

NCC Naval Wing Cadets: Catalysts for Sustainable Maritime Tourism and Coastal Development

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Abstract: Stretching to approximately 7,500 kms, India's coastline and its Blue Economy account for almost 4% of the country's GDP every year. Additionally, India's status as the residence of the world's largest youth organization, the National Cadet Corps (NCC), provides it with a considerable advantage in promoting its maritime sector. India's coastline is not just an economic asset but also a reflection of a centuries-old maritime culture; from ancient ports like Lothal and Muziris to traditional boat building and seafaring practices that have shaped India's history of trade and navigation. The core tents of NCC instill within all students, equally, the values of leadership and patriotism that make them the catalysts for reforms in potentially high yielding sectors of India like its coastal region. Around 18% of the Indian population can be found in 72 coastal districts that co-exist with the marine ecosystem and hence require careful attention to be paid to its preservation.

This research paper undertakes a retrospective analysis of India's maritime history whilst simultaneously analyzing its current 'blue economy' to show how its youth force can be leveraged through the NCC to promote marine tourism without its exploitation. Within the context of coastal development in India there exists a significant gap because this sector is largely regulated by local operators, with little to no supervision, who seldom consider the broader implications of their actions. NCC Cadets who are aptly trained in maritime protocol can come to the aid of India in such a situation and serve as an invaluable national resource.

Keywords: Blue Economy, NCC Cadets, Sustainable Tourism, maritime history.

Introduction: NCC Naval Wing cadets, filled with youthful energy and dedication towards serving their nation, have the potential of becoming India's leading force of positive change. Considering their familiarity with maritime protocol and nautical training, they are well equipped to dealing with the challenges that India's coastline faces. Through cleanliness and plantation drives coupled with awareness programs, they can bring massive change to the marine ecosystem and promote a sustainable form of tourism that uses India's coastline to gain international recognition without putting it in any danger. A dedicated strategy is needed to ensure that India properly utilizes its coastline without damaging the environment. A nation-wide strategy that takes into account the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) can ensure that any change aimed at the development of marine tourism in India celebrates its rich seafaring tradition and coastal livelihoods.

India's maritime history encompasses a wide range of sea ferring traditions that were practised throughout ages for a plethora of purposes. Explorations of India's maritime history as not confined to the past few centuries began with the discovery of a sophisticated dockyard in the port city of Lothal in Gujarat which dated back to around 2400 BCE (Possehl 61). Discovery of major trade routes like the Silk Route and the Spice Route placed India at the centre of exchange of valuable commodities like textiles and spices (Chandra 111, 125). Throughout the centuries, historians have found increasing evidence of the naval

capabilities of several dynasties like the Mauryan Empire, Southern dynasties (Cholas, Cheras and Pandeyas) and Satavahana and Gupta rulers. Under colonial rule, the Indian navy was developed (although for British purposes) and this development maintains its essence within the Indian navy even today (Indian Navy). Dr. Dharmendra Sharma insightfully points out, “Despite the decline of ancient Indian maritime activities, the legacy of this rich maritime history continues to resonate in contemporary society. From the economic importance of modern Indian ports to the strategic imperatives of the Indian Navy, the influence of ancient maritime traditions endures, shaping the course of history and influencing the future trajectory of maritime affairs.” (Dharmendra 64) This glimpse into India’s vast maritime history is only a small drop in the ocean, yet it places a great responsibility on today’s naval cadets to uphold and carry forward these proud traditions.

India has an infinitely marvelous coastal belt (7,500+ km) that hosts a plethora of aquatic life like mangroves, coral reefs, and marine mammals that play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance, but the potential of water sports (a significant component of marine tourism) remains unrealized due to the fact that they are operated by the local populace of the region using make-shift gear that guarantees returns and not safety. The NCC Naval Wing Cadets can play a pivotal role in supporting safe and sustainable practices in these areas. India’s ‘Blue Economy’ constitutes about 4% of its GDP and encompasses fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, marine tourism, etc. This sector of India has the potential to reach 3 trillion USD globally by 2030.

Although India’s marine tourism sector promises exponential returns to the economy, it must not be developed at the cost of the environment and hence it becomes crucial to implement sustainable practices that ensure development without compromising the ecology of the area. For sustainable tourism development, studies by Butler and further emphasized by ecologists like Hardin are central. “Butler first used the concept of carrying capacity in tourism by modifying the concept of product life cycle to life cycle of tourists destinations...Sustainable development through marine tourism can occur only if carrying capacity of the destination is not reached” (Halder et al. 2).

Without taking into consideration the countless nuances of the environmental aspect of development, tourist places will soon lose their lustre and, due to over exploitation, become barren at best. NCC Naval Wing cadets, the symbols of youth and a new way of thinking can easily penetrate this barrier to bridge this gap and use their mindset to employ sustainable practices that encourage tourism while helping the environment. Taking into account the sheer amount of coastal area available for use and the number of cadets enrolled in NCC every year, the potential of tourism development far outweighs its limitations and promises a stunning future of marine tourism.

“Driving sustainable economic growth in the WIO (Western Indian Ocean) through blue tourism involves diversifying beyond beach and resort tourism. Integrated planning can promote year-round activities and leverage cultural and nature-based attractions, whilst addressing the challenges of seasonality. Moreover, scaling up local businesses with supportive policies and programs would enhance inclusivity and sustainability” (Gona et al. 6)

Additionally, there is an astonishing dearth of lifeguards in places that are in desperate need of the same, but the seashore beauty continues to draw numerous tourists annually. The NCC Naval Wing, being well familiar with naval procedures, can prove to be of huge assistance to the government in resolving the aforementioned issues by utilising its enormous manpower to prevent any and all inequalities. At the same time, they can encourage safer, well-trained water-based tourism without undermining the traditional knowledge systems of coastal people, thereby harmonising continuity and change. As cadets are highly trained in social outreach, they are more likely to have a positive interaction with the members of the coastal

community whose collaboration is especially crucial in developing marine tourism. As highlighted in sustainable blue tourism:

“Strengthening regional cooperation in the WIO would foster sustainable blue tourism through a unified approach that can address shared challenges and opportunities such as environmental protection and economic growth” (Gona et al. 6).

NCC Naval Wings cadets can enlighten coastal communities and tourists about maritime security, piracy threats, and illegal fishing practices, enabling locals to become increasingly involved in security efforts. Key areas include cruise and lighthouse tourism, development of fishing harbours, logistics training centres, and advanced maritime research hubs like NTCPWC at IIT Madras and CICMT at IIT Kharagpur (SagarMala). Skill gap studies and training programs aim to create employment and modernize traditional coastal professions, while projects in aquaculture, cold chain development, and tourism infrastructure enhance economic opportunities. The NCC Naval Wing can support these efforts by promoting maritime awareness, assisting in coastal community outreach, and encouraging youth participation in sustainable coastal initiatives that respect India’s maritime culture while adapting to modern changes.

Beyond the lives of the people of India today, it becomes the duty of each member of the society to protect and preserve the environment for future generations so that they are able to enjoy the same benefits that the world has (largely) taken for granted. “We need to ensure robust health of coastal ecosystems through sustainable management, so that they continue to provide various goods and services for future generations” (Nayak 174). Any initiatives planned by the government, whether present or future, cannot succeed without skilled manpower committed to serving the nation. In this context, NCC cadets represent a reservoir of youthful energy and discipline that can be effectively harnessed in the nation’s service.

Development and upliftment might go hand in hand but these are still different terms that require individual attention. As one must know, the most prominent purpose of a nation is development as well as upliftment and when dealing with the coastal communities of India, upliftment becomes an infinitely daunting task but requires undivided attention. A survey reported, “97,984 beneficiaries in rural coastal areas have been trained in climate-adaptive livelihood practices, with approximately 40% being women” (UNDP). While impressive, these numbers require a tremendous increment to make a significant impact as envisioned by the government of India and to that end, NCC Naval Wing cadets can lend their support by helping them in mobilizing youth volunteers for inclusive capacity building. Ecosystem restoration efforts have also been carried out by the government of India, “3,825.91 hectares of vulnerable coastal ecosystems have been restored, including 2,985.91 hectares of mangroves and 840 hectares of coastal watershed areas, enhancing resilience against climate variability” (UNDP). Such large scale initiatives are not carried out easily but require tremendous effort and considerable amount of time and community involvement at the grassroots level. Cadets of the NCC Naval Wing, disciplined, trained in environmental awareness and disaster response are the best suited to carry out these efforts. Cadets can actively take part in mangrove plantation drives, coastal clean-up campaigns, and monitoring of restored areas to ensure their long-term sustainability.

Conclusion: India’s maritime future rests on the shoulders of the youth who must carve a sustainable path for development through initiatives like **Sagarmala**, the **Blue Economy Mission**, and commitments to the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. India’s future vision of maritime development plans to use its massive 7,500+ km coastline for the economic development of India and its native coastal population by supporting fisheries and marine tourism through potential skilled youth participation and secure seas. The cadets of NCC Naval Wing are trained, throughout the course of their affiliation with the NCC, in maritime protocols and discipline with the sole aim of serving the nation in times of need. They can aid several initiatives such as community outreach, skill development and environment protection aimed

at uplifting the local population whilst developing the nation as a whole. If NCC cadets work towards the development of a sustainable tourism practice in India, they will become the living embodiments of the national aspiration that seeks to develop India without compromising its heritage. Their involvement in maritime work will also serve to instill the importance of nature within the younger generation, motivating them into becoming environmental conservatives of the future.

This incorporation of NCC Naval Wing cadets into the framework of maritime development can result in a long lasting change that significantly impacts India's fight towards environmental degradation. Through training and discipline, coastal security and environmental issues can be better tackled. By raising awareness and aiding government led initiatives, NCC Naval Wing cadets have the potential to bridge the gap between policy formation and grassroots level implementation. When the youth of the nation works towards preserving its past for a better future the spirit of India's maritime culture is best captured. A coastal economy that depends on the flourishing of marine ecosystem but not on its exploitation, should be the standard that India sets for the whole world to observe. Within this context, the youth of India becomes indispensable, not only for their valuable efforts in promoting sustainable economic development, but particularly for the fact that it infuses an entire generation with a sense of duty towards the nation and nature.

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