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**UNREGULATED TOURISM AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL
CONSEQUENCES: IMPACTS ON HILL STATIONS AND WILDLIFE
IN TAMIL NADU**

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ABSTRACT

The right combination of management methods makes tourism beneficial for everyone. The lack of regulations makes tourism transform into an unseen enemy that harms ecologically sensitive areas. This study performs an extensive examination of uncontrolled tourism and excessive resort building impacts on the environment specifically in the hill stations of Tamil Nadu. This study focuses on ecological protection and environmental regulations to disclose development-related misuse of Ooty and Kodaikanal and Valparai and the Nilgiris natural areas. The research investigates the mounting pressures that wildlife already faces as they continue moving toward extinction. This study analyzes tourism's actual financial losses through courtroom evaluations and onsite monitoring as well as furnishes responsible alternatives to achieve development- conserve equilibrium.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism functions as an established means which stimulates economic expansion together with cultural cooperation. The charming destination of Tamil Nadu has experienced growing tourism over multiple years due to its attractive hill regions alongside its diverse natural resources. The price of this development constitutes a hidden burden that policymakers together with public opinion neglect to analyze. The natural environment faces an increasing danger from uncontrolled tourism activities specifically within ecologically sensitive areas. Wild forest encroachment together with waste contamination is creating extensive and destructive damage through unplanned tourism activities.

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The statistical data can be found in the Ministry of Tourism Annual Report (2022-2023) together with Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation reporting hill station tourist numbers.

During the past decade all four Indian destinations Ooty, Kodaikanal, Yercaud and Valparai have experienced significant rises in their visitor numbers. The high rate of development includes an exponential growth of resorts and homestays joined by commercial establishments. The new construction projects fail to undergo necessary environmental assessments. Deforestation at a large scale and unlawful land transformation and wildlife corridor intrusions have turned into frequent occurrences. Endemic species face severe threats because their vulnerable natural habitats operate at maximum capacity.

The study relies heavily on references drawn from Nilgiris District Collector's Land Use Reports (2019-2022) alongside the Wildlife Institute of India's report about habitat fragmentation in Tamil Nadu hill regions.

The paradox stands out clearly since everything that draws tourists to such places vanishes because of the ongoing tourism explosion. Lakes have been drained while forest routes have become waste storage and the peaceful hill slopes now produce construction sounds and vehicle noises. These shifts affect the environment as well as cultural aspects in the region. Progress-related activities force Indigenous inhabitants to relocate from their traditional lands while simultaneously subjugating them through exclusionary practices.

The research by the Centre for Environment and Development in Kerala (2020) examines tourism-related tribal displacement and the Forest Rights Act from 2006 provides information about community rights and claims.

Current tourism policies exist but their actual implementation is uncertain. The lack of valid Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) allows many resorts along with construction projects to continue their operation while buffer zones protecting forest areas face inevitable violations without effective legal enforcement. Environmental laws no longer match the needs of their practical field-level implementation.

The Footnote uses material from EIA Notification 2006 (as edited) alongside findings from CAG Reports on Nilgiris and Dindigul districts.

Tamil Nadu unregulated tourism became my research subject because I study environmental law while being enthusiastic about wildlife conservation. Tourism should proceed toward sustainability which joins development projects with environmental protection. The primary goal of this document involves analyzing current legislation with a specific focus on its weak

points while recommending specific welfare-related reforms connected to constitutional commitments and environmental ethics.

The references in this footnote include Article 48A and Article 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution as well as the Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India from the Ministry of Tourism (2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Waste management stands as one major issue among others. Tourism without proper regulation has produced greater amounts of waste in Tamil Nadu's mountain destinations. Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) recorded through their report that numerous tourist sites lack effective waste management systems. Waste containers emptied into neighboring rivers and lakes along with forest areas result in more pollution of sensitive environmental systems. Environmental pollution worsens because Tamil Nadu lacks effective waste recycling systems while it displays improper plastic waste disposal methods.

In their article "Tourism and Waste Management Challenges in Hill Stations" (2021) the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board provides evidence about hill station waste management and "Impact of Waste on Nilgiris Ecosystem" by CSE (2020) presents additional data to support the analysis.

Wildlife encounters multiple serious threats caused by uncontrolled tourism activities. The Wildlife Institute of India conducted research which established how tourism-based resorts together with roads divide wildlife corridors throughout the Western Ghats region. The disruption of species ranges and escalating peace conflicts exist between wild animals and people most notably involving elephants and tigers. According to the report wildlife behavior exhibits negative changes because of expanding resorts which now reside in protected areas where vulnerable species receive direct harm.

Footnote: Wildlife Institute of India, "Habitat Fragmentation in Tamil Nadu's Hill Stations" (2020); "Human-Wildlife Conflict in the Nilgiris" by The Wildlife Protection Society of India (2021).

The research on sustainable tourism demonstrates that eco-tourism creates possibilities but its actual application remains restricted throughout Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) began operating eco-tourism projects in the Nilgiris and Kodaikanal but their efforts remain limited to isolated areas instead of influencing the entire tourism industry of Tamil Nadu. UNWTO states that properly controlled eco-tourism

operations bring economic rewards combined with environmental protection. Large-scale implementation of such models remains rare because there are insufficient infrastructure together with minimal awareness and weak regulatory oversight in place.

Footnote: UNWTO, "Sustainable Tourism and Eco-Tourism Models" (2021); Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation, "Eco-Tourism Projects in the Nilgiris" (2020).

The scholarly research demonstrates that regulation and management of tourism in Tamil Nadu hill stations remains poorly addressed. Environmental destruction spreads throughout the uncontrolled expansion of tourism which simultaneously produces economic and cultural benefits. Tourism continues to demand urgent policy reforms and advancement of waste management together with water conservation and wildlife protection programs to reduce environmental destruction caused by tourism according to existing research.

Footnote: "Sustainable Tourism in the Nilgiris" by Tamil Nadu Department of Tourism (2021); "Tourism and Environmental Degradation in India's Hill Stations" by Indian Institute of Public Administration (2020)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

An analytical qualitative study utilizes doctrinal research of law alongside empirical observations to investigate its subject matter. The research draws its base from a mix of secondary records that include laws together with government reports and scholarly publications and news info as well as district-level statistics. Investigating the legal structure of tourism and environmental conservation enables this paper to study actual implementation practices (or failures) in Tamil Nadu's mountain resort areas.

Footnote: Raj, S. (2020). Qualitative Research Methods in Environmental Law. National Law University Publications.

The research conducts case-based assessment through an examination of Ooty, Kodaikanal, Yercaud and Valparai regions. These real-life scenarios demonstrate changes in the environment together with forest trespass and wildlife corridor disturbance caused by tourism expansion. Evidence for this study comes from two government sources consisting of Nilgiris Land Use Reports and Wildlife Institute of India reports.

This study relies on documented reports from Nilgiris District Collector, Land Use Reports (2019–2022) as well as Habitat Fragmentation in Tamil Nadu's Hill Stations published by Wildlife Institute of India (2020).

The research approach heavily relies on legal and policy assessment. Research focuses on the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986 and incorporates the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 together with the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. Organizations perform official audits of EIA enforcement and local implementation using CAG findings and other reports.

Footnote: The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980; The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; CAG Reports on Dindigul and Nilgiris (2020).

The research analyzes both legislative measures and assesses policy documents including the Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India and Tamil Nadu's tourism master plans. The documents illustrate the touristic planning model that diverges from actual operational realities.

Footnote: Ministry of Tourism (2021), Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India; Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation, Hill Station Policy Documents

The methodology aligns with personal interests because this research connects emotionally to the ecological systems and cultural history of Tamil Nadu as both a wildlife enthusiast and environmental law student. The analysis shows objective objectivity but stays dedicated to protecting ecological equity.

The writer's observations together with their academic principles and wildlife conservation beliefs form the basis of this examination.

ANALYSIS:

Tourism under controlled regulations becomes beneficial. The boundary between development and destruction rapidly erodes in the Tamil Nadu hill stations of Ooty, Kodaikanal, Yercaud and Valparai. Multiple resorts currently operate in sensitive areas while they break zoning laws to turn natural areas into new commercial properties. The local level enforcement and corruption lead to frequent buffer zone violations because of insufficient oversight.

The 2020 Comptroller and Auditor General of India report about Nilgiris district violations is referenced in addition to Section 3 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

Poor coordination exists between environmental departments and tourism departments at their operational level. The Tourism Department seeks growth expansion but the Forest and Environment Departments suffer from shortages of staff and funding constraints. Poor visitor management combined with weak monitoring of illegal land use violations forces the departments to fail in protecting wildlife habitat.

The information in this footnote derives from Tamil Nadu State Tourism Policy (2020) as well as MoEFCC Budget Report (2023) and State Forest Department reports regarding man-animal conflict in hill areas.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) mechanism operates as the initial safeguard but officials use it merely as a procedural document. The EIA process fails to monitor numerous small-to-medium resort projects due to gaps in the 2006 notification system. Large-scale projects delegate their assessment task to private consultants who carry personal stakes into their evaluation methods.

The Footnote draws from EIA Notification 2006, Para 7 along with the CSE (Centre for Science and Environment) study on flawed EIAs in Indian hill regions (2021)

The destruction of biodiversity stands out as the most remarkable outcome. Visitors who explore Tamil Nadu's hill stations must be cautious because these areas protect three endangered species: Nilgiri Tahr, Slender Loris, and Lion-tailed Macaque. The development of tourism infrastructure fragments their habitats which forces these animals to inhabit human settlements where they face more conflicts that result in death. Tourism landscaping activities result in native floral species extinction because they are replaced with foreign ornamental plants that are used to decorate vacation locations.

Relevant sources include Wildlife Institute of India's Annual Biodiversity Assessment (2022) together with data from IUCN Red List regarding endangered species in Tamil Nadu.

Water crisis is another fallout. Most hotels and resorts draw groundwater excessively from borewells without being held responsible for their actions. Summer tourist periods force the local residents to experience water supply scarcity. These regions naturally store water but the ability to hold water drops because of deforestation and cementing activities.

The report from India Water Portal (2022) focuses on water pressure from tourism in hill stations and users should consult the CGWB (Central Ground Water Board) Tamil Nadu status paper.

Solid waste is piling up. Plastic waste along with glass bottles together with food packets has led to environmental contamination throughout forests and river systems and slope areas. Single-use plastic possesses a limited ban within Tamil Nadu yet its enforcement remains inadequate. Waste incineration operations in Yelagiri and Kotagiri hill station areas have generated air pollution problems in these vulnerable environmental systems.

The policies regarding plastic bans in Tamil Nadu can be found in G.O. No. 84, 2018 together with the CPCB reports on non-biodegradable waste distributions in hill areas.

Tourists often unknowingly—or knowingly—break eco-rules. The pursuit of selfies inside restricted forest areas together with loud noise production and the disposal of waste in sacred groves has become common practice. The Forest Department struggles to supervise all tourist activities because its personnel are minimal and there are no live monitoring tools in place.

The reference for this information comes from the Forest Department manual (2020) and TN Forest Cell reports on Misconduct by Tourists in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve.

The traditional culture alongside tribal heritage continues to disappear into oblivion. The forest guardians who previously protected their land now face two options: loss of their land or forced industrialization. Non-original communities operate most homestays within tourism industries but first inhabitants face challenges entering the market because tourists view them solely as cultural exhibits.

The discussion refers to the provisions of the Forest Rights Act 2006 regarding community rights while drawing information from research conducted by Keystone Foundation about tribal livelihoods in the Nilgiris region.

Legally, the situation is complex. The Madras High Court has received multiple PILs targeting the unauthorized building activities happening in hill station areas. The delay in executing stay orders issued by courts allows builders to continue conducting activities that harm the environment. Although laws exist they have an ineffectual enforcement mechanism. Footnote: Refer to Madras HC ruling in P.S. Sathyapriya v. The cases involving Ooty and Kodaikanal construction matter alongside P.S. Sathyapriya v. State of Tamil Nadu (2021) became part of the alliance filed as public interest litigation in the Madras High Court.

There are positive signs. The Forest Department runs sustainable eco-tourism parks and Valparai restricts traffic which demonstrates that proper management systems can succeed. The current efforts require consolidation into official amendments to laws and policy reforms.

Footnote: Refer to Tamil Nadu Forest Department's 2023 annual report and case study of Valparai Eco-Zone vehicular restriction (2022).

FINDINGS:

1. The quick growth of Tamil Nadu hill station tourism has produced significant environmental deterioration throughout the region. Environmental damage in Tamil Nadu manifests mainly through heavy deforestation combined with water shortages and air contamination and habitat injuries to wildlife populations. Recent reports from the Tamil

Nadu Forest Department reveal that major sections of protected forest land have been used for resort development without following required Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and they disregarded the sensitive state of the local ecosystem.

The document issued by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (2022) addresses tourism's ecological consequences (also referred to in "Tourism and Deforestation in the Nilgiris" by The Hindu (2021))

2. Tourism activities in the popular hill stations of Ooty and Kodaikanal have caused mounting strain on local water resources since tourism has been unregulated. Tourist resorts in many areas make water scarcity worse through improper water management systems. The excessive pumping of groundwater has caused lakes and streams in the area to show reduced water availability. State Water Resources Department reports that these regions encounter overwhelmed water supply conditions which become more severe during peak tourist periods.

The reports from the State Water Resources Department on Tamil Nadu hill station water use in 2021 have been used while consulting the findings presented in "Water Scarcity in Kodaikanal: Causes and Consequences" by Kodaikanal Environmental Conservation Trust in 2020.

3. Unregulated tourism expansion has caused substantial pollution as it produces elevated amounts of solid waste throughout different regions. Research conducted by the Nilgiris District Administration reveals that most resorts alongside tourist facilities in the area lack appropriate waste handling procedures. The current waste management practices generate severe pollution problems which mainly affect local rivers and lakes because treatment systems are absent.

This information was obtained from Nilgiris District Administration Study on Waste Management in Hill Stations (2022) and additionally aligned with "Impact of Waste on the Nilgiris Ecosystem" by CSE (2021).

4. The expansion of tourism facilities has produced major negative impacts on wildlife which can be observed particularly in the Western Ghats region. The situation has worsened because protected areas are under threat from encroachers together with the fragmentation of natural habitats. The construction of residential housing areas has generated more conflict between humans and wild animals who now frequently appear in urban zones.

Data from the Wildlife Institute of India about Habitat Fragmentation in Tamil Nadu's Hill Stations came out in 2020 yet another important source comes from The Wildlife Protection Society of India with their work "Human-Wildlife Conflict in the Nilgiris" in 2021.

5. The number of sustainable tourism practices in Tamil Nadu remains minimal as uncontrolled construction projects continue to dominate. The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation promotes eco-tourism initiatives which demonstrate responsible tourism practices however these projects are restricted in their application areas and achievements.

The initiatives of the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation Eco-Tourism Projects are mentioned in the cited sources (2021) together with "Sustainable Tourism in the Nilgiris" (2020) by Tamil Nadu Department of Tourism.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.Environmental Impact Assessment procedures need stronger enforcement for all hill station tourist infrastructure through an enhanced rigorous and open examination approach. Local tribal communities together with conservationists must have open access to public consultations about every project.

The procedure for public hearings is established through EIA Notification 2006 under the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 and its newest amendment from 2021.

2. A state-level regulatory authority should be developed as the Hill Station Development Regulatory Authority to monitor tourist projects in hill stations by offering approval while maintaining the ability to suspend or ban eco-unfriendly initiatives.

Footnote: Refer to the model of the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Board Act, 2010 for an example of an integrated approach.

3. Each hill station should establish its maximum tourist capacity through an eco-tourism approach instead of welcoming masses of visitors. Enable certified eco-stays while promoting the management of homestays through indigenous communities together with experiences that both protect nature and offer educational opportunities instead of destructive actions.

This note derives from guidelines presented in the Tamil Nadu Tourism Policy (2020) – Eco-tourism together with World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) sustainable tourism recommendations.

4. The construction of resorts should remain prohibited in areas adjacent to protected spaces. Through legal measures state agencies need to establish and protect wildlife corridors which maintain safe pathways for animals especially for elephants leopards and gaurs.

Footnote: Refer to Wildlife Institute of India's "Right of Passage" report on elephant corridors and National Wildlife Action Plan 2017–2031.

5. Approximately 365 tribal communities should have an active role in managing tourism activities together with forest conservation and waste handling systems. Traditional community knowledge serves as an unexploited reservoir of sustainable living knowledge that produces outcomes that unite conservation efforts with community advancement.

The note includes both the Forest Rights Act 2006 and various Keystone Foundation case studies about Toda community involvement.

6. Tourists need to receive eco-awareness education which carries serious financial consequences if they disregard nature regulations or break into prohibited zones or use prohibited materials in delicate environmental areas. The tourism departments need to coordinate their efforts with forest units and law enforcement teams.

The visitor guidelines for protected areas of the Tamil Nadu Forest Department should be referred to together with Section 51 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 for understanding penalties.

7. Sustainable Infrastructure: Promote green building norms for all new tourism projects. The development should minimize road widening initiatives and lower concrete quantities and support rainwater collection systems and solar power adoption in addition to promoting organic waste management practices.

Access this information through Verified References to the Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) established by the Ministry of Environment and to green building guidelines defined under IGBC standards.

Conclusion:

Unmanaged tourism activities in Tamil Nadu's hill regions and wildlife areas no longer exists as a distant environmental threat but rather become a fast-expanding tangible problem

bringing enduring damage. Observations show that the environment faces measurable and worrying consequences including forest decline along with threatened wild animals in addition to water sources contamination. This research validates my commitment to environmental protection and wildlife preservation because inaction at present may destroy Tamil Nadu's ecological heritage for generations.

The reports on Western Ghats forest cover reduction can be found in Forest Survey of India Report (2023) together with the Ecological Fragility Zones information from MoEFCC.

Economic advancement started with this instrument but it developed into two conflicting elements. Unmanaged construction along with commercial pursuits and administrative failures have resulted in excessive hills development thus causing biodiversity destruction and permanent impacts on ecosystems. Tourism plays an essential role especially for local community livelihoods although it should support both environmental principles and existing laws.

The Environmental Protection Act 1986 along with the 2021 decision from the National Green Tribunal specified unauthorized constructions in Kodaikanal.

The shola forests and montane grasslands together with the endemic Nilgiri Tahr species face declining conditions because tourist infrastructure continues to expand while enforcement stays inadequate in Tamil Nadu. The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve along with other protected areas receives encroachment and illegal actions which developers conceal beneath the guise of development despite their legal protection status. The need exists now to create distinct boundaries between promoting and preserving environmental conservation.

The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, Sections 18 and 35 are supported by the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve's status report from Wildlife Institute of India (2022).

KEYWORDS

- Tourism in Tamil Nadu
- Unregulated tourism
- Hill stations
- Environmental degradation
- Ecologically sensitive areas
- Wildlife conservation
- Habitat fragmentation
- Eco-tourism

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Sustainable tourism
- Waste management
- Water crisis
- Forest Rights Act
- Tribal displacement
- Legal framework in tourism
- Environmental laws in India
- Climate ethics
- Tourism-related pollution
- Development vs. conservation
- Human-wildlife conflict

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