and formulated by UNESCO.

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