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AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF MATHERAN - HILL STATION

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Abstract

Matheran is a very picturesque hill station which is located very close to Mumbai and it is a municipal council area in Karjat Tahsil in the Raigad district of Maharashtra. Matheran is one of the smallest hill stations in India. It is located on the Western Ghats at a height of 800 m above sea level. Matheran is declared by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India as an eco-sensitive region. It has a small railway route known as 'The Matheran' which was constructed in 1907 by Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy and covers a distance of around 20 km. Matheran was recognised as a hill station by district collector of Thane Mr. Hugh Poyntz Malet in May 1850. Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay later started the work for its development as a future hill station. Matheran was developed as a resort by British Government to tackle the summer heat. Matheran has not progressed much as compared to other hill stations of Maharashtra. Many difficulties are restricting its development. This research paper studies the history of development of Matheran as a hill station and also gives some suggestions for it to come up as an important tourist destination. .

Keywords: Picturesque, Hill Station, Western Ghats, eco-sensitive, Hill Railway, etc.

Introduction:

Tourism is recognised as a major growth engine of the economy of any nation. Several countries are taking the advantage of their tourism potential and make it competent to survive with the global economy. As this tourism industry is growing very fast, still there are tourism potential resources like natural beauty, abundant natural resources, rich and cultural heritage and many other tourism attractions. It is also an important role of local people, tourists, government to take the initiative to protect the natural surroundings, preserve the heritage property for the sustainable development of tourism.

In this paper presentation, I have selected the history of development of Matheran as a hill station, which is a very scenic and beautiful hill station in Raigad district of Maharashtra. It is one of the eco-sensitive hill stations. Many tourists visit Matheran because it is nearest hill station to Mumbai and Pune and also gives some suggestions for it to come up as an important tourist destination.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To Study the History and reasons for development of Matheran.
- 2) To find out the scope of some tourism potential activities and different problems faced in the study area.

Research Methodology

The researcher study is based on secondary data.

Maharashtra and MTDC:

Maharashtra is the third leading state and second in positions of its proportion of population in India. It is having scenic mountains, beautiful hills, rivers and dense forests. Maharashtra is well known for hill stations like Matheran, Mahabaleswar, Pachgani, Lonavala and Khandala. Maharashtra has unique development of education, industries, IT, culture, religious, history, sports, agriculture and natural endowments. Maharashtra has a growing potential for tourism development. Therefore, Maharashtra government formed MTDC under Companies Act 1956. in 1975. The MTDC is a nodal organization for promotion and development of tourism sector in Maharashtra. The MTDC makes the tourism schemes of history, heritage, and culture, organize fairs, and creates market opportunity for them. The MTDC at various locations runs hotels, restaurants and holiday resorts.

About Matheran:

Matheran is a very picturesque hill station which is located very close to Mumbai and it is a municipal council area in Karjat Tahsil in the Raigad district of Maharashtra. Matheran is a small hill station. It is located on the Western Ghats at a height of 800 m above sea level. Matheran is declared as an eco-sensitive region by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India. It has a small railway route known as 'The Matheran Hill Railway' which was constructed in 1907 by Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy and covers a distance of around 20 km.

History of Development of Matheran:

Matheran was recognised as a hill station by district collector of Thane Mr. Hugh Poyntz Malet in May 1850. Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay later started the work for its development as a future hill station. Matheran was developed as a resort by British Government to tackle the summer heat. Matheran has not progressed much as compared to other hill stations of Maharashtra. Many difficulties are restricting its development.

The late Mr. Mallet whose name, Matheran will ever remember because he is the father of Matheran. Matheran is one of the family hills comprising Western Ghats. Matheran is generously endowed with all varieties of natural beauty at their best. Nature has gifted this mountain range with endless beauty. In the last week of September or early October or in the months of November and December, the hill of beauty is at its best, green and cool. The season of October is the pleasantest and most beautiful one wishing to enjoy the charm of the hill, choose this time of the year to visit Matheran.

Matheran Hill Railway:

The Matheran Hill Railway (MHR) is a 2 ft (610 mm) narrow-gauge heritage railway in Maharashtra, India, which is administered by the Central Railway. It covers a distance of 21 km, cutting a swathe through forest and connecting Neral to Matheran in the Western Ghats. The MHR is on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The Neral-Matheran Light Railway was built between 1901 and 1907 by Abdul Hussein Adamjee Peerbhoy and financed by his father, Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy, at a cost of Rupees 16,00,000. Adamjee Peerbhoy visited Matheran often, and wanted to build a railway to make it easier to get there. Hussain's plans for the Matheran Hill Railway were formulated in 1900, and construction began in 1904. The consulting engineer was Everard Calthrop. The line was open to traffic by 1907 with tight curves, and speed limit of 12 km/h (7.5 mph). The toy train that takes the visitors from Neral to Matheran, has a distance of 21 k.m in about two hours.

The railway line from Neral to Matheran is 20 km (12.6 miles) long with a riding gradient of 1 in 20. The route is noted for its unbelievable curves and the first sharp curve is marked by a large notice, which reads, 'Oops! what a curve: 45 feet radius.' The track zigzags up the hill, bringing into view the beauty of the Matheran hill.

The unique feature of this line is the horseshoe embankment, which was built to avoid a reversion station, seen when the train curves markedly. Important stations and special features include this, the initial Neral Station, the Herdal Hill section, the Bhakra Khud steep gradient, the only tunnel on the route, popularly known as the "One Kiss Tunnel" (time to pass through this is just sufficient to exchange a kiss with one's partner), a "Water Pipe" station (no longer in use due to change over to diesel locos), Mountain Berry with two sharp 'Zig Zags', Panorama Point and finally terminating at Matheran Bazaar. The Broad gauge line between Mumbai and Poona runs close to this line and the road also crosses the railway line at two locations.

The trains on this line were earlier hauled by steam locomotives, which have now been replaced by diesel engines. But it is still a singularly pleasurable journey as the hill station can only be reached by train, which is the only mechanised source of transport to this hill resort. It is unique in its kind as being the only hill station in India, which has no road transport and can only be reached by train. The lack of vehicular traffic makes Matheran free from petrol and diesel fumes and cacophony of cars and buses and an unusual and peaceful retreat from the noise and congestion of Mumbai.

The train wheezes up the Western Ghats into the clear mountain air, where one gets a breath taking view of the hills and plains below. There are four pairs of trains which run sunrise to sunset. However, during the monsoon season, which stretches from mid-June to mid-September, the trains are discontinued and out of the four pairs of trains running between Neral and Matheran, only one pair of trains is run to open timings.

The Ghat road between Neral and Matheran was completed in about 1855. Prior to the construction of Neral to Matheran railway in 1907 the journeys to Matheran were made either on foot or by rickshaws, ponies or manchils. There is 8 k.m vehical drivable roads to Matheran from Neral. The taxi service has been started from Neral to Matheran. The total number of tourist who visited to Matheran was 4,18,153 (domestic 4,10,161 and foreign 7,992) during the period April 2019 and March 2020.

Eco-Sensitive Zone:

Matheran, a popular hill station located in the State of Maharashtra, is the smallest hill station of India with an area of about 7.25 sq. kms and local population of approx. 4,500. The annual number of tourists is approx 2,50,000. Around 63% of Matheran is Reserve Forest and the bungalow plots are largely forested. The climax forests support a variety of species of flora and are also home to a number of endangered species. This ecosystem is extremely sensitive and given the area and other factors, even small amounts of pressure on the ecology and environment have enormous pressure on it. The Supreme Court declared Matheran as eco-sensitive and the Ministry of Environment and Forests issued a draft notification on 6 February 2002 declaring Matheran and surrounding areas as eco-sensitive.

Places of Interest in Matheran

1. Temples---ShriPisarnathMadir
2. Sporting Places---Panday Playground
3. Olympia---It is an extensive circular plateau making riding an exciting pleasure and the natural sports are held here in the month of May.

4. Parks: Paymaster Park, Nowroji Lord Garden
5. Panorama Point, Mount Barry, Mary Point, Madhavji Point, Khandala Point, Garbut Point, Alexander Point, Rambag Point, Chowk Point, One Tree Hill, Echo point, Landscape Point, Honeymoon Point, Lousia Point, Mondey Point, Charlotte Lake.

Till today, the tourists visit Matheran only for entertainment or just for relaxation. There is no attitude to look at Matheran from another angle. It is not only the hill station but also has several potentials. A very few tourists are attracted towards such types of tourism or they may not have an idea about the potential of Matheran.

Tourism Promises in Matheran

1. Adventure tourism
2. Sports Tourisms
3. Jungle Safari
4. Eco-tourism
5. Bio-diversity tourism
6. Wellness tourism

Problems in Matheran

Though the numbers of tourists are increasing day by day, they are not satisfied with this place. They just come here for self-entertainment. So, they prefer to stay only for a night and two days due to lack of tourism development. The flow of tourists is only for five to six months in a year. This flow may get reduced after certain period of time. Because there many reasons that create restrictions to its development. Like;

1. Deforestation
2. High transport cost
3. Decline of wildlife and birds species
4. Improper medical facility
5. No development of site scenes
6. Problems of toilet blocs
7. Many Untrained Guides

Conclusion And Suggestions

There is a need to have a proper strategy for the survival of tourism activities in Matheran. Some Suggestions have been given by the researcher to overcome the above problems in the study areas.

- Matheran is an eco-tourism hill station therefore; there should be strict control on deforestation. Local people should be convinced for any other occupational source rather than cutting of trees.
- Increasing train frequency from Neral to Matheran. Railway Wagons for carrying goods should also start. Construction of Substitute Road from Panvel via Dhodhani to Matheran should be complete.
- If the forest is protected then automatically habitats of the wildlife, birds will also be protected.
- Rainwater harvesting system should make it mandatory for hoteliers because there is heavy rainfall at Matheran.
- Rotary Club and Lion's Club should take initiative to establish toilet blocs and drinking water facility.

- Benches at site scenes, safeguard at site scenes also should be developed with the help of some charitable trust or NGOs.
- Guide training course should be provided to local youth by MTDC.
- Initiative should be taken by one of the hoteliers in Matheran or their association to organise training for Youth of Matheran for adventure tourism.

If all the above suggestions are taken into consideration then there will be sustainable development of Matheran. The tourists will not come only for a day or not only for entertainment but they will also get attracted by other motives of tourism.

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