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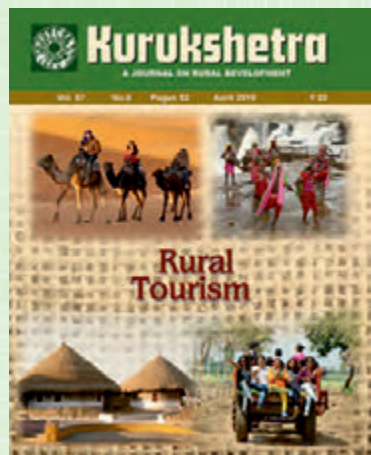
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Kurukshetra seeks to carry the message of Rural Development to all people. It serves as a forum for free, frank and serious discussion on the problems of Rural Development with special focus on Rural Uplift.

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Editorial

The concept of Rural Tourism is acquiring new dimensions with the passage of time. However, in India, it has always existed in some form as almost every Indian has roots in some village or another and they often keep returning back to their roots. Now, of course, feeling bottled up by the chaos in urban areas, the growing desire to take a break and relax in the pristine surroundings of the village is growing. People are frequently touring rural areas as they are full of color, fragrance and vibrant life.

Travelers visiting India no longer wish to remain confined to the idea of going to tour the established tourist destinations. The craving to know India in its totality has brought about enormous changes in travel itineraries of the tourists, indigenous or foreign. Stunning landscapes, the virgin beauty of mother nature, the colorful and captivating culture of rural areas compel the travelers to head for Indian villages where they find the real essence of India. That is the reason why tourism industry is making strong moves to promote Rural tourism in the country. It has motivated many travel and tourism companies to offer Rural Tourism packages for enthusiasts to experience a soulful journey to the 'Heart of India'.

Rural Tourism offers tourists an opportunity to get first-hand experience of farmland activities, such as cultivation, sowing and harvesting etc. This provides them an opportunity to get introduced to artisans and even purchase locally manufactured handicrafts besides gaining an insight into the different ethnic and indigenous practices in rural areas.

Rural Tourism provides ample opportunities to tourists to soak in the astounding splendor of nature and adds new perspectives of understanding the ethos of Rural India. It also benefits the rural community by way of developing infrastructural facilities, generating employment opportunities for the local inhabitants and opening new vistas of entrepreneurial activities which strengthen rural economy and helps in alleviating poverty to some extent. Rural Tourism activities also promote biodiversity conservation, preservation of regional heritage in terms of art and crafts and therefore instill a sense of pride among the rural people. It can also be very effective in putting a check on the migration of people to urban areas for seeking job opportunities and help the farmers and artisans to develop direct contact with customers.

It is noteworthy that Rural Tourism is not just farm-based tourism. It has a lot to provide in a single package in non-urban setting with rural flavor. It includes farm based holidays, special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, fishing, educational travel, arts, and heritage tourism, and in some areas also entails ethnic tourism. The tourists participate in the creation of sales, profits, jobs, returns, and income. The economic impact of tourism is an important factor in national, regional, public planning and economic development.

India being a nation of diversities has a lot to offer to tourists. Rural tourism in India is still in the developing stage but once tapped to its full potential, it can open great vistas of mutual benefit for both the tourists as well as the rural people alike. Every region, state, and the village of our country has its own language, culture, tradition, customs, costumes and cuisines which can offer a unique non-urban experience of a lifetime. Rural tourism can offer unforgettable experiences. In fact, it offers a journey back to our roots encompassing a wide range of activities and attractions all set in a natural rural environment. It is also a very important activity from the perspective of rural development because of its contribution to the economic and social development of rural people.

RURAL TOURISM- SHOWCASING INDIA'S RURAL HERITAGE

Vikas Rustagi

Rural Tourism has been recognised as a very effective way of providing experiential travel and diversifying the tourism product as well as helping rural communities by increasing their income levels and in preserving dying art forms.

The tourism industry the world over is going through a great shift in ideas and beliefs. Today, fuelled by a massive increase in purchasing power and development of faster and cheaper modes of travel, more and more people are travelling across the world. The purpose of travels now tends to be more of leisure and increasingly so for getting to know new things and experiencing cultures, cuisine, traditions, etc. This kind of travel is called 'experiential travel'.

Today, the discerning traveler is prepared to go greater distances and to previously unknown places to get the unique experience and to also cater to her own special interest. The tourist is also looking at being a responsible traveler, about giving back to the community and interacting with the host community so that they have a visible stake in the whole development of the region.

India's tourism attractions, as we know, are large and varied. Our culture, which is both syncretic and dates back to ancient times, is our most visible attraction. The great monuments ranging from that symbol of eternal love, Taj Mahal to the great temples of South India, the majestic forts of Rajasthan as well as the wide and varied landscape of snowcapped mountains, golden beaches, rich forests and verdant deserts all make India an 'Incredible' destination. India also has many products to offer to the tourists who travel keeping a special interest in mind be it Medical and Wellness Tourism, be it Golf courses and be it Adventure Sports, India has it all.

India is well known for its unique cultural heritage, in which lies its competitive strength. India clearly recognizes the inherent relationship between tourism and its cultural assets. India has a vast array of arts and craft spread through the length and breadth of the state. The conservation, preservation and integrated development of the areas around these art and crafts not only provides an additional



opportunity for growth and expansion of rural and heritage tourism in India but also enhances the experience of the tourist – domestic and foreign – visiting such sites. While tangible heritage has been in the mainstream of tourism development in India, the intangible or living tourism has tremendous scope for increasing India's tourism offering not only to the world, but also to its own citizens. The intangible heritage includes folklore, cuisine, customary practices, etc. Almost all districts of India are endowed with these intangible heritages which can be identified and developed for providing new cultural experiences to tourists.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that "India lives in its villages". The village life in India is where you meet the 'real India'. The villages are also repositories of the country's culture and tradition. The slow pace of life in the village, far away from the hustle and bustle of the big city, is an experience that can rejuvenate oneself. The villages and the rural economies also have practitioners of unique arts and crafts in their original forms that are hard to come by in the cities. However, one knows that rural areas are mostly farming communities and in many cases the incomes are not as good as they are in cities. In many cases, there are not many jobs available in the villages and many young men and women are

increasingly migrating to the cities looking for better opportunities. This has also led to some of the arts and crafts traditionally being practiced in the rural communities dying a slow death.

Rural Tourism is one of the solutions which can cater to all the above questions. Rural Tourism focuses on the visitor actively participating in a rural lifestyle. The tourist travels to a rural location and experiences the life while taking part in the daily activities of the village. The tourist also gets a chance to imbibe the traditions and culture of the area. Rural tourism may also include overnight stay in which the visitor also gets to know the unique lifestyle of the village at much closer quarters. The local community also benefits as this is a way of supplanting their incomes which are mostly dependent on agriculture or low skill jobs. They can also imbibe the other cultures of the visitors and thus expand their knowledge and horizons. Many cases of rural tourism also include voluntourism in which the tourists spend some time in volunteering and giving back to the community they visit in the form of teaching at local schools, helping out in the farming activities, etc.

The National Tourism Policy of India recognizes that special thrust should be imparted to rural tourism and tourism in small settlements, where sizeable assets of our cultural and natural wealth exist. Rural tourism is defined as, 'any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience'. This concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful and holds significance for a country like India, where almost 69 per cent of the population resides in about 7 million villages.

Increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture, improved accessibility and environmental consciousness are some of the factors responsible for shifting the trend towards rural tourism. In the developed countries, this has resulted in a new style of tourism, of visiting village settings, to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle. This has given shape to the concept of Rural Tourism.

Rural Tourism has been recognised as a very effective way of providing experiential travel and diversifying the tourism product as well as helping rural communities by increasing their income levels and in preserving dying art forms.

Recognizing the potential of Rural Tourism in the country, Rural Circuit has been identified as one of the 13 thematic circuits to provide a unique experience to travelers visiting the country and, as the same time, develop lesser known destinations located in remote areas of the country. The development of Bhitiharwa, Chandrahia & Turkaulia in Bihar and Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism Project in Kerala has been undertaken under Rural Circuit theme. This would help in generating employment through active involvement of local communities and following community based development and pro-poor tourism approach.

In compliance with the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, Rural Tourism Scheme was launched in 2002 in partnership of UNDP. Rural tourism was identified as means for generating rural employment and promoting sustainable livelihood. In the selected sites, community managed Village Tourism Development Committees were formed to develop rural tourism initiatives. Showcasing of local cultural heritage and indigenous traditions

was the key component of this initiative to attract tourists. It also intended to set up facilities for accommodation, which would exhibit vernacular architecture and skills. Community ownership and management is central to the alternative models of endogenous tourism developed across India. The community members were provided training in software activities such as management of the project, tour operations, waste management, accounting etc. through capacity building programmes by reputed NGOs. Hardware part of the project included



infrastructure development including facility for accommodating visitors to the respective villages. As a part of this project, the local community was provided training in different aspects of hospitality to provide services of international standard. The scheme particularly addressed gender and issues, indigenous people and minorities.

There have now been many success stories of the Rural Tourism model and many of the projects have achieved financial viability. Notable among them is the Shaam-e-Sarhad project in the village of Hodka in Gujarat. Shaam-e-Sarhad is a tourist camp, built, owned, and managed by the Hodka community. Tourism could enable the community to improve the quality of their life by creating more livelihood options while also enabling them to conserve and further develop their unique culture.

The concept has now been taken forward by many states as well. Kerala has been at the forefront of developing the Rural Tourism model and evolving it under the greater ambit of Responsible Tourism. The award winning Kerala Responsible Tourism projects in Kumarakom, Wyanad and other locations combine a unique model of involving the local community and getting the visitor experience the village life with the local stakeholders as the story tellers. This instills a great pride in the villagers who would otherwise have abandoned their traditional way of life for the city.

Another success story is in Sikkim which has empowered many village communities to develop tourism experiences including homestays thus spreading the tourism product evenly and away from the traditional destinations. This also helps in increasing the carrying capacity of the tourism product. Sikkim is also leveraging its rural tourism product with its distinction of being India's first organic state. Such a development model has the communities' involvement at the grass roots level and everyone gets a equal stake in the whole process.

Following the success of such public sector initiatives, there have been some notable initiatives coming up from the private sector. The projects in Rajasthan including in Samode and Mandawa have come up on a public-private model. A noteworthy mention is of the Govardhan Eco-Village in Maharashtra which won the UNWTO Ulysses Award for Innovation. The institution has developed the village into a community that has a symbiotic



relationship with the visitors and has increased both community participation as well as helped in raising income levels and education in this once backward area.

There is, therefore, immense scope for development of the concept of Rural tourism and Village Life Experiences across the country. However, some challenges still remain. Chief amongst the challenges are that of marketing. The communities by their very nature have very little avenues for marketing of the products both nationally and internationally. Therefore, with the lack of sufficient marketing infrastructure, those projects which are not very well linked with the traditional tourism circuits have not been able to do well. The Rural Tourism Kerala Mission is an example of a successful marketing effort by the State Government of Kerala. More such efforts are required both at the international level and at the domestic levels.

Awareness is being created about the various products and destinations including Rural Tourism amongst the trade and consumers by participating in exhibitions and by organizing roadshows etc. as part of ongoing promotional activities.

India's rich cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage provides a huge potential for development of tourism and job creation in the country and it would be fit to quote Mahatma Gandhi again, "India perishes if her villages perish". Therefore, it is imperative on our part to nurture the villages and preserve that simple way of life for our future generations. Rural Tourism therefore, goes a long way in keeping that tradition alive.

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SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF RURAL TOURISM

Dr. Anupama Srivastava

Rural tourism has an immense possibility for exotic destination seekers and has been recognized as a key business opportunity by the stakeholders mainly due to the growing demand for domestic weekend holidays. It is therefore paramount that the third party involved that is the rural community should be the equal beneficiary through tourism with minimal damages to its socio-cultural structure.



Tourism as an activity undertaken by individuals provides diversification from routine functions of one's day to day life. Today tourism is recognized as one of the largest industries of the world. It contributes to employment generation, enhances income and enables fair distribution of wealth from an economic perspective. Simultaneously it provides a ground for cultural exchange, enhances tolerance and mutual respect amongst different cultures and promotes international friendship. It is also one of the surest and economical means of gaining exchange income (Rezvani, 2004).

Tourism is an enormous subset of the entertainment industry. Though the movement of tourists from point of origin to a new destination is temporary and non-remunerative, it is still a rejuvenating experience. In the recent years with the changing dynamics of tourism, the industry

has witnessed shifts from mass tourism to tourists being more specific in their taste for seeking new and unexplored destinations. This presents a challenge to the service providers to discover exotic places and package these to attract the new breed of tourists and also as a means to beat competition. Many forms of Special Interest Tourism (SIT) catering to the new needs of the tourists have emerged. One such trend has been to present the urbanized tourists a chance to travel from concrete jungles to greener pastures. This has led to the introduction of rural tourism. With growing demand for short weekend breaks especially amongst the domestic markets, the increasing popularity of forms of tourism which comprise rural tourism represents a large and important sector for the overall tourism market. During the last two decades, a strong undercurrent of community-based tourism has become an underlying principle in the realm of

new, alternative and responsible tourism (Singh, Timothy & Dowling eds. 2003, 5–6).

Introducing Rural Tourism

Rural tourism can be defined as the country experience which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. The essential characteristics of this form of tourism include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural and/or natural environments. Rural tourism can be defined according to its relationship with its environment (Lane 1994)

Prerequisites of rural tourism that lend a unique experience to tourists are that the destination should be:

- Located in a rural area
- Functionally rural. It should revolve on small settlements, open space and in contact with nature and the natural world, traditional societies, their heritage and traditional practices.
- Traditional in character, growing organically, and connected with local families. It will often be very largely controlled locally and developed for the long term good of the area.

One of the most important features of rural tourism economy is the motivation that the private sector has or investment in tourism because it is small, varied and simple. The role and importance of tourism in the process of rural development had been proved in many countries. Considering the importance of tourism in the process of rural development planning, it is of paramount importance to take it into account in rural planning and plans. For the purpose of playing the positive role of tourism in the process of rural development, paying attention to environment management, local contribution, firm laws, marketing and realistic planning in tourism seems necessary (Rezvani, 2005). Rural tourism is an important means of enhancing employment and income and can help social and economic development of rural societies (Sharpley, 2001). Rural tourism must be in balance with other rural needs and a long term protection of rural resources (Shsrpley, 2001).



Rural community-based tourism is small scale tourism in rural areas, where the local people are actively involved in tourism development. It is often perceived as a sustainable and responsible form of tourism. However, in practice, the planning and evaluation of the tourism development is often concentrated only upon rapid economic and environmental impacts and the socio-cultural significance is left without proper attention. The issues about socio-cultural development have not been considered seriously enough in alternative tourism contexts. In tourism research, it has been widely accepted that the hosts can benefit from tourism only when they are accepted as agents of their own development (Shen, Hughey & Simmons 2008, 7; Wild 2008, 74, cf. Li 2006).

Positive Impact in Building Rural Societies

Rural tourism, though just a minority tourism market, is making a valuable contribution to rural economies. Its contribution can be expressed not only in financial terms, but also in terms of jobs, contributions towards funding conservation and encouragement to the adoption of new working practices. In terms of the social fabric of the rural community, definitely an additional source of income that comes from tourism contributes positively to this community. The rural society through tourism can overcome their complete dependence on agriculture for revenue. Tourism can also build a sense of pride amongst the rural community in their heritage and traditions. The rural community is also exposed to the urban world directly and interactions between the two can lead to encouraging mutual respect.



The development of rural tourism contributes to the social benefits in several ways. It leads to the maintenance and support of public transport. Increased social contact brings opportunities for cultural exchanges, greater awareness and the revitalization of local customs, crafts and cultural identities. It can also aid in preventing the youngsters of these communities to shift to urban centers as they are now exposed to an array of alternate income through tourism. The role of women can also gain momentum as they participate and gain economically from tourism. The facilities created for tourists can benefit the residents in terms of upgraded infrastructure, health and cleaning of public spaces. Thus the standard of living of the rural community is on the surge.

One of the major positive impacts on the rural society is the resurgence of cultural, traditional and historical traditions. This caters to a conducive environment for conservation and sustainable management of local and indigenous culture, arts and crafts. The presence of tourists who are in awe and praise local talent and art can make the rural society realize the importance of their culture and thus tourism can play an important role in conserving and developing art. Due to this awareness amongst the local rural population, tourism has the strength to stimulate pride in local heritage.

However though the positive implications of tourism and the opportunities it brings to the rural area is evident, a systematic and integrated approach to planning and managing rural tourism is necessary. The fundamental and dominant land use in rural areas is agriculture and this is a fragile resource highly susceptible to environmental and social change. It is vital therefore that the very

characteristics that attract tourists are not degraded due to excessive tourism development. It is important to address the negative implications of tourism so that these can be countered before they impact the socio cultural structure of the rural society.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a process of adaptation and adjustment (Ebin et al., 2001). It is the change that one culture has on another. When local people entertain tourists, they adapt tourists' needs, attitudes and values and ultimately start following them (Nash, 1996). This often happens in a less sophisticated society where, stronger culture dominates the weaker (Burns, 1999). In particular, the youth are vulnerable to this impact as they often copy tourists' lifestyle. This process though not immediately evident takes a foothold gradually and the very culture that differentiate the rural from urban gets affected. Typically in tourism, the community being acculturated is the destination community, which then experiences dramatic shifts in social structure. Noticeable changes occur in clothing habits and food. Local costumes gradually get replaced by costumes as worn by tourists. Food too undergoes subtle changes as it is made in a way that caters to the taste of tourists. These changes over a period of time severely dent the original rural structure.

Cultural commodification

Cultural commodification results in the transformation of value-from sacred to profane and from real to the unauthentic (Shepherd, 2002). Cole (2007) summarises that tourism collects various cultural components and then sometimes adds something artificial to make it eye catching. This is then packaged and sold to tourists. Tourism can turn local cultures into sellable items or commodities. Religious rituals, traditions and festivals are reduced to commodities that conform to tourist expectations. This results in what is now termed as 'reconstructed ethnicity'. The actual and sacred significance of a ritual or tradition loses meaning even to those who had been following them religiously. This endangers the social customs of the community.

Demonstration Effect

One of the most detrimental impacts on the culture of the host community is the demonstration effect. The demonstration effect is

the occurrence of rural communities and cultures adopting western style and behaviour that they have observed in visiting tourists through interaction. It has been observed that young people bring changes in the material goods they use and in their gestures and postures, which is defined as demonstration effects by Burns (1999). By being in contact with lifestyles and different consumption patterns, local residents directly compare their standards of living with those of other people. This can lead residents to adopt tourist's demonstrated behaviour. According to Burns (1999: 101), the demonstration effect refers to the process by which traditional societies, especially those which are particularly susceptible to outside influence such as youth, will voluntarily seek to adopt certain behaviours (and accumulate material goods) on the basis that possession of them will lead to the achievement of the leisured, hedonistic lifestyle demonstrated by the tourists.

Standardization

Landscape, accommodation, food and drinks must meet the requirements of the tourists in spite of the fact that tourists actually move to exotic rural destinations for experiencing change. The tourists most often look for familiar features at such destinations. Standardization of cultural tourist areas means bringing recognizable features such as food, hotels, and movies to exotic destinations to make the tourist feel more comfortable in their surroundings. Standardization also means taking a culture and changing it to appeal to the tourists. Standardization means offering a common product on a national, regional or worldwide basis" (Jain, 1990, P.422). According to Clow Standardization means presenting a unified theme across nations and cultures" (Clow, 2005, p.162). This can severely damage the appeal of the rural area in the long run. At the same time, it also further damages the local produce as the host community is forced to adapt to the tastes of the tourists.

Staged Authenticity

Tourism poses a significant threat to a society's culture as a result of its ability to modify traditions. MacCannell notes that tourists are thwarted in experiencing reality and the authentic truth due to the commercial role of the tourism industry.



Subsequently, 'staged authenticity' in tourism settings seems to discourage modern tourists to search for authentic experiences. Adopting cultural expressions to the tastes of tourists or performing shows as if they were 'real life' constitutes staged authenticity. The rural environment, traditions and rituals which are meant to be performed only on certain occasions and have a spiritual meaning for the performers may undergo severe irreversible damages. These beliefs and rituals are performed as shows to keep up with the demands of the tourists. They are merely duplication of traditions as a staged show. The performers showcase original rituals and thus are not spiritually connected to the rituals. By and by such events become a routine and lose their intrinsic worth to the rural society.

Cultural Erosion

Tourists on their visits to rural destinations seek to purchase the local arts, crafts and cultural manifestations as a souvenir. The local craftsmen then respond to these demands but keeping up with the tastes and requirements of the tourists make changes in design of their products to bring them more in line with the demands. This leads to cultural erosion and eventually the original version of the artefact becomes just a museum piece. This once again severely damages the rural structure as authenticity is lost due to modern demands and interventions.

Cultural Clashes

As the local rural population feels threatened by the constant flow of tourists due to the changing patterns of their world, anti-tourist attitudes may begin to manifest amongst the rural population. As a result of different cultural background, values,



lifestyles, languages and levels of prosperity cultural clashes may occur eventually destroying the tourist– host bond. Apart from this, job level frictions may occur. This happens mainly as stakeholders are usually the beneficiaries of tourism economically as compared to the local community. This may further antagonize the local population towards tourists.

Ethical Issues

Other negative social influences of tourism of rural societies can be felt in rise in prices of basic commodities which are hiked due to the tourists but impacts the local community. Crime rates may typically increase with growth of tourism activities in the rural area affecting the local population. Another concern due to growing tourism in rural areas is the employment of children as they work for low pay. The ill of child labour is another issue that needs to be addressed by the tourism industry. Rural areas may also experience a surge in flesh trade as these bring easy money.

Conclusion

Since the positive and negative outcomes of tourism depend on human factors, including the attitude and behaviour of tourists and hosts during the interactions, so tourists, tourism and hosts are jointly responsible not solely (Spanou, 2007). Strengthening local cultural value is a vital point. In Indonesia, local people agreed to stage dance and music, but disagreed to stage rituals because they didn't want to commodify their core value (Cole, 2007). The success of rural tourism lies in creating a balance between the positive and negative impacts of tourism and maintaining a healthy

rural environment. As any other business activity, rural tourism is also profit-oriented. Nevertheless, because it is driven by the accountability principles, rural tourism should be based not only on the core features of rural tourism (local biodiversity and eco-systems support, sustainable development), but also on understanding the lifestyle of the users of products and services of rural tourism (Moutinho 2000). Rural tourism has an immense possibility for exotic destination seekers and has been recognized as a key business opportunity by the stake holders mainly due to the growing demand for domestic weekend holidays. It is therefore paramount that the third party involved that is the rural community should be an equal beneficiary through tourism with minimal damages to its socio-cultural structure.

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BRANDING RURAL TOURISM

Dr. Amit Kumar Singh

The tourist's perception lies in this fact that the rural tourism offers to visit a place which has its authenticity along with the custom and traditions and that have been conserved in its original structure. It also provides spaces to get relaxed from the stress, enjoy the serenity along with family members. The motivation behind choosing rural tourism as an alternate is to find peace, solace, space, freedom, tradition and authentic environment. Though it is very difficult to predict the exact reason to opt for rural tourism but it can be well said that rural tourism has extended itself from the boundaries of farm/agri based tourism.

Untapped tourism potentials like medical, rural, tribal, eco, adventure, heritage, spiritual, food and many more are being explored in recent times. These untapped tourism resources have been identified as niche areas and cited as new avenues in tourism by the tourism researchers and professionals and such niches gradually succeeded in carving out a place for themselves in the eyes of travellers fulfilling their various lust for travelling. Thus, the witness of practicing tourism now a days has been shifted from traditional to non- traditional thrusts. By understanding the far reaching significance of tourism, the government and other stakeholders are now focusing on developing rural tourism as a tourism product which is self-sustained and does not need more funds. Many key concepts like sustainable tourism development, alternate tourism, pro-poor tourism, volunteer tourism,

responsible tourism, green tourism, community based tourism, special interest tourism etc. are being coined. The development of Rural Tourism (RT) has now gained popularity and proved to be a sword with double edge i.e. source of employment for local community (Pro-poor Tourism) and preserving its rich culture and heritage (Sustainable Development).

In simple terms, Rural Tourism (RT) can be defined as the touristic activities happening into rural environments to experience rural taste. According to Ray and Das (2016), the tourism that provides a base to experience real rural life including its rich art, culture and heritage, focusing on making local community more economically dependent and an opportunity to interact between host and guest for more enriching travel experience. There are many aspects of rural tourism like eco- tourism, green





tourism, wilderness tourism, volunteer tourism etc. All these types of tourism have a common identity that is rural background and it provides visitors an opportunity to participate in a rural lifestyle. The added advantages of these villages are that they provide the basic ingredient for tourist inflow i.e. its rural background and hospitable villagers. The basic motivation in visiting according to Das and Nilanjay (2014) to rural areas is to understand the life style of rural residents. By identifying its business prospects, the adjoining areas of metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, Chennai and Kolkata have developed certain rural tourism destinations that attract visitors during weekend where they are introduced with crops, plough, bullock cart ride, mud bath, milking procedures along with traditional meals and entertainment. A large number of tourists are flocking to these areas where they contribute into the rural economy by staying in their houses, consuming local cuisines and purchasing local crafts. According to UNWTO, the rural tourism can be defined as “a type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing. Rural Tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: i) low population density, ii) landscape and land use dominated by agriculture and forestry and iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle”. The EU defines rural tourism as a bundle of services that is being offered to fulfill the desire of

experiencing the countryside, its natives, heritage and culture. Thus from the above it is clear that it is the rural tourism which focuses on generating income and employment opportunity for the local people in their own surroundings. It is full of man-made and natural resources. Though the tourist activities associated with rural tourism are small scale in nature and contribute benefit to the certain families only but the expansion of natural and cultural attractions

at these places, marketing of rural tourism are some of the areas which will determine its future resource use pattern and of course its scope too.

Rural Tourism Products: The expansion of the urban environment has engulfed the greenery and the residents are forced to stay in built surroundings which cannot be claimed as healthy. It has thereby created various social and environmental issues. People are trapped in the unbeaten rat race of success and hence they need some change. They want to spend some quality time away from their urban lifestyle with their family members where they can relax in a calm surrounding, interact with each other, play and have fun. Their needs have been accessed by tourism researchers in a new form called Rural Tourism (RT) that gives so many opportunities to the visitors. As a tourism product, Rural Tourism in India offers green walks through meadows and orchards, bullock cart ride, fishing, agriculture based activities, bird watching, indigenous games etc. Though the climatic conditions in India are full of variations therefore the rural tourism products also vary. The desert area offers camel ride, fairs and festivals along with tented accommodation and local cuisines. The Himalayan belt offers trekking to remote villages, eco-tourism, bird watching, adventure activities, boating, angling, volunteer tourism and home stays. The coastal area attracts tourists especially for fishing and angling where they are being carried to the mid of ocean and

get involved in fishery. The villages located near metropolitan cities offer rural tourism in a different manner. They have been commoditized as a sojourn for peace, space and freedom. The tourist's perception lies in this fact that the rural tourism offers to visit a place which has its authenticity along with the custom and traditions and that have been conserved in its original structure. It also provides spaces to get relaxed from the stress, enjoy the serenity along with family members. The motivation behind choosing rural tourism as an alternate is to find peace, solace, space, freedom, tradition and authentic environment. Though it is very difficult to predict the exact reason to opt for rural tourism but it can be well said that rural tourism has extended itself from the boundaries of farm/agri based tourism.



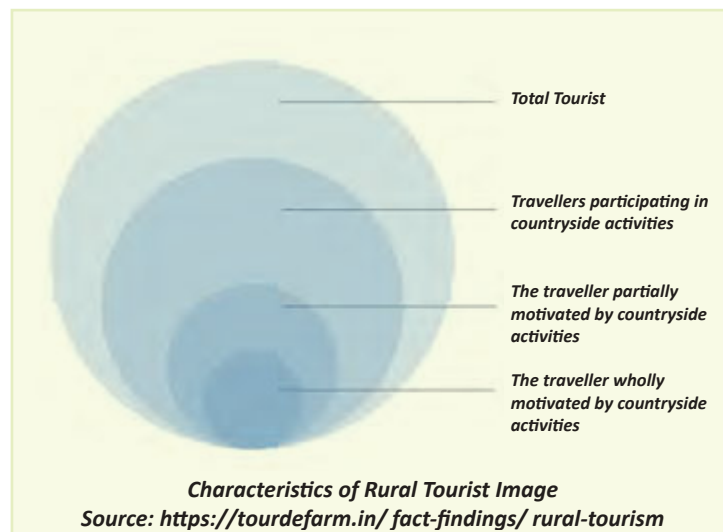
Rural Tourism- Products: Rural Tourism is defined as a form of tourism that generates an opportunity to showcase rural indigenous culture, life and heritage at rural locations, provides employment and other business opportunity for locals along with enabling interaction with the host and guest for more enriching tourism experience. From the above definition it is clear that Rural Tourism concentrates on following three important aspects:

1. Showcase all the rural background i.e rich culture heritage and rural life.

2. It is a beginning of pro-poor tourism linking benefits of tourism to the local community in the area of employment and social development.
3. The tourists get involved in one to one interactions with locals, open the path for many enriching tourism experience and other community based tourism development projects.
4. Rural Tourism is essentially an activity linked with countryside.

However, there are many other features which are discussed below:

1. Rural Tourism has many dimensions; it does not attract tourists to the village life only but touches other aspects like cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism as well.
2. The heart of the rural tourism is its architecture and food. The home is homely in true sense and the food which is served is prepared with local available resources. It can be said that rural tourism is experience oriented activity.
3. It is also promoting sustainable tourism development, community based tourism, volunteer tourism, responsible tourism and other holistic approaches of tourism development.
4. The development of rural tourism emphasizes on three important aspects like must see the place, do something constructive and contribute to the locals in increasing their income with the purchases.
5. Though the locations in rural tourism spots are sparsely populated but it is con-



ducted in natural environment. It can also be blended with local fairs and festivals with maximum stress to preserve and conserve local culture, tradition and heritage.

Profiling Rural Tourists: In India, Rural Tourism as a product is a recent phenomenon. By seeing its potentiality, all efforts are being taken to promote it. But before going with the marketing campaign, it is worthwhile to take a look at the participants, who they are, what their motives are and what makes them visit any rural destination. India is well known for its culture and culture lies in villages. So anyone who wants to be the part of this tourism must have some information about rural background along with its tourist resources. It has been seen that majority of the travellers participating in rural tourism are short term visitors who prefer to visit the area to get some relief from the daily routine life and such travellers are motivated towards fairs and festivals falling in the specific period to their choice of rural destination. In due course of such visit they interact with the host population and want to explore as much as they can do. It is also observed that such places become the center of attraction once they gain popularity and gradually visitors flock the area with their repeat visits. While talking about Rural Tourism participants, they are not of any particular age group. Normally the whole family rejoices the destination which has potential to woo every segment of the participant. Thus, they become the evidence of their own personal experience by identifying their specific niche. After participation into rural tourism, the travellers are supposed to gain more knowledge and information which one cannot get through lifeless pages of books. Practical exposure is the core of this rural tourism package which gives an opportunity to see the live performance of many activities in the genuine and preserved surroundings. The rural tourist gives more emphasis on conservation and preservation of the resources because they are taught during their stay in rural areas of the sustainability chapters with indigenous knowledge. Rural tourism also contributes in shaping the youth who are badly addicted to electronic gadgets and the parents are joining rural tourism environment as a campaign along with their children to keep them away from virtual life and spend some time in a surrounding where these gadgets do not exist.

Conclusion: To conclude, it can be said that every village has potential to attract visitors, remove poverty by attracting extra income to the locals, promotion of true culture but it is not feasible to develop every village as a rural tourism destination. In recent past, many rural tourism projects have been rejected by both tourist as well as host. The major focus in developing Rural Tourism is on identifying its strength and opportunities to attract visitors. The strength and opportunities are the KEY RESULT AREAS (KRA) for village tourism which has the ability to attract tourists and make the village viable in economic terms, generating job opportunities and livelihood. The Key Result Area may be handicrafts, folk culture, organic farming, eco- parks, herbal parks, yoga and meditation centers, Besides the resources, one should not forget to access the destination because inconvenience in reaching the destination will also attract the shortfall in the tourist arrival. An assessment of the local environment is also important because that will boost up the link of PPP model. It also ensures the sustainability of Rural Tourism in the concerned village.

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ECOTOURISM FOR PROMOTING LIVELIHOODS AND CONSERVATION

Dr. Venugopal C.K.



With dwindling natural resources there is a need to reduce man animal conflict. Through sustainable and eco-friendly practices many destinations have shown way as to how humans can live in harmony with nature for his own sake and for the sake of future generations.

Ecotourism is a term which is used worldwide for the last two decades. Conservation, preservation and sustainability are embedded in this form of tourism. The very concept of tourism has undergone drastic changes in light of livelihood of rural community and conservation of biodiversity. Any tourism activity which is detrimental to local community will also cause irreparable damage to environment. The age old traditions and values that are ethnic in nature need to be conserved and nurtured for future generations. Ecotourism has established itself as a livelihood activity to local community in remote destinations around India particularly in Kerala.

Tourism undoubtedly ranks among the top industries in terms of employment and revenue generation globally. Ecotourism has emerged as a major activity among local community in rural India especially in Kerala. Ranking top among consumer

states in India, Kerala banks heavily on ecotourism activities to provide livelihood to local community. Although tourism is not rated highly among hard core conservationists as they find it detrimental to environment, there no going back in terms of tourism revenue. This is particularly true in light of the fact that rural community with their wealth of knowledge in terms of environment, local flora and fauna have managed to earn a decent income through ecotourism initiatives undertaken from time to time. Carrying capacity of eco destinations is a major cause of concern particularly in terms of damage caused to bio diversity of the region. Systematic approach based on regular training to local community has ensured that environmental impact due to these activities is minimal or zero. Nature has healing powers and can cure itself of damages caused by intrusion provided sufficient time is given. This concept is applied in wild life sanctuaries and national parks around the country where ecotourism activities

are promoted. During certain periods like breeding season of endangered species, drought or at times of unforeseen events, these Eco destinations remain closed to visitors. An attempt has been made here to highlight ecotourism activities in general in India with a focus on ecotourism initiatives in Kerala.

Emerging as a buzzword in the late 1980s, Ecotourism is a responsible travel to undisturbed natural areas that conserve the natural environment and enhance the well-being of the local people (TIES – 1990). Recognized as an appropriate tool for reaching the milestone of sustainable development, the catch phrase simultaneously performs three important functions namely strengthening conservation efforts by providing financial supports, enhancing economic benefits to the aboriginal people and other local community and enrich visitor's experience in the destination where the buzzword is being implemented and promoted properly. Keeping in mind the importance of the development of ecotourism, ecotourism zones are being developed in the protected areas network across the world. Experience shows that the cost of maintenance of the global network of protected

areas will be around USD 50 billion per year and the top 25 World Biodiversity Hotspots require USD 500 million per year (Gossling, S; 2002). The protected areas are in the need of ecotourism for generating sufficient income to cover their maintenance costs in order to achieve financial sustainability. Western Ghats, in India, is one of the biodiversity hotspots in the world which is home for endemic plants and endangered animals. Along with this, the 1600 km long mountain range is considered as one of the principal ecotourism sites in the country.

Ecotourism in India

Realising the importance of ecotourism a great deal of work has been done in terms of developing eco destinations in various states keeping in mind the spirit of sustainable development through conservation of ethnicity and environment. The top eco destination in the country in Kerala is the narrow piece of land tantalisingly wedged between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats. The very fact that the mighty Western Ghats runs across the length of Kerala is the reasons for the large number of eco destinations dotting the state of Kerala.

Figure 1.1 – Ecotourism in Kerala



Other major ecotourism destinations are found in the north eastern states chiefly in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The concept of ecotourism is catching up in other states as well, some of which like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh to name a few. With a fascinating spread of wildlife amply protected by the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries India is one of the few countries in the world that can boast of such a varied biodiversity. Tourism industry has not looked back since the advent of community linked projects reaping profits that augers well for further ecotourism initiatives. In light of the above observations some the prominent ecotourism destinations are being discussed in the paragraphs that follow. Ranging from the lofty heights of Leh to the capital city of India, New Delhi we can find ecotourism closely interwoven into the fabric of the Indian society. Some ecotourism initiatives related to livelihood of local community in Indian states other than Kerala are listed below.

Leh Nutrition Project

Ladakh (Leh) is a much sought after destination where ecotourism is a source of livelihood to local community. The Leh Nutrition Project, an NGO initiative joined hands with Ladakh Ecological Group to promote sustainable livelihood to local community. They have been addressing issues related to child care, development, education, livelihood and watershed development in this difficult terrain. Ecotourism concepts have been imbibed into the livelihood activities of this community which has resulted in improving living standards.

Ecotourism for a Better Future - Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh Forest Department has taken steps to carry forward the concept of ecotourism in the state. State Forest Development Agencies (SFDAs) were constituted to implement Participatory Forestry Management.

Ecotourism Initiative in New Delhi

Ecotourism Society of India has played a key role in ecotourism initiatives in the capital city of India. New Delhi ranks top among the cities that are most polluted and reducing carbon foot print

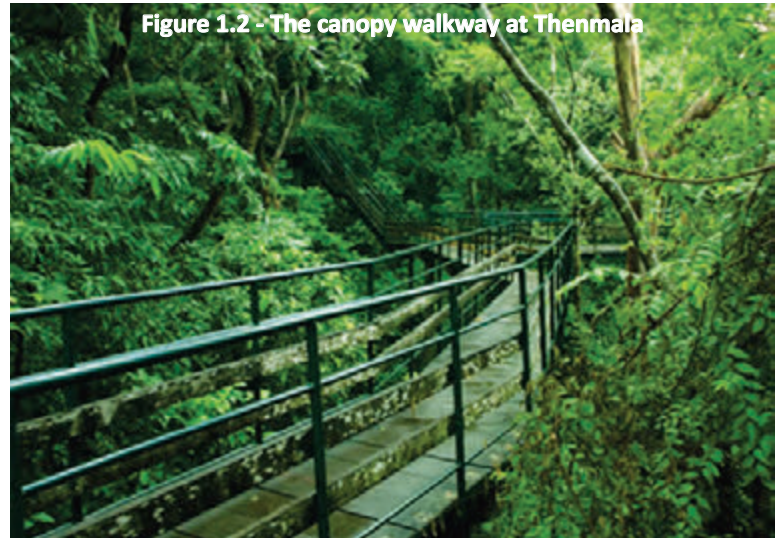


Figure 1.2 - The canopy walkway at Thenmala

by creating awareness among city dwellers will go a long way in addressing this menace. A clean and green city is modern day man's dream and New Delhi has taken the right step in this direction. Places in the city like the Chhawla-Kanganheri – an ecotourism park near Najafgarh drain has been revamped for recreational activities. Boating, camping, paintball and obstacle course are some of the activities available for tourists and city dwellers. Farm tourism is another activity that is catching up with tourists largely in city outskirts and a few have come up in the heart of the city as well. Other ecotourism activities available are exploring the JNU caves that consist of a few caves hidden in the lush greenery of Jawaharlal Nehru University campus in New Delhi. The Yamuna Bio diversity park is another emerging bio diversity project site dedicated to giving insights into the importance of conserving biodiversity. This 457 acre park near Wazirabad village is one the most visited public places and is emerging as a important centre for learning and understanding the environment.

Ecotourism in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand has established itself as a leading ecotourism destination in the country over the last few years. With its abundance in terms *snow-capped mountains*, rolling Meadows, *high altitude lakes*, dense forests and *wetland*, Uttarakhand is a nature lover's paradise. Garhwal and Kumaon regions of Uttarakhand are home to exotic *wildlife*, *birds* and *flora*. Many circuits are being developed in these areas as ecotourism circuits. The forest rest houses of British era add value to these circuits.

Ecotourism initiatives in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Assam

These states of north east have a unique identity different from the rest of country in terms of flora, fauna and way of life. The people of these regions right from their ancestors have imbibed a sense of pride wherein their culture is inextricably intertwined to nature. Hence ecotourism concepts are in cohesion with their thoughts and activities. Though a late entrant into the area of tourism and its different forms, these states are setting their own benchmarks by conserving their ethnicity and culture. Eco tourists from world all over now look at north eastern India with awe and respect. Kaziranga National park in Assam is such a destination famous for the one horned Rhino. In addition to these many exotic species have made this state their home.

The mountainous state of Sikkim famed for its close association with nature has made ecotourism a livelihood activity through organised treks and trails which have become package tour programmes. Meghalaya is yet another north eastern state of India where the indigenous communities are in harmony with nature. Their rituals and beliefs are closely associated with mountains, flora and fauna. Conservation and preservation of eco systems is a natural process here. Sometimes called the paradise unexplored, various initiatives in this state aimed to bring ecotourism in its true spirit the welfare of local people. With mesmerising natural beauty and abundance, this state stands on the threshold of what could be a harbinger to a sustainable livelihood, through ecotourism initiatives.

Ecotourism in Karnataka

Madikeri, Agumbe, Coorg and Shimoga are among the most sought after ecotourism destinations in Karnataka. The importance this state has given to ecotourism is amply evidenced by the decision to set up an Eco-Tourism Development Board for the state. The famous national parks like the Bandipur and bird sanctuaries like Ranganathittu are just a few examples where ecotourism has become both a conservation and livelihood activity in this state. Ecotourism has firmly set its roots in this southern state of India and has paved way to a better future for the local people.

Ecotourism in Kerala - interwoven into the Fabric of Society

Forest with its endemic plants and majestic animals has always captivated mankind. Kerala

is one of its kinds in the Indian peninsular as the Western Ghats supports tremendous biological values in great variety. With this backbone, today the state has established 23 protected areas (16 wild life sanctuaries and 5 national parks) which are spread over 1736.88 sq.km thus providing a natural advantage for developing ecotourism.

The Eco Development Project

India Eco Development Project aims to reduce the dependency of local community on forest and conserve the biological diversity of protected areas with the support of World Bank and Global Environmental Facility (GEF). 580 EDCs have been formed involving 75,000 households in the selected areas. Considering the biological value of Periyar Tiger Reserve for the state, the India Eco Development Project is launched by the Department of Forest and Wildlife in 1996 in this reserve (Project Performance Assessment Report, World Bank, 2007). The major objectives of this project are following;

- Improve the capacity of protected areas management to conserve biodiversity, increase collaboration of local people and increase opportunities for local participation
- Reduce the negative impact of local people on biodiversity
- Develop more extensive support for eco - development
- Ensure effective management of the project
- Prepare future biodiversity projects

After launching India Eco Development Project in Periyar Tiger Reserve, ecotourism has received significant attention among local people, tourists, service providers and other aid agencies in this state. Considering the significance of ecotourism in the forest areas, steps are being taken to spread this concept into other protected and forest areas of this state. As a result, EDCs and VSS were formed in the network of protected forest areas by involving local people. For assisting EDCs, a local level institutional mechanism was developed what is known as Community Development Found (CDF) in which a particular portion of employee's salaries are retained, deposited and will be utilized for the members in terms of loan and to meet unforeseen demands of the local community. The members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) are also included in the ecotourism practices to boost women empowerment in the state.

Benefits of Ecotourism

The ecotourism initiative in Kerala has become an alternate tool for providing livelihood benefits to the marginalised community members in terms of employment, income generation and training. Guards, guides, and drivers are the major employment generating positions in the ecotourism destinations. The employment opportunities for the local community members not only increase their level of income but also facilitate saving pattern among them. As ecotourism destinations are laid down in remote areas, the initiative has provided employment opportunities to the marginalised and economically backward community members. According to Eco – Development and Tribal Welfare Wing of Department of Forest (as on 31.12.2008), a total of 39557 community members have been employed of which 8164 people (20.64%) belong to Scheduled Caste community, the employment generated for Scheduled Tribes is estimated as 6063 (15.33%) while 23330 people (64.03%) from other community have been employed in various ecotourism practices across the state.

In addition to the socio – economic benefits of ecotourism, the earnest efforts are being made in imparting various training / skill development programmes to the members of EDC and VSS across the state which enables them to acquire and update their knowledge on different concepts of ecotourism management. Most recently, Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) in association with Directorate of Ecotourism organised Naturalist/ Interpreters course for EDC / VSS members with the aim of promoting quality eco tour guides in the identified ecotourism destination. During the course, guiding skill, first aid practices, ecotourism products of Kerala, visitor management technique, hospitality and special knowhow on endemic and endangered species of Kerala were imparted to them with the aim of enriching their existing knowledge. Moreover, the Directorate of Ecotourism is taking efforts for organising regional workshops in the identified regions for achieving the goals of sustainable development of tourism in the state.

The statistics released by Kerala Forest Department (2016) shows that out of the 190 EDCs across forest regions in Kerala, Scheduled Tribe (ST) representation family wise is 31.14% while for 400 VSSs in Kerala the representation by Scheduled Tribes (ST) family wise is 25.76%. This shows that

Scheduled Tribes who are ethnic to that region have shown greater interest in enrolling themselves in ecotourism initiatives of the state.

Extracts from Statistics for the year 2016 by Kerala Forest Department

Participatory forest management (PFM)

The State has adopted participatory forest management (PFM) as a strategy for conservation of bio-diversity and for the improvement of livelihood of forest dependent people by forming partnership institutions at grass root level since 1998. The institutions in territorial forest divisions are called Vana Samrakshana Samithies (VSS). Those in Sanctuaries and National Parks are called Eco-Development Committees (EDC). During the year 2015-16, there were 400 numbers of VSSs and 190 numbers of EDCs. Detailed statistics on VSS/EDC are given in tables 1.1 to 1.2 that follow.

Table 1.1 -Division wise number of VSS

SI No.	Territorial division	No.of VSS
1	2	3
1	Thiruvananthapuram	20
2	Thenmala	11
3	Punalur	15
4	Konni	20
5	Ranni	34
6	Achencoil	6
7	Kottayam	13
8	Kothamangalam	10
9	Munnar	11
10	Marayoor	23
11	Mankulam	9
12	Malayattoor	17
13	Vazhachal	11
14	Chalakydy	10
15	Thrissur	21
16	Palakkad	11
17	Mannarkad	11
18	Nilambur south	14
19	Nilambur north	30
20	Nemmara	17
21	North wayanad	17
22	South wayanad	18
23	Kozhikode	17
24	Kannur	20
25	Kasargode	14
	Total	400

Table 1.2 -Division wise number of VSS

SI No.	Wildlife division	No.of EDC
1	2	3
1	Parambikulam	7
2	Aralam	3
3	Silent Valley	7
4	Wayanad WL	15
5	Peechi	12
6	Thiruvananthapuram WL	31
7	Shendurney	9
8	Idukki	9
9	Munnar WL	22
10	Periyar East	35
11	Periyar West	40
	Total	190

Vanasree Ecoshops

Vana Samrakshana Samithies were to sell processed and semi processed non timber forest products collected by adivasis (tribals) from forest areas. The profits from these outlets are ploughed back to the Minor Forest Produce (MFP) collectors through the VSS. The public will also be getting unadulterated and genuine forest products from these outlets. There are 37 Vanasree Ecoshops in the state under forest development agencies (FDA) including 2 mobile units. The details of these outlets as on 31.03.2016 are shown in table 1.3.

Table 1.3 -Division wise location of ecoshops

SI No.	Division	Name of Vanasree unit
1	2	3
1	Thiruvananthapuram	Forest headquarters, Thiruvananthapuram
2	Thiruvananthapuram wildlife	Neyyar
3	Achenkoil	Manalar - Kumbhavurutty
4	Thenmala	Palaruvi
5	Punalur	Ayur
6	Konni	Konni
7	Ranni	Kochandi
8	SF, Alappuzha	Kommadi
9	Malayattoor	Kodanad
10	Malayattoor	Paneliporu
11	Kothamangalam	Thommankuthu

12	Chalakyady	Chalakyady
13	Vazhachal	Athirappally
14	Vazhachal	Vazhachal
15	Munnar wildlife	5th Mile
16	Munnar wildlife	Alampetty
17	Munnar wildlife	Anamudi shola
18	Munnar wildlife	Lakkam
19	Munnar wildlife	Rajamala
20	Periyar east	Thekkady
21	Parambikulam, wildlife	Parambikulam
22	Parambikulam, wildlife	Malampuzha
23	Parambikulam, wildlife	Anappady
24	Silent valley national park	Mukkali
25	South wayanad	Soochippara
26	South wayanad	Pakkom-Kuruva
27	North wayanad	Mananthavady
28	North wayanad	Plamoola
29	North wayanad	Thrissileri
30	North wayanad	Kalindi
31	Nilambur north	Aruvakode
32	Nilambur south	Nedumgayam (Manjeri)
33	Wayanad wildlife	Muthanga
34	Marayoor	Marayoor
35	Schendurany wildlife	Schendurney
36	Thiruvananthapuram	Mobile vanasree unit
37	Malayattoor	Mobile vanasree unit

Eco-tourism destinations

The eco-tourism in forest areas is implemented through forest development agencies. There are 55 eco-tourism destinations functioning in the State. District wise number of eco-tourism destinations in the State under forest department is given in table 1.4.

Table 1.4 -District wise number of Eco-tourism destinations

SI No.	District	No. of destination
1	2	3
1	Thiruvananthapuram	6
2	Kollam	3
3	Pathanamthitta	4
4	Alappuzha	0
5	Idukki	8
6	Kottayam	2
7	Ernakulam	3

8	Thrissur	2
9	Palakkad	6
10	Malappuram	3
11	Kozhikkode	5
12	Wayanad	9
13	Kannur	3
14	Kasaragode	1
	Total	55

The photographs are just a glimpse of the depth in bio diversity and natural resources of Kerala which are also popular ecotourism destinations.

Role of Department of Tourism and allied Organisations

Tourism is a thriving industry in Kerala and ecotourism is one many forms of tourism practiced in the state. However the very fact that a separate directorate exists of ecotourism at Government level shows the importance of ecotourism. Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) is the HR wing under Kerala tourism catering to all training and manpower requirements in tourism sector in the state. Some initiatives implemented through KITTS has given expertise to thousands of local community people and common man interested in pursuing a livelihood in ecotourism destinations. Leading ecotourism destinations of the state such as Munnar, Thekkady, Wayanad have captured lot of international attention through sustainable livelihood practices using ecotourism.

Thenmala Ecotourism

This is India's first planned ecotourism destination. The major activities and zones in this scenic spot situated 72 kms away from Trivandrum are a) Adventure zone b) Boating c) Butterfly safari d) Children's park e) Deer Rehabilitation Centre f) Leisure zone g) Musical dancing fountain and the h) Nakshatravanam. The latest contribution by Thenmala Ecotourism Society (TEPS) is barrier free access for hearing and visually challenged visiting this pioneer ecotourism destination in the country launched in March 2019.

Conclusion

Ecotourism as tool to sustainable livelihoods conservation of bio diversity is established beyond doubt. In India more and more states have embraced ecotourism not only to increase revenue but also to

conserve nature and its valuable resources. It will not be an exaggeration to state that the entire state of Kerala can be declared an ecotourism destination. Ranging from providing livelihood to local community living in forest fringes to cities, ecotourism is a way of life in Kerala. Well trained man power and judicious use of resources has made Kerala a true leader in this venture. Munnar, Wayand, Thekkady and Neyyar are just a few shining examples of this noble venture. With dwindling natural resources there is a need to reduce man animal conflict. Through sustainable and eco-friendly practices many destinations have shown way as to how humans can live in harmony with nature for his own sake and for the sake of future generations.

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INCREASING INTEREST IN RURAL TOURISM

Dr. Shahin Razi, Naushin

Rural Tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for women, which makes the gender equality perspective highly relevant. Work in the rural tourism sectors of destination areas is concentrated particularly in retailing accommodation & catering, selling entertainment & transportation provisions.

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage of rural locations, thereby benefitting the local community, economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity that takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm / agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like-it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is pre-dominantly in natural environment, it meshes with essentiality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and tradition”.

India with all its geographical and cultural diversity has always been an attraction for tourists. The mighty Himalayas, vast deserts, lush green forests and beautiful beaches intertwined with ancient temples and the majestic forts of Rajasthan make India truly an ‘Incredible’ destination. However, India has much more to offer than just being the ‘land of tigers and temples’. Spread across its lakhs of villages lie untold venues in all their myriad colours and hues. If explored and developed as rural tourism sites, these venues could be instrumental in bringing out the much needed turnaround of rural communities and at the same time providing a visitor wholesale tourism experience. Rural

tourism holds immense promise for India. When developed to its fullest potential, it could provide jobs to many young men and women who otherwise are increasingly migrating to cities. Rural tourism can revive many of the arts and crafts traditionally being practiced in the rural communities but dying a slow death. Socially, it can open rural mindset to new thoughts and ideas from the outside world. On the other hand, for the urban citizen, a few days spent amidst traditional rural lifestyle may prove to be a great stress reliever.

Major Types of Rural Tourism in India :

- **Agricultural Tourism:** To explore more about the agricultural industry and how farmers work with crops.
- **Cultural Tourism:** To allow tourists to be immersed in local culture related activities, like rituals and festivals.
- **Nature Tourism:** Responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.
- **Adventure Tourism:** Any constructive activity which tests the endurance of both a person and



his equipment to its extreme limit is termed as Adventure Tourism.

- **Food Routes:** Where wanderlust meets the variety that persists in our cuisine. This tourism is all about food and knowing more about diverse staples of different places.
- **Community Eco-tourism:** Where tourism is for a purpose. It is a rather responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the well-being of local people.
- **Ethno-tourism:** To expand the horizon to view different cultures. It is essentially to know more about various ethnic and cultural lifestyles and beliefs.

Increasing Interest in Rural Tourism :

- Rural tourism helps to garner knowledge on agriculture, farming, local governance etc.
- Rural tourism helps to remove myths about rural lifestyle that may exist in urban minds, like villages are unhygienic, rural life is unsafe, etc.
- Rural tourism will help a person to explore the vast diversity that breathe in the interiors of India.

Some Popular Rural Tourism Destinations :

- **Kutch Adventures India:** Community Tourism in Kutch; Forays into Rann of Kutch of Gujarat to visit artisans' villages as well as the salt desert.
- **Itmennan Lodges Punjabiyat :** Farming in Rural Punjab; Gives the tourist a taste of various farming activities.
- **Ecosphere Spirit:** High altitude rural tourism; Visits to Buddhist monasteries, yak safaris, treks to villages, village homestays, and cultural performances are some of the possible activities.
- **Lachen, Sikkim:** It is located at 8500 feet against the backdrop of snow-capped peaks, glaciers and rock cliffs, amidst mixed conifer and Rhododendron forests. Made accessible to tourists only a few years back, it retains an unspoilt freshness.
- **Ballabhpur Danga, West Bengal:** Ballavpur Danga, 3 KM from Shantiniketan, is a Santhal Adivasi tribal community in the pastoral beauty of rural Bengal. The Sonajhuri forest lies to the east and the Ballavpur Avayaranya forest area and bird sanctuary is to its south. Santhali art, craft and culture is closely knit into the community's life.



- **Sunderbans Village Life:** The UNESCO World Heritage Site with the largest mangrove vegetation in the world is a great attraction for tourists.
- **Majuli in Assam:** The largest river island on the Brahmaputra river in Assam is a popular tourist destination.
- **Pochampally, Telangana:** Tourists can have a look at weaving of the famous slik sarees known by the same name.

There are more to the list, which still remain unexplored by the tourists.

Rural Tourism and Rural Women :

Tourism is one of the most important activities in the world, employing large number of women in industrialized and developing countries. Rural Tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for women, which makes the gender equality perspective highly relevant. Work in the rural tourism sectors of destination areas is concentrated particularly in retailing accommodation & catering, selling entertainment & transportation provisions.

Thus Tourism is considered as one of the largest economic activities today. The Draft Tourism Policy 1997 sees the emergence of tourism as an important instrument for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environment regeneration and advancement of women and other disadvantaged groups in India. In the tourism industry, the percentage of women who work in the industry is high but function is dominated by unskilled, low paid jobs. The tourism sector definitely provides various entry points for women's employment and opportunities in small & medium sized income generating activities for creating self employment.



infrastructures, lack of financial support, unsatisfactory training and education opportunities are other problems. In spite of these if local women are proficient in presenting rural site specific thematic story to tourist, rural tourism can be developed and managed. Here local communities relationship with nature should be

- 1) Rural Tourism can create long term employment and provides skilled/ unskilled training and career development opportunities for women.
- 2) Rural Tourism will boost women's empowerment and provides young/ agriculturist livelihood diversification.
- 3) Rural Tourism has the potential of establishing medium and small enterprises started by women entrepreneurs.
- 4) Rural tourism will promote local production, education, art and architecture, community self esteem and pride, heritage and nature conservation.
- 5) Rural Tourism will create new infrastructure / superstructure, helps to maintain local services and facilities and improves quality of life for women.
- 6) Development of Rural Tourism is the passport of poverty alleviation and can double the women farmer's income without creating negative impacts on environment and ecology.
- 7) Rural Tourism has the potential of developing new professional profiles in the form of local tour guides / escorts, Manager of Accommodation, Transportation, Shopping Centers, Travel Circuits, Production House, Food Joints, Souvenir Shops and Services. Women can be hired for such services.

Challenges :

Rural women and farmers have inadequate knowledge, education and exposure which construct problems in understanding and management of travel and tourism sector which is most dynamic and vibrant. They have modest business proficiency and deficient in business and market opportunities. Inadequate

exposed to tourist and rural tourist must experience authentic reflection of rural life pattern.

Socio-economic Change and Rural Tourism

The most important impact of increasing rural tourism is the impact on the economy. With increased number of tourists visiting the countryside, there will be a boost in the income level of the people especially women due to increased level of trade among the people. This will also generate jobs among the rural people especially women. The traditional handloom and handicrafts of any place is matter of pride for the local people. Through tourism, the visitor can have the benefit of directly buying the finished products from the local people. This in turn will have a positive impact on the overall economy. Women in the rural areas will benefit because of increased demand for their products. Exchange of ideas with the tourists will create a new idea among the villagers. This entails increasing interest in education, preventive health care, modern gadgets, etc. That will help in universal literacy. With more tourists visiting the villages, there will be improvement in the connectivity by means of roads, increase in public transport etc. Villages which are close to sanctuaries and reserve parks can teach the ideal of preserving the nature to their urban counterparts. Living by the side of nature for centuries, they will have more knowledge about how to preserve nature. Tourists may develop an interest in the local religion and traditional rituals that act as catalyst for social harmony.

Instead of having more hotels or guest houses in rural areas, it is better to encourage homestay. The tourist can have a taste of the traditional practices along with local recipes prevalent in rural India. This would help the tourists to connect to the villagers in less time. Women can be encouraged to cook local food for the tourists. Language may be an important

issue when it comes to tourism. Hence, tourists may be given the option of interpreters in case they face any difficulty. There is a need to have trained and qualified interpreters for this purpose. Rural women can be trained and educated to act as interpreters. This will increase their income and self confidence.

Rural Tourism creates jobs for women, but domestic objections, religious beliefs, already established cultural beliefs regarding gender roles, ability to travel longer distances for work and child rearing make them less accessible to women. Because of this, women supplement income by side jobs (e.g. baking, cleaning) to sustain household livelihood.

Rural tourism has the potential to be a vehicle for the empowerment of women in India. It provides better opportunities for women's participation in the work force, women's entrepreneurship & women's leadership than other sectors of the economy. Women in rural tourism are still underpaid, underutilized, under educated and under represented, but tourism offers pathways to success, if properly developed.

Due to its size, its rapid growth and its extremely diverse and dynamic nature, the tourism industry has an enormous flexibility. This can enable the industry to develop key initiatives for the advancement of women.

Conclusion :


“To other country, I may go as a tourist. But to India, I come as a pilgrim”, the words of Martin Luther King Jr. have their resonance in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “We are inheritors of a rural civilization. The vastness of our country, the vastness of the population, the situation and the climate of the country have, in my opinion, destined it for a rural civilization.” Rural India has a lot to offer to people. It would need concerted effort from both the Union Government and State Governments to identify these areas and explore tourism potential in this sector. That is of utmost importance to promote rural tourism in the country. Then only rural tourism can develop and flourish. Then only woman empowerment in the rural tourism sectors increase.


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RURAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Chetan Chauhan

Studies have also shown that sustainable rural tourism creates urban facilities for locals in rural areas and develop a large number of semi-skilled jobs for the local population in not only local hotels and catering trades but also in other fields like transport, retailing, heritage interpretation etc. In rural areas, which get tourists, there has been revival of traditional arts, crafts, building art etc.

India with glorious past, varied cultural heritage, abundant landscapes and natural beauty presents a unique experience to tourists from across the world. From the snowcapped Himalayas to fascinating backwaters of Kerala, from sandy beaches of Goa to rich wildlife deep inside the north-east, from beautiful deserts of Rajasthan and Kutch in west to Olive Ridley turtles of Odisha, there is enough for every tourist to see something in India. The tourism has grown manifold in India with its contribution to the national Gross Domestic Product being 6.3 per cent and that to total employment in the country 8.3 per cent.

The impressive national output numbers has not shown its impact on growth of tourism in rural India primary because of lack of infrastructure in the villages and poor skill training to rural youth. With around 69 per cent of the population living in about seven million villages, as per 2011 census, rural India is where the real India lives and provides insight into the country's culture, heritage, arts and crafts and lifestyle.

Despite lack of infrastructure, a large number of foreign tourists flock villages in Rajasthan, Gujarat and south India states every year. Pochampally in Andhra Pradesh, which is famous

for its silk weaving business, Nalanda district in Bihar for its Mango Groves and Chitrakoot waterfalls of Chhattisgarh are some of the well known rural travel places in India. This proves that rural tourism has a lot of potential and there is a need to promote rural tourism to ensure sustainable economic development and positive social development.

Not only rural tourism can provide insight to tourists about "real India" it can also promote sustainability and prove to be good employment and income generator in rural areas. Moreover, rural tourism has lot of potential as stress of urban lifestyles has led to a counter urbanization syndrome, in which, people want to spend some "quality" time in more peaceful, environmentally cleaner and soothing rural environs. Furthermore, in recent years tourism facilities have come up in villages because of several initiatives undertaken for promotion of rural tourism, which provides basic facilities to tourists, but much more needs to be done.

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, benefits the local community economically and socially, and enables interaction between the



tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural sustainable tourism is defined as one which can reinvigorate the conventional concepts and views on tourism and it can bring a new dimension to the sustainable development concept. In this, rural people offer small-scale accommodation units and showcase their culture and heritages while getting economic and social benefit from the activity without having any adverse impact on local environment. In fact, sustainable tourism leads to betterment of local environment as eye grabber for people from outside.

In fact, the first mention of sustainable tourism can be traced back to the Sargent Committee report of 1946, which said that Indian culture promotes sustainable way of living. And hence, cultural tourism remained the central plank of India's tourism strategy and various surveys show that heritage and culture are the two biggest draws in attracting foreign tourists to India. And now, sustainability has been added to this with foreign tourists keen to watch how people in rural India can live on very less water, naturally cooling homes and low food wastage. Recent studies of domestic tourists show that the young Indian tourists are following the footsteps of foreign tourists.

As per a scheme to promote rural tourism, in which thrust is given to promote village tourism to new geographic areas. Under this scheme, a convergence committee headed by district collector is formed and activities like improving the environment, hygiene and infrastructure are taken up. Apart from providing assistance, the focus is to converge various rural development schemes to provide village tourism in a sustainable manner.

According to various studies in rural tourism, the interest for alternative tourism such as eco-tourism, special interest tourism, heritage tourism etc., is increasing and such change of preference is driving these tourists to go to rural areas where fragmented nature and rich bio diversity can easily satisfy their ultimate desire i.e. to experience and to enjoy the rustic charms of rural India in the lap of the nature. Apart from that, meaningful holiday and fulfillment of expectation at a reasonable price also increase the chance of repeated visits by the backpackers.

For promotion of Rural Tourism several steps have been taken which underline development



of Rural Tourism Infrastructure, promotion of organizing fairs, festivals and Tourism related events and encouragement to rural people to learn hospitality trades of food production, food and beverage service, housekeeping and bakery and patisserie for their economic empowerment.

What Needs To be Done to Boost Rural Tourism

According to AC Neilson study of 107 rural projects conducted in 2017, Jammu and Kashmir had the maximum number of successful projects and Chhattisgarh and Odisha least number of successful projects. For other states, the report presented a mixed bag.

According to the study, the important learning lessons were that the rural tourism destinations should be specific and near to places where people usually visit. Accessibility to destinations should be the first criteria for selection of destination to be developed for rural tourism, the report said, adding that advertising the destinations will help artisans in selling their products better and proper marketing of the project is required to increase tourists. Projects should be re-strategized in terms of proximity to popular sightseeing destinations and maintenance of the projects is required to keep up the momentum, the report said.

The report also said people who visit rural tourism sites prefer sustainability and homes that are made with traditional style are more preferred than urban style rooms and guest houses. It also said that rural destinations need to promote sustainable rural tourism as it is cost effective and attracts lot of tourists. The report also rightly points out that tourists coming to rural areas are willing to pay more for living in environment friendly homes and that is the way ahead. The report also said that for sustainable rural development the state



governments have to play a more proactive role and has to provide models for villagers to adopt and it should ensure quality is maintained.

Sustainable Tourism

The most widely accepted definition of sustainable tourism is that of the World Tourism Organization, which defines it as “tourism which leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.”

For developing countries it is also one of the biggest income generators. But the huge infrastructural and resource demands of tourism (example: water consumption, waste generation and energy use) can have severe impacts upon local communities and the environment if it is not properly managed.

Challenges

In many mountain regions, small islands, coastal areas and other ecologically fragile places visited by tourists, there is an increasing concern that the negative impact of tourism on the natural environment can ultimately hurt the tourism industry itself.

In other words, the negative impact of intensive tourism activities on the environmental quality of beaches, mountains, rivers, forests and other ecosystems also compromise the viability of the tourism industry in these places. Example of this, are the beaches in Goa and Pondicherry and

damage to forest ecosystems in popular tourist destinations in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. In fact, many hill stations face acute water shortage in summer months because of tourism activity much more than the potential of these places.

There is now plenty of evidence of the “life-cycle” of a tourist destination, that is, the evolution from its discovery, to development and eventual decline because of overexploitation and subsequent deterioration its key attractions.

In many developing and developed countries alike, tourism destinations are becoming overdeveloped up to the point where the damage caused by environmental degradation-and the eventual loss of revenues arising from a collapse in tourism arrivals-becomes irreversible.

Examples of such exploitation of non-renewable tourism resources “range from a small fishing village in India’s Kerala state” which saw its tourist sector collapse after two decades of fast growth, because of inadequate disposal of solid waste-to several places in the industrialized world. Many hill stations and beaches in India are moving towards end of “life-cycle” as tourists are heading towards more cleaner and better tourist locations.

In addition, tourism in many destinations could be particularly threatened by external environmental shocks, notably the potential threat of global warming and sea-level rise. Significant rises in sea level could cause serious problems to tourism activities, particularly in low-lying coastal areas and small islands. Global warming is also expected to increase climate variability and to provoke changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme climate events-such as tropical windstorms and associated storm surges and coastal flooding-that may threaten tourism activities at certain destinations (United Nations Security Council Resolution, 2001).

Promoting Sustainable Rural Tourism

First and foremost step is preservation of traditional culture. The income generated from tourism can be utilised in preserving ethnic forms of art, dance and folk songs. It will safeguard rural

people's interests and will reduce the pressure to earn living miles away from their homes.

Second, as most of India's around 700 wildlife habitats fall in remote areas, eco-tourism can help in preventing further degradation of the forests and providing protection to the wildlife there. Local communities should be involved in eco-tourism activities so that they provide them employment and an incentive to protect environment.

Third, community development and involvement can help in sustainable tourism. For this, community based initiatives like encouraging women to set up more community radio centres in India, formation of folk dance groups and community based guided tourism activity can help in including all acquire key stakeholders. A successful model consisting of community practitioners and potential investors can help in generating more employment opportunities apart from large revenues.

Fourth, promotion of non-intrusive tourism, meaning those coming from outside should not hurt cultural, religious and societal ethos of the locals. In many parts of India, tourists are not welcome as local traditions are a form of entertainment for them. Tourists should be made aware about local culture and ethos before allowing them visiting non-commercial and pristine rural areas.

Fifth, the sustainable tourism should be seen as poverty reduction strategy as envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Considering that the United Nations has placed poverty at the center of the international development agenda, it can be argued that sustainable tourism development should go beyond the promotion of broad socio-economic development and give greater priority to poverty reduction. For this, a pro-poor tourism (PPT) approach needs to be converged with sustainable development strategy.

Sixth, legislative backing for sustainable tourism to ensure its development and ecological goals are met. The law can also define the role of different stakeholders including different government agencies, communities involved and individuals for sustainable tourism, and also assure quality hospitality for the tourists. The law can look at poverty reduction through sustainable production and consumption for the sector in rural

areas. In fact, it should aim for zero environment impact.

Benefits

According to a study published in 2016, Rural Tourism: Need, Scope and Challenges in Indian Context, 'rural tourism' done in an ecologically sustainable way has vast potential as it provides immense tourist satisfaction and creates local economic growth by way of alternate earning, employment, empowerment of communities and building entrepreneurship.

But, according to Nagaraju, Chandrashekara (2014), "Environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and litter disposal can be assisted by tourism revenues and local heritage can also be preserved." Sustainable rural tourism fosters a closer relationship between city dwellers and rural communities providing villagers an alternate source of income and can help women to become independent decision making.

Studies have also shown that sustainable rural tourism creates urban facilities for locals in rural areas and develop a large number of semi-skilled jobs for the local population in not only local hotels and catering trades but also in other fields like transport, retailing, heritage interpretation etc. In rural areas, which get tourists, there has been revival of traditional arts, crafts, building art etc. and brings marketing opportunity for rural producers to sell their products directly to the tourists. In such villages, tourism is said to have created alternative business opportunities for locals, especially in arts and crafts, and poverty reduction has been faster there as compared to other non-tourism activity villages.

Way Forward

Though talking about sustainable development looks niche, challenges are many. Some of them are poor connectivity from nearest towns, bad condition of roads, inadequate maintenance of facilities created for tourists, very less community participation and poor quality of service leading to slow death of the rural tourism village. As India is a country of diverse languages, communication with tourists including sign boards in local languages also becomes a bottleneck for rural tourism.

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London Book Fair

At London Book Fair-2019, the India Pavilion of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India laid special focus on 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The London Book Fair (LBF) which is one of the biggest global book fairs with the largest rights centre was held from March 12 to 14, 2019.



The India Pavilion at the London Book Fair was inaugurated by the Director General, Publications Division and Shri Vikram Sahay, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on March 12, 2019. On display at the India Pavilion were The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG) brought out by Publications Division, one of the largest publishers of Gandhian Literature. This 100-volume series forms the core of most Gandhian titles published even today. Running into over 55,000 pages, intricately connected across the series as an integrated whole, the series is a monumental document of Gandhiji's words which he spoke and wrote, day after day, year after year. The original series took 38 years (1956-94) in the making and it has also been successfully digitised by Publications Division.



Other qualitative works on Gandhiji which were on display included Mahatma (in 8 volumes) and Gandhi in Champaran by D.G. Tendulkar, Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence, M.K. Gandhi - An Indian Patriot in South Africa by Joseph Doke and Gandhi – His Life and Thought by J. B. Kripalani.



The India Pavilion also displayed the digital version of the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi brought out by Publications Division, apart from various other titles on culture, history and folklore of India. An interactive digital media experience on the life and times of Mahatma Gandhi, Statue of Unity and other major achievements of India were available at the Pavilion.

As part of the London Book Fair, a Seminar was also organised at the London Olympia on the topic "The making of the print and electronic versions of The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi". Mahatma's vision and works were shared with the global community during the Seminar. The participants of the Seminar were apprised that the 100-volume series of CWMG is available online in searchable format for free browsing on the Gandhi portal of the Ministry of Culture, as also on Gandhi Heritage Portal hosted by Sabaramati Ashram Preservation and Memorial Trust.

Taking the initiative further, the Ministry of I&B, in collaboration with Indian High Commission, London, also organised a talk by eminent Gandhian, Prof. Satish Kumar on the topic "Gandhian Model for Sustainable Development" at India House, London.



AGRI-TOURISM: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES

Prof. Dr. R. Gopal

Agri-tourism is a supportive system complimentary to the agricultural activities. The development of Agri-tourism can perhaps help a great deal in socio economic empowerment of the farming community.



Tourism is one of the most important revenue generating sectors of any country. It not only generates employment opportunities but also alleviates poverty and is a catalyst for rural development.

Rural tourism is a form of tourism that takes place in rural areas or settlements, providing employment and income to local population, and offering individualized holiday products to consumers.

Agri-tourism is a form of tourism which involves agriculture based operation that brings visitors to the farms. Agri-tourism is where agriculture meets tourism and there are certain learning along with leisure and vacation. Agri-tourism is a leisure activity which also helps the person understand and appreciate the work done by the farmer.

Agri-tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry. It gives the tourist an opportunity to experience the real, enchanting and authentic contact with the rural life, taste the local cuisine and get familiar with the various farming tasks during the visit. It provides a welcome escape from the daily hectic life in the peaceful rural environment. It gives the tourist a chance to relax and revitalize in pristine natural environment, surrounded by magnificent rural setting. The tourist gets the opportunity to see the real India and have

the experience of the lifetime. Agri-tourism helps the child especially the urban child who normally lives in closed door school, watches television and mostly remains confined to the four walls of the home to understand and appreciate the traditional way of farming, milk production etc.

Agriculture currently is under stress in terms of farmers' earnings and vagaries of nature. Through Agri-tourism the farmer benefits by increasing his earnings and this benefit could percolate to the village community. The increased earnings is possible through the following methods:

1. Expanding his farm operations so as to create an interest in the tourist.
2. Using farm products in an innovative way. For instance, the farmer and / or the community can prepare fresh juice or snacks and sell them to the tourist. This strategy is seen in tourist places like in Mahabaleshwar where one of the leading juice manufacturers has created a "see through glass" enclosure through which the tourist is able to see how the various fruit juices are prepared. Outside this enclosure is another enclosed space where the organization sells fruit juices at a discounted price which is less than the price at which it is available in the urban areas. The Agri-tourism concept may possibly adopt a similar strategy.

3. Developing new consumer niches by selling farm products directly. At several places on way from Nashik to Mumbai one can see farmers selling their products on the street. Perhaps this idea could be extended to farmer's market at the village level.
4. Creating an improved farm living conditions, working areas and farm recruitment opportunities.
5. Allowing tourists to either plough the fields or harvest products for a price. This would however depend on the farming cycle. Many of the children and parents, especially the urban family groups, have lost touch with their roots. They have seen villages in the cinema halls or in television. This may be a new method to attract the tourist to villages and give them a firsthand experience of farm activities.
6. Creation of museum where the farming equipment are demonstrated and the tourist gains knowledge of the evolution of these equipment over the years.

Agri-tourism could be beneficial to the community by

1. Generating additional revenue for local business and services from the tourist. The tourist would need several items which can be procured from the nearby towns and sold to them thus bringing in additional revenue to the local business.
2. Upgrading and revitalizing community facilities for the residents and the visitors.
3. Helping preserve local traditions, art forms and culture.
4. Helping in diversifying and strengthening the rural economy through job creation.
5. Empowering the women in the villages.
6. Interacting with the urban tourist could also help in reducing the impact of the social ills like superstitions etc.

Agri-tourism can take several forms. Some of the products that can be offered are:

1. **Farmers' Market:** Here the farm products can be purchased by the tourist at any time and in any quantity.
2. **Pick your own products:** here the tourist can be encouraged to enter the farms and pick up the products directly e.g. pick up apples, strawberries, cabbages, grapes, pumpkins etc.

This is widely practiced in several developed countries and also in a small way in certain tourist centers in India. Of course the products that can be picked would depend on the season. The quantity picked is then purchased by the tourist.

3. **Savour local flavor:** typical village breakfast, lunch or dinner may be offered, for instance in Maharashtra "kandapoha" is offered for breakfast. Tourist may sit on the floor or on the 'charpoy' and have breakfast, lunch etc. This is something which many tourists enjoy. In South India, many tourists enjoy eating food on banana leaf especially in areas like Kerala, Tamil Nadu etc.
4. **Participation:** Tourist may be requested to try lighting the 'choolah' and cook simple food. Many of the urban children and parents have only seen a choolah in the movies or in the books. This gives them a different and varied experience which is memorable and unforgettable. Cooking demonstration classes may be arranged, especially the traditional cuisine. This ideally would be a big hit amongst the urban women. Tourists can be encouraged to do cow milking, sheep shearing. Cow milking is something which is difficult but also interesting. Tourists can be encouraged to milk the cow and this can be purchased by the tourist at a price. Care however must be taken with regard to the safety angle.
5. **Experience Rural life:** A conducted tour around the village may give insight about the rural life. In Mumbai, for example one of the world's largest slums is located at a place called Dharavi. Foreign tourists like visiting Dharavi just to understand life in a slum. The tourist is also asked to enter the house of select slum dwellers and partake some food etc. A similar concept can be developed in the villages also. The tourist may be offered something innovative to observe and enjoy like some aspects of the culture, dress, nearby forts, temples, bird watching etc. They may be offered to stay in a typical mud hut etc. Typically in some countries in the middle east and in some cities in Rajasthan tourists are encouraged to stay in tents.

Besides the above, the tourists may be offered animal Rides e.g. bullock ride or horse ride etc. They may be given opportunity to witness events like bullock cart race or cock fight etc. This could

be organized in a manner so as to make the same interesting to the tourist. Educational training camps can also be arranged so as to make the stay interesting for example some leadership games like building tents or trekking or treasure hunting etc. Some experienced rural people may share their agricultural experiences or speak on regional themes like making coffee, spices or herbal materials.

Implementation of Agri-tourism is not without some challenges. Some of them are listed below:

1. **Quality and complexity of services.** Quality in service is the basic prerequisite for the survival of Agri-tourism. For this it is necessary to have a dedicated and motivated staff who are skilled in presentation of products in a professional way. Many urban tourists would love to enjoy the rustic flavor of rural life but with a blend of urbanity. Sometimes it is necessary to provide facilities like entertainment services, swimming pool, gymnasium etc. Absence of some such facilities could result in a drop in satisfaction levels.
2. **Cooperation amongst the stakeholders.** Agri-tourism involves working together of both private and public organizations in tandem. The farmer who is at the center of the Agri-tourism network of stakeholders is the key to success. Some of the stakeholders who are part of this Agri-tourism network is given below:
 - a. Farmer: The farmer is at the center of this network.
 - b. Medical Facilities: Availability of medical facilities is extremely important,
 - c. Transportation Network: Availability of transportation network is another important aspect. This includes good road facility, availability of a good network of road, railway etc.
 - d. Safety Aspects: This is a critical prerequisite.
 - e. Media and Communication: Media plays a very important part in promoting Agri-tourism. Care must be taken in promoting and communicating proper messages which would make Agri-tourism a grand success.
 - f. Tourism organizations play the role of a catalyst in promoting Agri-tourism.
 - g. Government and Hospitality industry also play a critical role in promoting Agri-tourism.

In addition to the above there are several other stakeholders who are critical and important in the promotion of Agritourism.

Public Awareness: Today there is a general awareness regarding the quality of food that one eats. There is a growing fascination towards organic food. Through Agritourism it is possible for people to understand how organic food is prepared and what are the advantages of organic food.

With the objective of overcoming these challenges it is necessary for the Indian farmer

1. To cater to the concept of diversifying their agricultural business into Agri-tourism.
2. Need for a strategy to create innovative products
3. Need for a well-defined strategy both at the national as well as the state level.

Some such strategies in promoting Agri-tourism could be:

1. Proper recognition of the Agri-tourism industry.
2. Government supported policy structure. There is a need for the government to develop and implement policy measures in this regard.
3. Education of the farmer and the farm owner for development of the entrepreneurial skill in their work operations.
4. Creation of a community level cooperative for the implementation of Agri-tourism at the village level.
5. Interest free loan to be given to such cooperatives for the development of Agri-tourism.
6. Product and service quality improvement training programs
7. Timely delivery of services
8. Proper development of the 4 Ps Marketing Strategy and
9. Setting up of a proper public private partnership development model.

Agri-tourism is a supportive system complimentary to the agricultural activities. The development of Agri-tourism can perhaps help a great deal in socio economic empowerment of the farming community.

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IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM ON RURAL ECONOMY

Jaspal Singh, Tanima Dutta and Anupama Rawat

Most of the village tourist sites have been part of the Endogenous Tourism Project which has brought in huge investments in these areas. It has helped to safeguard the local heritage sites making the local inhabitants aware of the rich culture, tradition and heritage that they have, which may be explored for their economic betterment and to bring their villages on the global map.

India resides in the villages” wrote Gandhi ji and he wanted the economy to be village based. A contradiction to this view is that all over the world one of the parameters to measure economic prosperity is the rate of urbanisation. In the past several decades since the country got independence, there has been a push towards urbanisation from rural to urban taking place in large numbers. Urbanisation brings with itself many incentives which lead to better standards of living for individuals and also economic growth for the economy. However it is also marred with ill effects. One of the off shoots of urbanisation is that people are stressed out and look for avenues to relax. Tourism or vacations provide the perfect get away for the residents of concrete jungles. This sector has a humane dimension to it but the economic impact of tourism cannot be overlooked. Initially the places with historical importance or of natural beauty became tourist destinations, in turn these destinations developed economically. In India, states like Goa, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh primarily depend on tourism for their livelihood. Considering the importance of

this sector initiatives have been taken to promote tourism. Rural tourism is part of one such policy where the stress is on developing rural areas as tourist areas. In India this is a modern concept, however at the global level this trend started in the seventies. Rural economy needs to be revitalized as there is over dependence on agriculture and with the lack of forward linkages, agro based industries have not grown at the required pace. As a result, the rural economy has been in doldrums. Rural tourism can play a very important catalyst in such a scenario.

The analysis of the role of rural tourism in rural economy requires defining the term “rural” and “rural tourism”. The term rural has different connotations for different countries and there is no consensus on its definition. Broadly it may be defined as an area which has low population density, large open fields, less degree of pollution and less technology driven means of livelihood. In India as per the Census of 2011, rural area is defined as an area which has population less than 10000. In the same survey it has been said that there are about





Economy and Tourism

The direct contribution of the tourism sector to GDP was 3.7 percent in 2017 which was expected to increase to 7.6 percent in 2018 and by the year 2028, it would be 3.9 percent of GDP. If the total contribution to GDP is seen then it is 9.4 percent in 2017, for 2018 the forecast to rise by 7.5 percent and for 2028, it is 6.9 percent. In terms of employment, in 2017 the total employment generated was 5 percent which is expected to increase by 2.8 percent in 2018 and by 2.1 percent in 2028. The

potential of this sector can be gauged by the fact that 10.8 million foreign travelers visited India which was 15.6 percent more than 2016. The number of domestic tourists was 1613.6 million in 2016. The total foreign exchange earned from this source is INR 180379 crores showing a growth of 17 percent between 2016 and 2017.

seven lakh villages and around 69 percent of the population resides in these villages. In addition to this the fact that 62 percent of the total population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Now defining rural tourism, it is any form of tourism that showcases rural life, culture, traditions, folklore, handicrafts, heritage at rural locations. Rural tourism may include agri tourism, eco-tourism, adventure sports and cultural tourism. The main focus is on giving the tourists a firsthand experience of rural life and its various dimensions. One of the objectives is also to connect the people with their roots as there are families who have lived in urban spaces for generations. Less pollution, less density of people, natural produce, less technological interventions and cheap facilities are some of the pull factors for rural tourism.

Rural tourism was first introduced in India in the National Tourism Policy whereby 103 projects were sanctioned by the government during the Tenth Five Year Plan. In the Eleventh Five Year Plan rural tourism became one of the primary tourist product and the government sanctioned 69 rural tourism projects. By the Twelfth Five Year Plan it was decided to develop clusters, proposing 70 such clusters with a total investment of INR 770



crores. Rajasthan and Kerala were the early movers to take advantage of this scheme. Villages with special art form, cuisine, historical importance, and beauty or adventure sport sites have been developed in various states. Jammu and Kashmir has the highest number of rural tourist sites (26). Economically these villages were already developed as they had a distinct art and culture. However tourism is providing a perfect showcase for these handicrafts, culture, heritage at the global level. It is also providing them with extra cash especially in the off season. While developing these villages as tourist sites the infrastructure in terms of power, connectivity, sanitation and health was also developed in the process. This is an added advantage for the population living in these areas. Moreover the development of tourist sites also puts a brake on migration.



The states which have high tourist sites in general have less rural tourist sites like Rajasthan and Maharashtra. The North Eastern states have large number of villages that have been identified for tourism mainly because of the ecological beauty and the handicraft of the region. As these economies are female led, these rural tourist sites provide additional income to them.

heritage and culture that they uniquely possess which needs to be showcased to the world. Thirdly there is capacity building in these sites in terms of culinary skills, soft skills etc which provides indirect employment. Fourthly the local business gets boost as the number of consumers go up making it beneficial for local consumers as well as they get more variety of products. Fifthly, employment also goes up but it may not be permanent in nature but there is diversification from agriculture which is a positive sign for the rural economy. There is huge infusion of investment in the core and periphery of the villages thereby improving the overall economic health of the villages.

Sustainable development has been the core of all developmental policies across the world since it was first mentioned in the Brundtland Report in 1987. The current debate on circular economy is dealing with the same issue and rural tourism is a means to achieve this goal. All around the world rural tourism deals with using local resources- both physical and human and using it to market the place for tourism. Infrastructure development is very important, especially in countries like India. When a village gets selected to be a part of rural tourism destinations then the state machinery helps in developing these amenities. Secondly it draws the attention of the local residents on the



It is to be understood that though there are large number of positive socio-economic effects of rural tourism, there is also the need to analyse the negative effects of rural tourism on village economy. The urban mass brings with itself new technology and means which destroys the serenity of these places. The very environment which acts as a pull factor becomes polluted because of tourists harming the health of the local people. Many a times the local resources go out of bounds for the local people as they are treated as special incentives so as to draw more tourists. The work culture of the villages gets disturbed as tourism is usually part time, thereby the working ethos changes. Though there is a shift of employment from



agriculture to tourism but it has been observed that the by product is given more importance than the main occupation which is detrimental for village economy. There is also local price inflation that reduces the local demand and thus makes the model unsustainable.

Gender is another aspect that needs to be looked into closely. The women are the uncoun- ted and very often unpaid labour who does most of the lowly jobs. In the case studies of various rural tourist places, an aspect that has been highlighted is that women continue to do their household chores apart from contributing in the business. As these sites are community run, most of the work is done by the local people which is a positive for the economy but for women it adds to their work burden.

Case Studies

Shaam-E-Sarhad, Hodka, Gujarat: Hodka has been named after a jheel (lake) by the same name that existed some 300 years ago at this place. As part of the Endogenous Tourism Project of UNDP, this village was selected for rural tourism in 2004. This village is known for its rich embroidery and art work mostly done by women. The basic idea of tourism here was to give the feel of rural life amidst rural set up and for this the villagers built mud houses which blended with the local landscape. These mud houses were decorated with local artwork and this gave a big impetus to local artisans. The annual income has increased from one lakh per annum to 45 lakhs per annum which is used for the development of the region. A major achievement of Hodka is that it gave a formal outlook to the *Banni* (local community) breeders association which led to the recognition of *Banni* buffalo as the eleventh

breed of buffalo of India. The Rann festival also originated from here.

Naggar, Himachal Pradesh: Naggar in Kulu district was chosen as one of the heritage sites for rural tourism under the Endogenous Tourism Project of UNDP where 5 villages were selected to be developed as tourist sites. Famous Russian painter Nicholas Roerich called it his home after he settled here. The government turned his villa into a heritage site. The weaving of Naggar is famous and that has been used as an unique selling point to attract tourists. As it is between Kulu and Manali, it is easy to get tourists for this village. The entire site is run by the local inhabitants and the women are earning extra through their weaving work. The local youth has been trained to act as guides and capacity building has been done so as to stop migration.

Conclusion

Rural tourism not only promotes tourism activities in general and generates employment but also makes the villages self reliant in many ways. Most of the village tourist sites have been part of the Endogenous Tourism Project which has brought in huge investments in these areas. It has helped to safeguard the local heritage sites making the local inhabitants aware of the rich culture, tradition and heritage that they have, which may be explored for their economic betterment and to bring their villages on the global map. There are certain negative factors too that have come in with the positive ones to these areas but a cost benefit analysis shows that the standard of living of the people have improved. As these sites are run and maintained by the local people, the originality of the area is not being lost and the youth are engaged in this work which gives them an enhanced sense of belongingness and they are finding newer methods to augment their income. As Gandhiji wrote, “the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed” and this is true for all the rural tourist sites.

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BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURISM

Prof. G. Anjaneya Swamy

Since rural tourism provides an opportunity to engage the local resources – both physical and human, it will have a positive impact not only on the incomes of local people but also lends a sense of pride to them.

The oft repeated saying that ‘India lives in villages’ is more than true. There are about 7 lakh villages in India spread over 29 states and 7 union territories. Population in rural areas is engaged in diverse socio, cultural and economic activities. Accordingly, each place in rural India is endowed with its own charm and beauty. From the tourism prospective, rural India holds a huge potential waiting to be tapped. It is only in the recent year that policy makers, tourism development agencies and connoisseurs of tourism began to realize and appreciate the potential of rural tourism. It is anybody’s knowledge that modern life in urban concrete jungles in the midst of noise, polluted air, and fast paced lifestyle has a telling impact on the health, peace and well-being of the people in general. To escape from the monotony of modern urban life and in the pursuit of peace, and for an authentic experience of rural cuisine, domestic chores, farm operations and a variety of artifacts, urban elite, of late, have developed a penchant for rural India. Thus there lies a huge potential in rural tourism where the unique strengths of rural India may be showcased. This article therefore attempts to bring out the various facets of rural tourism and the benefits there of.

Before dwelling into the benefits of tourism, it is appropriate to understand what rural tourism

is all about. *“Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural location, thereby benefitting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the local people for a more enriching tourism experience”,* may be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is multi-faceted and encompasses the following:

- Agricultural tourism - tourists watch and participate in traditional agricultural practices/processes.
- Activities in the nature – recreation and fun (hunting, fishing, cycling, walking, mountaineering).
- Ecotourism – tourism to support initiatives for natural resources protection,
- Rural experience – tourists’ participation in everyday village life,
- Cultural tourism –bringing to the fore rich rural culture, history and archeology,
- Other combined forms of tourism of special interests – events, festivals, recreation in the open air, production and sale of local souvenirs products.

In contrast to conventional tourism, rural tourism has the following typical characteristics:



- It is experience oriented,
- The locations are sparsely populated,
- The setting is predominantly in natural environment,
- It blends with seasonality and occurrence of local events, and
- It revolves around preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

Rural tourism as an economic product

Rural Tourism implies trips where the main purpose is to enjoy authentic rural experiences. The primary motive for a holiday to rural areas is to enjoy the quality of natural unspoiled landscapes. Rural tourism aims at including and benefitting rural communities, while preserving their environmental and cultural assets. It fosters economic development in rural areas by creating additional income and employment. Besides improving the social and economic well-being, promotion of rural tourism concurrently stimulates infrastructure development in the areas of transport, telecommunication, banking, sanitation and electrification.

Who constitute the rural tourists?

Mostly a typical rural tourist is the person who has a flair for travel to distinct places, educated, interested in culture, and ecology. He/she lives in the urban area and usually prefers outing in the weekends to rural areas. Longer stays are rare and at times some of the tourists may prefer to stay for up to 10 days.

Rural tourists may be classified under the following categories:

Visitors interested in daily picnic: This segment however is large. It's common for the city dwellers to visit the countryside close by. Generally it's a one day trip, starting in the morning and ending by the sunset. Groups of tourists, families with friends and relatives plan this type of short visits. Usually they make their own transport arrangements and carry food with them. They camp at a particular place, be it a temple, river bank, orchards, etc. They indulge in entertainment activities like games, singing, dance etc.

Visitors interested in short vacations: In the western countries, this segment of tourists is sizeable. Tourists in this case plan to spend short

vacations stretching from a fortnight to more than a month in a rural setting of their choice. Tourists of this category are quality conscious and usually from higher income groups. They obviously look for good transport, telecommunication, and health care facilities since their stay is for relatively longer periods.

Senior citizens: Senior citizens who have sufficiently explored major tourist destinations during their busy work life and who prefer calm and quiet places away from the urban hustle and bustle.

Urban youth: Of late, rural tourism has become a rage with the urban youth living in concrete jungles devoid of natural light and pure air and engaged in long hours of work chasing deadlines and meeting targets. This segment of tourists has the energy, economic power and the curiosity to explore the countryside which of course is the 'other world'!

Conventional Tourism vs. Experiential Tourism

It's heartening to note that there is a gradual shift all over the world from conventional tourism involving just visiting the tourist destinations to *experiential tourism*. As a result, tourists of the present day are not passive spectators, but active participants.

Benefits of Rural Tourism

Indian experience and several research studies across the world reveal that the benefits of rural tourism to the various sectors/segments of the society are manifold. It would be appropriate to examine these benefits sector-wise :

1. **Benefits to the Local Community:** The primary occupation and source of income to households in any village in India is agriculture and allied activities. Further, rural incomes in India widely fluctuate depending on the vagaries of monsoons. Agriculture in most of the regions in India is rain fed. That apart, agricultural operations by and large are seasonal. As a result most of the households in India are financially stressed. This is largely responsible for the exodus of people from rural areas to urban places in search of livelihoods. Promotion of

rural tourism contributes for the resurgence of rural India in the following ways.

- a) Provides alternate and novel employment opportunities in the village they live. The possibility of continuing their occupations/vocations gets enhanced. Rural tourism increases the faith in their traditions/occupations and motivates them to stay at villages instead of migrating to urban places in search of jobs/alternative income earning avenues.
- b) Supplements household income in a big way. Rural tourism will lead to creation of several supporting services where enterprising villagers transform themselves into service providers. It is a sure option to engage the rural folks. This in a way reduces the pressure of depending on the tiny landholdings with meager incomes.
- c) Throws up opportunities to showcase their cuisine, heritage and artifacts. Rural tourism facilitates expansion of complementary businesses like service stations, hospitality services, recreational activities, crafts/arts.
- d) Facilitates and broadens their vision and outlook, thanks to interaction with the tourists from different places and backgrounds. In most of the Indian villages, for a variety of reasons, the exposure and awareness levels of people are rather low. Interaction with tourists and close association with tour operators/planners connects them to the outside world and in the process the rural-urban divide gets blurred for good.
- e) Entrepreneurial instincts which are hitherto innate get tickled by showcasing their wares to the tourists. Enterprising youth in the villages get new career opportunities suited to their energies and enthusiasm. Rural tourism provides a chance to sharpen their creative skills with respect to product design and improvement.
- f) The feeling that they are less privileged compared to the urban dwellers may be assuaged. They may be helped to draw pride in what they do and the way they live; It's natural for anyone to feel elated when someone from outside their system appreciates the aura and the dexterity with which they perform various tasks in their daily routine - be it collecting water from the wells, tending the livestock, milking the cattle, ploughing the fields, sowing, harvesting, weaving, craft making, community participation/involvement in celebration of festivals and type of competitions/events organized, etc., are only to be seen to appreciate and enjoy! Each of these tasks is a fine art.
- g) The various local crafts and arts, the heritage and treasure trove of yesteryears, are languishing for want of patronage could be revived and the past glory may be restored. For instance, handlooms, pottery, wood carvings and several other region specific crafts in the villages are on the way out in the modern market economy. The commitment and spirit in continuing them gets reinforced by acknowledgement. Rural tourism is the only way to sustain and preserve the folklore, music, dance and drama which form part of the rural cultural heritage and legacy.
- h) Rural tourism is the easiest way to provide gainful employment to the women folk in villages as Indian women are known for their hospitality. For instance, Homestays, the fast growing segment of tourism business today, largely owes its success to women in those villages.
- i) With the revenue that villages will get from the tourists through entry fee, parking charges and the cess levied on local service providers. The revenue thus pooled up by the village administration comes in handy for improving the facilities like sanitation, drainage and internal roads. This is how rural tourism empowers the villages and the much avowed 'Gram Swaraj' becomes a reality.

Benefits to the Tourism Industry

Though tourism industry is growing fast in India with respect to the increase in number of both domestic and international tourists' visits of various tourism destinations, development of new tourism products is far from satisfactory. As a result many of the Indian tourism destinations are overcrowded beyond their carrying capacity and are becoming products of mass tourism. It is high time that new tourism products are developed. Rural tourism fits the bill as a new tourism product. The following benefits accrue to the industry if rural tourism is promoted systematically.

- a) The pressure on conventional tourism destinations may be brought down by popularizing rural tourism as an alternate tourism product. Too many crowds at popular destinations obviously render these places beyond the reach of low budget tourists. As alternative tourism products like rural tourism are promoted, the market mechanism brings down the overheads at popular/ conventional destinations which in turn is a big relief to the tourists.
- b) As rural tourists are generally from elite segments of the urban places and they are driven by a strong desire to relax in the lap of nature away from the urban humdrum, they are relatively not price sensitive. With deep pockets and a strong desire for an exclusive experience, rural tourist's affordability of the trip cost is quite high. As such, the profit per tourist to the various service providers in the supply chain, namely tour operators, transport providers, tour escorts, etc. is impressive.
- c) The few villages selected for rural tourism promotion will eventually emerge as rural tourism hubs. In other words, facilitators and various service providers of rural tourism at the village level come into contact with the tour operators located largely in urban places and thus they form part of a network.
- d) The scope of tourism industry could be enhanced as the product mix gets enriched with the inclusion of rural tourism in the product basket. As in the western countries rural tourism in India too has a potential to emerge as powerful special interest tourism with special interest tourists as the target market.

Benefits to the Society at Large

While all the players associated with rural tourism are the direct beneficiaries of rural tourism promotion, the society at large also is immensely benefitted in the following ways

- a) Rural tourism may be used as a tool to mitigate the rural unrest prevalent in most of the rural areas due to low incomes and deprivation of even the basic amenities apart from unemployment. Since rural tourism provides an opportunity to engage the local

resources – both physical and human, it will have a positive impact not only on the incomes of local people but also lends a sense of pride to them.

- b) In view of the need to showcase the local heritage and culture, villagers take initiatives to preserve local buildings inherited from the past, abandoned palaces and castles, old canal waterways, etc. There is now a motivation for them to do so, thanks to the need to present what their places are known for.
- c) Facilitates creating a favorable ecosystem in the rural areas conducive to tourism through enabling people in the villages hitherto untouched by the whole gamut of modern tourism.
- d) Rural tourism acts as a tool with minimum cost to bridge the psychological and emotional gap between the urban and rural populace, as consumers of the product and marketers of the products respectively.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning a few rural tourism destinations which have gained visibility in the rural tourism map of India. Banavasi in Karnataka where wood carving, artifacts, musical instruments and stone cuttings ensures tourists. Raghurajpur in Odisha is known for Pattachitra painters and Gotipua dance troupes, the precursor to the Indian classical dance form of Odissi. Apart from that, the village is also home to crafts like Tussar paintings, palm leaf engravings, stone and wood carvings, cowdung and papier mache toys, and masks. Hodka village in Gujarat is another popular rural tourism destination where finest leather craft artisans and embroidery craftsmen arouse lots of curiosity. Similarly Pochampalli in Telangana state has its unique character of designing and weaving a wide range of silk sarees produced by thousands of looms. Pochampalli has found place in UNESCO tentative list of World Heritage Sites as part of "Iconic saree weaving clusters of India". Destinations like these may be identified across the country and these successful rural tourism business models can be replicated.

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PROSPECTS OF RURAL TOURISM IN NORTH EAST

Dr. Mukesh Kumar Shrivastava

It is evident that the 'Paradise Unexplored' is highly rich in natural and cultural resources. These potentials of resources can be tapped through rural tourism in the interest of its inhabitants. Hence, promotion of rural tourism can play a major role in the creation of additional employment opportunities in rural areas and upliftment of living conditions and increase in income of rural inhabitants.

Rural Tourism is one of the prominent forms of tourism and evolving as a primary form tourism sector. Now, it is being recognised as an important driver of rural economic growth and source of alternative livelihoods & employment in rural areas. It has also been underlined that the Rural Tourism has a great capacity to create large scale employment for both skilled and unskilled labour force including youths residing in rural areas. Hence, the promotion of rural tourism can play a major role in the creation of additional employment opportunities in rural areas. It can also play an important role in achieving growth with equity and sustainability.

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural

Tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like; it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in the natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on the preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

Why Rural Tourism is so important?

- India lives in her village.
- About 68.84 per cent population lives in rural areas of India and the majority of them are dependent on subsistence agriculture without any alternative means of livelihoods.
- Rural Tourism has a great capacity to create large scale employment for both skilled and unskilled

- labour force including youths residing in rural areas.
- d) Promotion of Rural Tourism can reduce the incidence of migration
 - e) It provides a great opportunity for womenfolk to contribute to the mainstream economy and promotes gender empowerment.
 - f) Provides an opportunity to optimising the use of village level recourses/assets.
 - g) Provides a national/ International platform for rural art and handicraft made by rural folk
 - h) Food festival dress
 - i) Rural Tourism can also promote cultural identity of tribal and other community
 - j) It provides impetus to the rural economy and linked them to the economy of the world



The North Eastern States: Treasure of Natural Beauty and Cultural Rainbow

The States located in north eastern corner of India are blessed with natural beauty characterized by the glaciers, lakes, passes, hill ranges with dense forest, river systems, a treasure house of flora and fauna created by the eastern range of Himalaya and its foothills and many other hill ranges. This natural endowment is ornamented by the rainbow of customs, cultures, traditions and languages of communities. The natural and social beauties have shaped this region having eight states a distinctive and compelling destination of International and domestic tourists. The manmade parks, sanctuaries and sharing of 96 percent international boundaries with Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh have also made the region as a hot spot of tourism. The top 5 Destination States in 2016 for domestic tourist were Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka while top 5 destinations for international tourist were Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and West Bengal during 2016.

Rural Tourism in the States of North East India

The Region having eight States with 7.98 per cent of Country's landmass and 3.76 per cent of Country's total population is primarily rural. More than 81 per

cent of the region's population is the inhabitants of rural areas. In fact, rurality is the way of life for the people residing in the states of the region. The potential of tourism in this region is basically rural tourism that is fundamentally ingrained in the natural beauty and socio-cultural practices of ethnic groups of the region. The natural and cultural resources are the core competency of the region.

To harness the potential in the interest of Rural Development, a strong integrated development strategy around the concept of Rural Tourism will be definitely useful for the States of the region. Underlining the importance of Tourism especially Rural Tourism, all the eight states of this region have formulated the State Tourism Policy in which Rural Tourism has been given due place. In fact, it is worthwhile to mention that State Tourism Policy covers the entire territory of the respective State and it is basically a Rural Tourism Policy because it would very difficult to draw a line between rural and urban areas in all the states.

Rural Tourism Site with their USP in the North Eastern States

With an objective to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages, some villages have been chosen which have core competence in art & craft, handloom, and textiles as also an asset base in the natural environment. Under this initiative, the thrust is to promote village tourism as the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural inhabitants.

Review of North Eastern States Tourism Policy and Plan for Rural Tourism

The basic thread of the State Tourism Policy is to tap the alternative avenues of development and

Rural Tourism Sites and their USPs (as on 31.3.11)

State	Village with District	Unique Selling Proposition (USP)
Arunachal Pradesh	1. Village Rengo, Distt. East Siang. 2. Ligu village, Distt. Upper Subansiri 3. Village Ego-Nikte, Distt. West Siang 4. Village Nampong, Distt. Changlang 5. Village Deke, Dist West Siang	Culture and Bamboo Cane handicraft Culture Culture Culture Ethnic tribal culture
Assam	6. Durgapur, Distt. Golaghat 7. Dehing-Patakai Kshetra, Distt. Tinsukia 8. Sualkuchi in Distt. Kamrup 9. Village Asharikandi, Distt. Dhubri	Bamboo Craft and Cuisine Culture and Ecotourism Patta and Moga Silk weaving Terracota Craft
Manipur	10. Khongion, Distt. Thoubal 11. Village Noney, Distt. Tamenglong 12. Andro, Distt. East Imphal 13. Village Liyai, Distt. Senapati	Manipur Dance Manipur Dance Bamboo Craft Ethnic culture
Meghalaya	14. Village lalong, Distt. Jaintia Hills 15. Village Sasatgre, Distt. West Garo Hills 16. Village Mawlynnong, Distt East Khasi Hills	Adventure Bamboo Craft Eco-tourism
Mizoram	17. Village Thenzawl, Dist Serchchip	Handloom weaving and ethnic culture
Nagaland	18. Mopunchupket, Distt. Mokokchung 19. Avachekha, Distt. Zunheboto 20. Changtongia, Distt. Mokokchung 21. Leshumi, Distt. Phek 22. Thetsumi, Distt. Phek 23. Kuki Dulong, Distt. Dimapur 24. Longsa, Distt. Mokokchung 25. Mitikhru, Distt. Phek 26. ChungliYimti, Distt Tuensang 27. Village Longjam, Distt. Zunheboto 28. Village Shena Old, Distt Zunheboto 29. Village Longidang, Distt Wokha	Shawl weaving Tribal Culture Tribal Culture Tribal Culture and Adventure Tribal Culture Tribal Culture Tribal Culture Tribal Culture Art & Craft (Woodcraft), Handloom Historical & Tribal Culture Craft /Handloom (Mekhala and Shawls)/Culture Adventure (trekking and bird-watching) Wood craft and carving
Sikkim	30. Lachen, Dist North Distt. 31. Chumbung, Distt. West Sikkim 32. Tingchim, Distt. West Sikkim 33. Maniram Bhanjgyang 34. Village Rong 35. Village Jaubari, Distt. South Sikkim 36. Village Tumin, Distt. East 37. Village Srijunga Martam, Distt. West 38. Village Darap, Distt West Sikkim 39. Village Pastenga Gaucharan, Distt East Sikkim 40. Village Pendam Gadi Budang, Distt East Sikkim	Rugs and Carpet Eco-tourism (Home stay) Trekking, Bird watching and Butterflies. Culture Culture Adventure & Ecotourism Culture Culture Eco Tourism Culture and Ethnic Lifestyle Culture
Tripura	41. Kamlasagar, Distt. West Tripura 42. Jampui Hills, Distt. North Tripura 43. Durgabari, Distt. West Tripura 44. Devipur, Distt. West Tripura 45. Malayanagar, Distt. West Tripura 46. Village Banabithi, Dist West Tripura 47. Village Harijula, Dist South Tripura 48. Village Kalapania, Distt Sonamara Sub Division 49. Village Sarsima, Distt Belonia 50. Village Bagbari, Distt. Sadar Sub Division	Historical Eco-tourism Tea Gardens Farming Tribal Culture and Eco-tourism Eco-tourism and tea gardens Eco-tourism Religious Eco-tourism Eco-Tourism

upliftment of living conditions and increase in income of rural inhabitants by promoting rural tourism/ multi-faceted village life which has largely remained untapped.

The Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Development Plan is to harness the direct and multiplier effects of tourism for employment generation, economic development and providing impetus to rural tourism. The vital aspect of the rural tourism plan is to create a community managed rural tourism model through strengthening livelihoods of the local communities and the preservation and development of local heritage of the villages. The plan also wants to tackle the problem of migration of the artisans from the village through Rural Tourism and integration of gender perspectives into the tourism industry through the Rural Tourism Scheme, as it is the major employer of women and offers various opportunities for independent income-generating activities for them.

The Tourism policy of Assam focuses on the use of its plentiful natural and cultural resources to form the basis for the very lucrative tourism industry, creating employment and generating income not only in the urban centres but also in the rural areas.

With a focus on its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, the State of Meghalaya tourism policy states that the rural tourism will ensure the dispersal of tourists from the city to villages enabling them to familiarize themselves with the unique culture and heritage prevalent so that they are rejuvenated and culturally enriched. The prime objective of the policy is to harness the vast untapped rural tourism perspective of the state so that their multiplier benefit filters out directly to the rural communities.

Based on its strength, the tourism policy of Manipur focuses on the place of cultural attractions, particularly, the monuments and archaeological remains, its art, handloom & handicrafts and colourful fairs & festivals. The policy also proposed to promote other tourist attractions and options including forests, wildlife and landscapes for eco-tourism; mountain peaks for adventure tourism, rural tourism; heritage sites for heritage tourism; etc. The policy states that the state of Manipur will diversify the tourism product to make Manipur a unique multi-attraction tourism destination which can meet the needs of all forms of tourism particularly rural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, incentive tourism, conference



and convention tourism, etc. Nature tourism centred on villages, coupled with 'Homestay Concept', shall be promoted as an important tourism product of Manipur to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural areas.

Mizoram's tourism policy also underlines suitability of Ecotourism for the state and state that it offers an opportunity to showcase the state's unique natural and associated cultural heritage to visitors while enhancing the livelihood options for the local people. The policy also encourages the local communities to produce local handicrafts and other local souvenirs in a sustainable manner with minimum impact on the ecosystem. The policy also proposed to develop & promote different village ecotourism package for different target groups (i.e. for adults, children, family, students, etc) with potential villages after carrying out micro planning exercises.

Nagaland has also farmed the policy to promote the tourism with a special focus on the promotion of rural, ethnic, cultural, eco and adventure tourism in the state based on thorough understanding of local resources, social and economic factors and other characteristics. The policy proposed to develop Dzulha Village for Rural Tourism located on the border of Phek and Zunheboto districts at an altitude of about 2000 Meters. This village has a unique identity because of community participation and ethnic cultural traditions, arts and sports. The village is also proud of its own community Wildlife Sanctuary covering a natural forest of about 4.00 sq. kms.

Sikkim tourism policy strongly focuses on the promotion of rural tourism to showcase Sikkim's



vibrant and diverse culture. It also wishes to diversify tourists from urban pockets and seek to spread benefits accrued from the sector to more people. At the same time, the policy states that the opportunities and benefits of tourism contribute to the goal of a poverty-free state and provide enhanced opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups such as school dropouts and educated unemployed. The policy is of the view that more opportunities for rural people will also curb rural-urban migration.

The Tripura Tourism Policy focuses on Eco-tourism in rural areas because of the abundance of natural beauty and significant growth in nature tourism. The Policy underlines that the Eco-tourism is a sustainable, equitable, community-based endeavour for improving the living standards for indigenous host communities. To promote, the policy opines to encourage the villagers, especially in the tribal hamlets, the local people to convert part of their houses as house-cum-tourist paying guesthouses.

Conclusion

Rural Tourism is emerging as a primary tourism sector and has a great capacity to create large scale employment in rural areas. India lives in rural areas and without developing rural areas India cannot be a developed country. The same is applicable for the North East Region of India. It is evident that the 'Paradise Unexplored' is highly rich in natural and cultural resources. These potentials of resources can be tapped through rural tourism in the interest of its inhabitants. Hence, promotion of rural tourism can play a major role in the creation of additional employment opportunities in rural areas and

upliftment of living conditions and increase in income of rural inhabitants by promoting rural tourism/ multi-faceted village life which has largely remained untapped.

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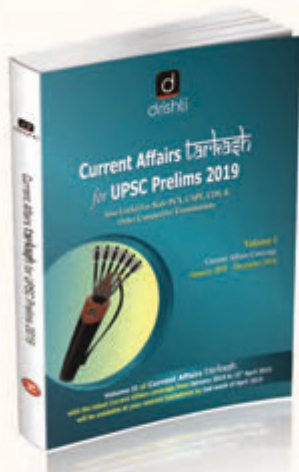
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