



AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE TOURISM APPROACH FOR NARSOBA WADI, A RELIGIOUS DESTINATION IN WESTERN MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract:

Narsobawadi, located in the western region of Maharashtra, is a prominent religious destination known for its spiritual significance and cultural heritage. The continuous influx of pilgrims and tourists has led to increasing environmental pressures, including waste generation, water pollution, and strain on local resources. This study aims to explore and promote environmentally sustainable tourism practices at Narsoba Wadi by assessing current tourism patterns, community involvement, and ecological challenges. Using a mixed-method approach that includes field observations, surveys, and stakeholder interviews, the research identifies key areas where sustainable strategies can be implemented. These include waste management systems, eco-friendly infrastructure development, renewable energy use, and community-based tourism initiatives. The findings highlight the importance of integrating local participation and traditional ecological knowledge in planning and management to achieve long-term sustainability. The study concludes that adopting an environmentally sustainable tourism model not only preserves the ecological integrity of Narsoba Wadi but also enhances visitor experiences and supports the socio-economic well-being of the local community.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism; Religious Tourism; Environmental Management; Narsoba Wadi; Western Maharashtra; Community Participation; Eco-friendly Practices

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Introduction:

Tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic sectors contributing to the global and national economy. However, unregulated tourism often leads to adverse environmental impacts such as pollution, habitat destruction, and resource depletion. Sustainable tourism, therefore, emphasizes balancing economic growth with environmental protection and socio-cultural preservation.

Narsoba Wadi, situated at the confluence of the Krishna and Panchganga rivers in Kolhapur district,

Maharashtra, is a revered pilgrimage site associated with Shri Dattatreya and Shri Narasimha Saraswati. Over the years, the increasing number of visitors has created challenges related to waste disposal, water management, and infrastructure pressure. This study seeks to develop an environmentally sustainable tourism framework tailored to the ecological and cultural context of Narsoba Wadi.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the existing tourism practices and their environmental impacts at Narsoba



Wadi.

2. To identify major ecological challenges arising from religious tourism.
3. To propose sustainable tourism strategies focusing on environmental management, community involvement, and eco-friendly infrastructure.
4. To promote awareness among stakeholders for adopting green tourism practices.

Study Area:

Narsoba Wadi is located approximately 45 km from Kolhapur city in Western Maharashtra. The site lies near the confluence of two major rivers, providing a serene natural setting that attracts pilgrims throughout the year. The area hosts temples, dharmashalas, shops, and food stalls catering to tourists. However, the lack of systematic waste management and sanitation facilities poses significant threats to the local environment and river ecosystem.

Methodology:

A mixed-method research design was adopted:

• Primary Data:

Collected through field surveys, on-site observations, and interviews with local residents, shopkeepers, temple authorities, and tourists.

• Secondary Data:

Gathered from government reports, academic literature, and environmental policy documents.

• Data Analysis:

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify key sustainability issues, while quantitative data (such as visitor numbers, waste volumes, etc.) were summarized using descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion:

1. Environmental Challenges

1. **Solid Waste Management:** Pilgrims generate significant quantities of plastic waste, food leftovers, and packaging materials. Absence of

proper collection and segregation leads to river pollution.

2. **Water Pollution:** Ritual bathing and direct disposal of offerings into the river contribute to water contamination.
3. **Infrastructure Pressure:** Unplanned construction around the temple area disrupts natural drainage and alters the landscape.
4. **Energy Consumption:** Heavy reliance on conventional energy sources increases carbon footprint.

2. Community and Stakeholder Involvement

Local residents play a crucial role in maintaining the site's cleanliness and guiding pilgrims. However, awareness of sustainable tourism principles remains low. Strengthening community participation through training and incentive programs can improve long-term outcomes.

3. Sustainable Tourism Strategies

- **Waste Management:** Introduce segregation bins, composting units, and awareness drives for “zero-waste pilgrimage.”
- **Eco-friendly Infrastructure:** Promote green building materials, solar lighting, and rainwater harvesting in dharmashalas and public areas.
- **Water Management:** Install bio-toilets and ensure wastewater treatment before discharge.
- **Renewable Energy Use:** Encourage solar energy for temple lighting and public facilities.
- **Community-based Tourism:** Empower local people through employment in eco-tourism activities, handicrafts, and guiding services.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Develop educational materials and signboards to promote cleanliness and respect for the environment.

Conclusion:

The study emphasizes that religious destinations like Narsoba Wadi can evolve as models of environmentally responsible tourism through



integrated planning, strong community involvement, and adoption of sustainable technologies. By aligning spiritual tourism with ecological consciousness, Narsoba Wadi can preserve its sacred environment while enhancing the socio-economic welfare of the local population. The proposed strategies can serve as a replicable model for other pilgrimage centers in India facing similar challenges.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a **Local Tourism Management Committee** including temple authorities, government representatives, and residents.
2. Enforce **environmental regulations** for waste disposal and construction.
3. Promote **eco-certification** for local businesses following green practices.

4. Integrate **sustainability education** into pilgrim outreach programs.
5. Regularly monitor **river water quality** and environmental health indicators.

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