

RURAL TOURISM IN INDIA: RELEVANCE, PROSPECTS AND PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Atithi Devo Bhavah is the adage used by the India tourism to lure millions of Tourists from across the globe. Indian villages are unique socio-cultural spaces that vary from one after another but are intertwined on the ethos of this great tradition. Rural Tourism takes place in non-urban settings usually in countryside, offering an elixir to counter tension and "urbanization" syndrome to the weary, stressed out tourists from both within as well as foreign countries to help them relax and rediscover their roots. Since nearly 70% of the India's population is living in rural areas, it is expected to benefit the local rural communities economically through various opportunities for rural enterprises, income generation and employment. It helps in nurturing rural arts and crafts, rural infrastructure development while simultaneously preserving environment and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Tourism in India, Tourists, Incredible India, Ministry of Tourism, Rural Enterprise

INTRODUCTION

अतिथि देवो भवः *Atithi Devo Bhavah* when translated in English means 'The Guest is equivalent to God', is a Sanskrit verse taken from *Taittiriya Upanishad* an ancient Hindu Scripture. It has become part of the "code of conduct" for our Indian society while taking care of our guests. The Indian Tourism industry uses this very adage in it attempts to lure millions of Tourists from across the globe.

Since the dawn of civilization, man's wanderlust has taken him to various places. 'Tourism' comes from the old Aramaic word "Tur", and was used for the first time when Moses began his expedition to the lands of Canaan according to the French School, led by A. Houlot (1961).

Travel for pleasure is Tourism. There are many definitions of Tourism that vary from source to source, person to person. The very first definition of tourism was made by Guyer-Feuler in 1905. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2010) *Tourism comprises the activities of "persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes"*.

SALIENT FEATURES OF TOURISM IN INDIA

India is located in South Asia. With an area of 3,287,263 km², it is the seventh largest country in the world in terms of its size and area. It is also the third largest country in Asia. India offers both religious diversity and tolerance since the major religions of the world viz. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism are practised here. It is also the birthplace of major religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism, in the world. Since India is a land of diversities, hosting diversity of culture, race, ethnic groups, languages, religion, traditions, customs, foods, music, dance, architecture, flora and fauna it is one of the most popular tourist destinations of Asia. It is a treasure house of natural resources ranging from the high mountains to the deep valleys, the wide blue black oceans and seas, the brackish lagoons, the peaceful scenic backwaters, the picturesque expansive deserts and the lush green, deep and dense forests along with man made monuments, forts, palaces, estates, museums, resorts and places of religious interest. The rich hospitality, unique culture and a variety of cuisines that each place offers, adds to the tourism experience. India offers all types of tourism opportunities to the global tourist and naturally attracts

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tourists from across the globe. No matter what the interests, the Indian tourism industry has something to offer to all the tourists coming here.

It was way back in 1958 that Department of Tourism under the Ministry of Transport and Communications was setup. It aimed at giving impetus to tourism in India through policy formulation and programs for promotion of tourism in the country. Department of Tourism controls tourism in India at the centre. It mentors all the rules, laws and regulations related to the development, administration and promotion of tourism in India and making it a prime destination for tourists from across the globe!

EVOLUTION OF INDIAN TOURISM THROUGH THE FIVE YEAR PLANS

The Indian economy is objectively planned through Five Year Plans in India. Indian planners sidelined the Tourism and its development in its 1st 5-year plan (1951-56). Tourism was made a state subject. No separate allocation was made for the tourism sector. In the second 5-Year Plan Rs 336.39 lakhs were kept aside for tourism. Separate allocations were made for the State and Centre Plans for development of accommodation and transportation for the tourists. By the time 3rd Five Year Plan was ushered in, the potential of tourism in the growth and development of India was established. The 800 lakhs allocated during this Plan were used for development of accommodation, transportation and roads. The 4th Plan emphasised on developing various Tourist destinations so that they could bear the influx of tourist traffic. During the 5th Plan 133 crores INR were allocated for integrated development of elected areas, along with development of accommodation and transportation & promotion of tourism abroad.

The 6th Plan emphasised development of sustainable tourism and airport infrastructure. During the 7th Plan Tourism was accorded the status of Industry and 326.16 crores were allocated to it. By the 8th Plan 15 States and 3 States had accorded Industry status to tourism. Courses in Universities on Travel and Tourism, recognition of public sector enterprises, use of communications and computer in development of tourism were realized in this Plan. (Fazili and Ashraf, 2006; Five Year Plans, GOI).

Major changes took place from the 10th Plan onwards. The government realized that Tourism was an important engine for the economic development of the nation and hence put forth 'National Tourism Development Policy' in place in 2002. Incredible India (styled as Incredible!ndia) became the international marketing campaign of Government of India to promote Indian tourism industry for the global audience in the same year. New trends in tourism viz. rural tourism and ethnic tourism were incorporated, along with wellness & health

tourism, spiritual tourism, eco tourism and adventure tourism.

In the 11th Plan INR 3112.71 crores were sanctioned for tourism to make it an engine of economic development. This Plan emphasised on rural tourism, infrastructure projects and human resource development (Annual Report, 2010-2011). 'Hunar se Rozgar' (Skill to employment) Programme was initiated in 2009-10. It intended to create employable skills among youth belonging to economically weaker sections of the society between the ages 18-25 years (In November, 2010 upper age limit raised to 28 years). During this Plan Rural Tourism projects were sanctioned in 186 villages located in 29 States/Union Territories by the Ministry of Tourism. Fifty six of these sites were located in the North-Eastern region. This program continued in the 12th Plan. Under this initiative 21,175 persons were trained by 31 January 2013 for the year 2012-13 (Annual Report, 2012-2013).

The Tourism Ministry adopted Publicity and marketing strategies and started participating in important tourist generating markets (emerging as well as potential) such as major international Travel Fairs and Exhibitions to showcase and promote Indian tourism. Since November 2014 'Visa on Arrival' facility has been introduced for International Visitors entering/visiting India from 43 different countries. This is another strategy to promote tourism and boost the GDP of the country that has been initiated. The emphasis in the current Plan is on 'Rural Tourism Cluster' or developing a cluster of villages of the country for Tourism promotion.

TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN INDIAN

The Indian Travel and Tourism Industry is economically very important for the country. It has grown phenomenally over the years, that it has outperformed even the manufacturing, financial services and retail sectors. Indian Tourism Industry is not just a growth engine but also an employment generator and export growth engine. According to the Economic Survey 2011-12 Tourism can create direct as well as indirect employment, small to large scale employment, absorbing specialized to unskilled workers.

The World Travel and Tourism Council calculated that tourism generated 6.4 trillion (US\$94 billion) or 6.6% of the nation's GDP in 2012. It supported 39.5 million jobs, 7.7% of its total employment. India ranked 38th in the world in terms of foreign tourist arrivals with about 7.68 million foreign tourists visiting India in 2014, indicating an increase of 10.2% foreign tourists and an increase of 14.5% in Foreign exchange earnings (FEE) over the previous year. The provisional number of Domestic tourist was 1281.95 million in 2014 registering an increase by 11.9 % over the previous year (Indian Tourism Statistics, 2014). The Indian

Tourism Industry has grown at about 7.35% in 2014 and is predicted to grow at an average annual rate of 7.9% till 2023 making India the third fastest growing tourism destination over the next decade.

India ranks among top 3 medical tourism destinations in Asia (Times of India, 2014). After Thailand, India has the second largest number of accredited facilities. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Grant Thornton Report, 2014, indicates that India's medical tourism market will more than double in size from \$3 billion at present to around \$8 billion by 2020 (DNA, 2015).

Besides medical tourism, various other types of tourism in India have registered significant growth and they include rural tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, eco and sustainable tourism, pilgrimage tourism, wellness tourism and wildlife tourism.

FRAMEWORK OF RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism has become popular in many parts of the world with the growing need for super segmentation of the tourism market (Negi, 1990; Zurick 1992). This form of tourism is a comparatively new entrant in the Indian tourism industry. It was the 'National Tourism Development Policy' 2002 that for the first time gave impetus to rural tourism industry. According to Nagaraju and Chandrashekar (2014) 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 a tourism activity that takes place in the rural areas, villages or the countryside. 'Rural tourism', 'agri-tourism', 'green tourism', 'sustainable and ecotourism' are all interrelated terms. In fact rural tourism may entail farm/agricultural tourism, heritage and culture tourism, scenic/nature tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrim tourism and eco-tourism. Rural tourism is a concept that has slowly gained popularity amongst travellers.

Compared to the conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics. Rural Tourism is a multi-faceted, experience-oriented activity. The locations for rural tourism are less populated taking place in predominantly natural environments. It is based on the premise of preserving culture, heritage and traditions. It has a lot to provide in a single package; the setting is nonurban with rural essence for the tourists. This benefits the local community while preserving rural assets, values and heritage. Rural Tourism is just not farm based tourism. It includes farm based holidays but also includes special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, fishing, educational travel, arts and heritage

tourism, and in some areas entails ethnic tourism. The tourists participate in creation of sales, profits, jobs, returns and income. Rural Tourism is characterized by the fact that consumption takes place where the service is provided (Steenwagen, 2003) and the economic impact of tourism is important factor in the national, regional, and public planning and economic development.

In India, the scheme of rural tourism was launched in 2002-03 by the Ministry of Tourism but till date it has yet to define 'rural tourism' formally. Initially it promoted 'heritage tourism/ 'religious tourism', 'ecotourism', etc., which included rural tourism. Its main objective was to highlight rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages which have core competence in art, craft, handloom, textiles and have resplendent natural settings and environment (Case Box-1). The premise behind promoting rural tourism was to benefit the local community economically and socially and to enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually inspiring and enriching exchanges and experience (Case Box-2). The promotion of village tourism was also aimed towards generating revenue for rural communities through tourist visits, which may stop the rampant unchecked migration from rural to urban areas in search of employment and better opportunities for life.

Case Box 1: Interacting with the Warli Painters of Maharashtra

The Purushwadi, Valwanda, Dehna in Maharashtra offers 1-5 days of wandering through the forests in Dehna, interacting with the Warli painters-the folk painters of Valwanda and witnessing a night sky lit with millions of fireflies in Purushwadi.

Case Box-2: Uttarakhand Rural Tourism: In the lap of nature

The Kumaon region in Uttarakhand has beautiful hilltops and the village Deora, Pallyu and Shaukiyathal offer unique picturesque sights of typical village mountain dwellings, houses that have intricately designed doors and windows, the mesmerizing waterfalls, the traditional Kumaoni music and dance and the lush green terraced fields.

India has grown remarkably and the urban areas and spaces at some cities match their counterparts at the international level. Some of these look even alien in their architecture, structural design and ambience. Some of the five star hotels, hospitals, malls and the banks are in utter contrast to what the traditional Indian architecture, buildings, monuments, market places and areas of tourist interest might offer. For those who are already stressed by the urban living and life

style and yearn to be back in the 'lap of nature', rural tourism provides them with the apt opportunity to do so (Case Box-3).

Rural tourism acts as an elixir to counter stress and "urbanization" syndrome. Many are interested in the taste of real India- India in its basic elemental form. For those yearning for this, it can only be explored in the many villages which encompass the rich cultural heritage, traditions customs and lifestyle. Rural destinations offer firsthand experience to the rural life in simple, unpolluted environment steeped in rural culture that entails staying in mud houses, enjoying the simple yet delicious meals, revelling in the folk art, music and dances for entertainment. Hence for those interested in travelling to the roots and discovering the soul of India, 'rural tourism' is what that they should undertake.

Case Box 3:

Rural Tourism of Spiti Valley

The Komic village in the Spiti Valley is the highest inhabited Asian Village at 4,400 metres. Komic along with Demul and Langza village provides homestays and offers opportunities to interact with Buddhist Theatre artists, try hands at high altitude farming, learn to cook customary food items, mountain biking, yak safaris, do botanical tours, experience the local craft and even venture into the habitat of blue sheep, the snow leopards and the oldest 8,00,000 years old species of Himalayan wolves!

RURAL - URBAN DIVIDE IN INDIA

Rural areas or 'countryside' in India are referred to as 'village'. The Villagers comprise the core of Indian society and also represent the real India. Mahatama Gandhi, in his famous speech during the Lahore session of the Congress in 1929, said, "India lives in her villages." And indeed according to the Census of India (2011) nearly 70 per cent of the country's population lives in 638,596 villages of rural India (Census of India, 2001). The rural-urban population distribution is 68.84 per cent (83.3 crore residing in rural areas) and 31.16 per cent (37.7 crore residing in urban areas) respectively (Census of India 2011).

The chief source of livelihood in rural areas is agriculture and allied activities as fishery, horticulture, animal husbandry, dairying, sericulture, cottage industries, pottery etc. The agriculture sector employs 49% labour force and contributes a big chunk of 17% to India's GDP. According to the World Bank's growth outlook for 2015-16 the Indian economy has grown at 7.6% and is expected to grow 7.7-8.0% in 2016-17. In terms of its nominal GDP India is now the seventh largest in the world and the third largest by purchasing power parity (PPP) (World Economic Outlook Database,

2014). The International Monetary Fund (2015) calls India "the bright spot in the global landscape".

In spite of this silver lining, the contribution of the agricultural sector to the GDP of India has declined connoting a distressed agriculture sector, distressed farmers and an extremely distressed rural life. The estimates of the Rangarajan Committee indicate that rural poverty is higher than urban and stands at approximately 31% in 2011-12 (Planning Commission, 2014). The vital development indicators clearly point that the rural India is a laggard!

Even the latest available Human Development Report (HDR) 2015 shows that in the overall global ranking India was placed at 130 (out of 188 countries) with 0.609 score in the medium human development category. The human development index [HDI] is estimated in terms of three basic capabilities: to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and knowledgeable, and to enjoy a decent economic standard of living. The 2011 Census of India points to a literacy gap wherein the literacy rate among urban population is 84.1 per cent while it is 67.8 per cent for the rural population; the overall life expectancy in India is 63.5 years and interestingly, an urban female lived 4.9 years longer than a rural female and 7.9 years longer than a rural male (Registrar General of India, 2011). The Crude Birth Rate is higher (24.1) in rural areas as compared to (18.3) urban areas. The Infant Mortality Rate (2012) is very high in rural areas (46 per 1000 live births) as compared to urban areas (28 per 1000 live births).

The total unemployment rates in the country stands at 4.9 per cent and the youth unemployment rate at 12.9 per cent (Ministry of Labour and Unemployment, 2014). The unemployment rate in rural India is at 1.7 percent and in urban areas at 3.4 percent, according to the 66th survey results of 2011-12 carried out by National Sample Survey Organisation. Kerala in spite of the highest literacy rates has the highest unemployment rates which is 73/1000 in Urban areas (National average is 34/1000 in Urban areas) and 76/1000 in the rural areas (National average is 16/1000 in rural areas), while Rajasthan and Gujarat have the least unemployment rate among major States of India. Forty nine per cent of India's workforce is employed in farming in rural areas.

Since the rural families tend to be larger on an average, this would mean anything from 55-60 per cent of our population is farm-dependent. In other words more half of the workforce produces just a seventh of the GDP and nearly two-third of India subsists on it (Gupta, 2015). Also in spite of striking fall in Inflation in India, these gains are not equally distributed...the rural inflation continues to be higher than the urban inflation as per the analysts at CEIC, HSBC Global Research (2016). In spite of 70 years of India's independence, the rural India and its people are in throes of

abject poverty, illiteracy, ill health, apathy, neglect, lacking even the bare essentials that are necessary for a dignified life. The villages fall abysmally low in almost every aspect of socio-economic parameter and its analysis. All this together projects a picture of grave rural distress and rural decay.

RURAL TOURISM COMBATING THE RURAL - URBAN DIVIDE

In this grave situation of extreme Rural-Urban divide and the prevailing rural poverty in India, Rural Tourism can provide a great balm and relief to the rural poor. Many underdeveloped / remote areas across the world are using Tourism as an instrument of growth of neglected, remote and rural/ backward areas. In India too it is illustrated by many successful experiences and examples of rural tourism one particularly being that of remote Tipam Phakey Village of Assam which is illustrated in the Case Box 4.

Case Box 4: Rural Tourism of Tipam Phakey Village, Assam

Milli's (2012) Study of **Rural Tourism in the Tipam Phakey Village of Naharkatia in Dibrugarh District in Assam** indicates that this place has great diversity of culture, traditions and natural resources, which makes this place very attractive tourist destination. This village provides opportunities to tourists where they can experience the rural life style of the local people, even witness their traditions, customs, their ethnic attire and share their local foods and cuisines in delightful destination. The economy of the village is reliant only on tea estate since the illegal wood business has been stopped! Tourism and tourist activities help the villagers accrue economic and other benefits from it. The employment opportunities and income levels of the youths have increased. About 17 youth of which 2 are girls are engaged in organisation of eco-tourism camps. The Handloom industry and production of local handloom products has got a positive impetus. The rural people now consciously work towards preservation of natural resources and rural eco system. They are involved in creation of social forests and preservation of existing forests since they form the very basis of rural livelihood and income generation. The villagers now realise the importance of their almost hidden but old culture the 'Tai culture' which they now consciously preserve and proudly showcase to the world.

In context of the rural urban divide, 'Rural Tourism' becomes a significant economic activity and service for the rural people as they act both as a 'service producer' and also as a 'service provider'. The tourists come to rural areas for gaining first hand taste and experience of rural life. In return the villagers get money from the tourists and this not only generates extra or alternative sources of income for them but

also opens many doors for various entrepreneurial activities and self-employment opportunities. The basic concept of rural tourism is to benefit the local rural communities through rural enterprises, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and also providing impetus to the development of rural arts and crafts, investment for infrastructure development simultaneously preserving environment and heritage. In light of the fact that as the share of contribution of the agriculture sector is on the decline to the GDP of our country a strong, alternative and a viable sector is required by the rural India to diversify their local economies. India with all its diversities, where about 70 per cent of the country's population lives in about 6.5 million villages and where the Indian Tourism Industry has grown at about 7.35%, 'rural tourism' sure can be an important and a viable alternative sector that can contribute to the rural economy and act as a tool for rural development. Rural tourism can not only be a harbinger of socio-economic development of the rural people but can also facilitate in increasing the foreign exchange reserve of the country.

RURAL TOURISM AND RURAL STAYS

Rural Tourism initiatives have been underway even long before the advent of the official concept in our country. Initially it was promoted and mentored by private owners and tour operators. As early as 1980, Rajasthan had heavy inbound traffic which was being run individually and privately. Randhir Singh of Mandawa started home-stay in Castle Mandawa in 1980, even when vegetables were not available in that region. This gave a cue to villagers to grow vegetables and fruits which could now be supplied at a higher rate within their own vicinity without fear of spoilage and produce going waste. Gradually many royalties who were finding it difficult to maintain their Estates, followed suite and started opening their palaces or lodges into high-end hotels and resorts. Foreign tourists thronged for a first hand slice from 'royalty life' and *Maharaja* (royalty) treatment. Rural tourism started at this time where besides the luxurious stay at Samode Palace, village huts with attached bath came up. These huts kept the vernacular architecture of the village intact to be part of the local landscape. Yet they offered comfortable stay to the tourists at affordable prices. The accompanying rural experiences in village huts, interaction with villagers and rural craftsmen & gorging local cuisine made it a unique experience of a life time!

RURAL TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOODS

In 2003 Endogenous Tourism Project-Rural Tourism Scheme (ETP-RTS) was started by Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with United Nations Development Project

(UNDP). The objective of the Project was focussing on sustainable rural livelihoods, income generation, employment, gender equality, empowerment of women, youth and marginalized sections of the rural society and their capacity building. The Project was initiated at Sualkuchi in 2004, the largest village in the Brahmaputra basin in the Kamrup District of Assam. Sualkuchi is famous for silk weaving and recognised as the “Manchester of the East”. The project experimented with tourism as an engine of sustainable rural development under Indian conditions (Ministry of Tourism UNDP, 2008). Tourist sites entirely managed by local communities were used for the first time under the ETP. Empowerment of women, promotion of self-help groups (SHGs), health camps, sanitation drives, and vocational trainings were the peripheral activities under the project. In 2008 the total income of these sites was slightly over INR 48.7 million with 40% increase in income level of at least 80 families. Today, the local cultural groups are performing at national platforms, the cuisine of Sualkuchi is recognized as one of the best among all the ETP sites in the country, and the villagers are now confident enough to receive tourists from all over the globe. Out of the total of thirty six ETP sites, fifteen sites are now open for visitors, and approximately 14,000 individuals are involved in these sites. This has been branded under ‘explorerural India’ sites for a successful rural tourism promotion strategy.

It was in 2007-08 that rural tourism artisans were brought to the National platform through the Delhi Haat, International Trade Fair, Delhi and Toshali National Craft Mela, Bhuvaneshwar. The Rural Tourism site Aranmula in Kerala possesses all the attributes of rural Kerala. It is a unique example of sustainable rural livelihood and integrated rural development. The local artisans of Aranmula engage in traditional yet internationally acclaimed crafts such as the Aranmula metal mirror the ‘Aranmula Kannadi’, the mural paintings, the construction of boats which are used in the annual Palliyodam boat race or the Snake boat race festival taken on the river Pampa.

Box 5: Help Tourism of the East and North East India:

The ‘Help Tourism’ organization launched a village-based tourism initiative in 1991 in West Sikkim by involving all the 40 families of the village. They offered rural home-stays that were clean, comfortable and cost effective to special-interest travellers like trekkers or climbers. Today, the same project has been replicated in 22 places across East and Northeast India providing enriched rural tourism experiences with unique local flavour!

Hodka Village in the Rann of Kutch is inhabited by the cattle herders of the Haleopatra clan who came in search of pastures from the Sindh (now Pakistan). Overtime the Meghwals the leather craft and embroidery craftsmen from the North also settled here. The Village Tourism Committee of Hodka has

developed the Shaan-e-Sarhad (Sunset at the Border) Village Resort that offers a unique tourism experience because of its magnificent, spectacular natural surroundings. The hospitable villagers warmly extend their hospitality, laced with traditional Gujarati and Kutchi cuisines aplenty with buttermilk (*chaach*), along with first hand peep into their local traditions, culture and their stupendously creative art and craft. Hodka is a shoppers delight, because of the rich crafts available here. Accommodation is available in both Bhungas -the memorable mud huts and also the tents. Shaan-e-Sarhad is a unique example of combining traditional livelihoods (embroidery, weaving, block printing, bandhani) with innovation (rural tourism) and contributing significantly to the economy of Kutch.

Rural Tourism although a road less travelled, actually gives a deep insight to local culture, and is a spiritual journey for many. The aroma of the local freshly brewed tea, the narrow unwinding roads, taste of a variety of cuisines and savouries is what a tourist can all experience while opting for rural tourism. Realizing the potential of rural tourism, 169 rural tourism sites have been sanctioned by the Ministry of Tourism in 2011 in 28 states/UTs of our country. These rural tourism sites have brought many accolades and laurels at national as well as International level. In recent times many private tour operators have innovated and are conducting tourism for even the wheelchair wanderers, developing tourists’ skills in rural art-folk art, folk music and folk dance, providing them opportunities for ecotourism and to even try out their hands at farming & hence catering to the diverse needs of wander lust tourists across the globe.

Case Box 6: Rural Tourism & Prestigious Awards

The Rural Tourism site Aranmula in Kerala got the prestigious Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Award in 2007 while the Rural Tourism Project at the Hodka Village in Kutch District of Gujarat won the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) award 2010 in the heritage category.

CHALLENGES OF RURAL TOURISM

The greatest challenge faced by rural tourism is educating the rural people and bringing favourable attitudinal changes towards the tourists coming to their villages and also towards the very concept of rural tourism as an economic enterprise for the economic development of the village folk. ‘Commoditisation of culture’ or ‘commoditization of culture’ is another grave threat and challenge in the development of rural tourism. Shepherd (2002) is of the view that commoditisation occurs since the ‘tourists want to experience cultures different from their own’. Commoditisation destroys the local culture and its authenticity. This can lead to so called ‘endangered cultures’ (Taylor, 2001). On the other hand Cole

(2007) believes that it can actually help and empower the locals e.g. Aranmula in Kerala (Case Box-6) and the Hodka Village in Kutch. The debate on commoditisation purports both positive viewpoint i.e. development of the rural indigenous people and negative viewpoint that it can lead to their culture being frozen to a certain point in development to provide a so called original, pure, pristine and authentic experience to the tourists. What is required is a balance so that both the rural people and the tourists can mutually benefit from the situation.

For obtaining visible positive impacts in the lives of the rural people it is important that they have equal stake in the planning, development, implementation and management of the rural tourism. Because they can on their own monitor, control and counter the negative impacts of tourism. Establishment of democratic processes also helps people at all levels to participate positively in the development of rural tourism and in the preservation of the environment also. Rural tourism also entails development of the basic rural infrastructure. The landscape and public amenities have to be so developed that quality of life of villagers can be improved and healthy, hygienic environment can be created and made available to the tourists. Local cooperation and participation of rural people is also required in the occupational training and handicraft promotion. Hence participation of the stake holder is an effective approach in bringing positive impacts in rural areas and overcoming all challenges.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM

- Create an interest among the rural people towards rural tourism, where in they understand its worth in income generation besides agriculture activities.
- Although Rural tourism activity has to be either centrally or state funded, but these initiatives have to be designed, planned, implemented and managed by the rural people themselves i.e. it has to be “community based” and “community controlled” initiative.
- Department of Commerce, Department of Economics, Department of Extension or Departments of Hotel, Hospitality, Tourism and Management of the state and Central Universities can provide consultancy in the designing, business planning, implementation, management and promotion of Rural tourism.
- Rural tourism should be local community centric rather than infrastructure centric. It should emphasise on the ‘process’ rather than the product.
- Village Tourism Committee under the leadership of Village Sarpanch or Headman comprising of representatives of all sections of the village should be constituted comprising of women, youth, folk artists, crafts men, artisans and the marginalized sections of the community.
- The Village Tourism Committee should have sub-committees, each sub-committee assigned with specific portfolio aimed at promoting
 - Local food and hospitality
 - Culture: customs, rituals, traditions, performing and folk art
 - Architecture
 - Traditional/indigenous goods and materials
- Capacity building trainings should be imparted to the villagers in areas of
 - leadership, rudimentary language learning and communication skills.
 - management of tourism.
 - waste management.
 - accounting.
 - development of indigenous publicity materials.
- Creation of a village museum that showcases the rural life through photographs, exhibits, artefacts, specimens, models all prepared indigenously.
- Developing website for promotion of rural tourism and creation of digitized Village in the era of ‘Digital India’.
- Synergy between various Government Departments, Government Health services, Private Health providers and Hospitals, local Civic authorities and District Administration is a must for development of concrete motor able roads as far as possible, provision of safe drinking water, adequate health facilities and total sanitation scheme.
- The natural, cultural, human and capital resources indigenous to the area ought to be used.
- The infrastructure that is created should have a vernacular architecture and use locally available materials so that it is in synch with the local ambience and experience.
- The village mason, craftsmen, carpenter etc should be roped in for creation of infrastructure so that it provides them with opportunities for employment and income generation.
- Rural Tourism experiences are unique and hence they have to be customized in every place and location.
- Authenticity, distinctiveness, holistic and contextual should be the hallmark of the rural tourism experience.
- The performing and folk art and crafts should be original and pure and not standardized, stereotypical, cheap imitations.

- The intake of Tourists in a season or round the year should be decided by the Village Tourism Committee so that visits in large numbers does not wreak havoc with the very ecosystem and diversity which the tourists have come to enjoy.
- Whether 'Home stays' or centralized accommodation will be provided to rural tourist, has to be decided by the villagers as:
 - are the houses ready to put up tourists.
 - is there a possibility of child sexual abuse as reported in Goa, Kerala, Orissa in home stay.
 - impact of tourists on hosts and hosts culture all needs to be kept in focus.
- Quality services and facilities should be provided.
- Pricing should be such that tourists perceive it to be 'value for money'.
- Being an important revenue generation activity for the rural people, rural tourism should include several mechanisms whereby revenue can be generated actually. This may be done through
 - Entrance fee to important locations, forested areas, museums, ecowalks, scenic beauty sights, cultural arenas
 - Fee for Facility use
 - Permit Fee or License Fee
 - On-site sales
 - Royalties
 - Collection from Tour Operators
- The villagers should explore and provide opportunities to the tourists for nature walks, trekking, climbing-mountains/ trees, exploring biodiversity in natural parks.
- Rural tourism sites even though may be remotely located but they have to be well connected by road, rail and air.
- Conscious attempts should be made to preserve and maintain the traditional culture and value system along with refinements on these via the assimilation process due to tourist linkages.
- Success stories and Case studies have to be very meticulously documented.
- Systematic researches may be taken up systematically by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. which keep tab of
- The data and inputs from the experiments and innovations in the rural tourism the achievements, success and even failures can form basis for improvements in this sector.

- Both local as well as world media should be used to extensively highlight the potentials of rural tourism.
- Well conceived and construed Media strategies, use of innovative advertisements, spots, circulation of print and other materials would not only promote rural tourism but make masses aware about rural tourism, its issues and also its concerns.
- A sound development driven Government Policy Framework is essential to make rural tourism an important viable economic activity.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Currently the prospects are very bright for the Indian Tourism Industry. The Foreign Tourists coming to India are on a steady incline. Expected to grow at an average annual rate of 7.9% till 2023, tourism offers an immense scope for India's economic development and its people. The Impact & Evaluation Study of Rural Tourism Projects undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India was done by AC Nielsen ORG-MARG clearly shows that of the 107 Rural Tourism Projects evaluated in 26 States, 41 were highly successful projects while 33 were averagely successful. Only 33 projects were unsuccessful. The Report indicates a bright prospect for the rural tourism industry. Rural tourism has great economic, environmental and socio-cultural prospects.

It acts as a tool for economic development to promote both capital inflow and employment opportunities to the impoverished rural communities. It can help in adding to rural amenities and infrastructure. Besides the economic value, rural tourism becomes an incentive for conservation of environment and ecosystems. Since the environment becomes a showcase to the tourist, hence there is a greater desire for both the host and the tourist to maintain it. At a socio-cultural level, tourists become sensitive to the existing disparities and difficulties of the rural peoples life. They even start contributing back to the community, their local arts, handicrafts and performing arts and bringing back resources to this community and helping in promoting education, conservation, disease prevention, and other needs. Success stories, Case studies and other researches may be taken up systematically by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India to regularly keep tab of the achievements, success and even failures to help improve the rural tourism sector. Systematic use of Medias through innovative ads, spots, circulation of print and other materials for promotion of rural tourism is an important area. This has to be strengthened systematically to make the masses aware about rural tourism, its issues and also its concerns.

India a land of diversities has a lot to offer to the tourists coming here. The Rural tourism in India is still in its nascent state 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 village of our country has its own language, culture, tradition, customs, costumes, cuisines which can offer unique non-urban, 'country experiences' of a life time. Rural tourism can offer memorable experiences in their basic elemental state. In fact it is a journey back to our roots encompassing a wide range of activities and attractions all set in their natural rural environment. It is also a very important activity from the point of rural development because of its contribution to the economic and social development of the rural people.

Experiences from around the globe suggest that, Rural Tourism is the main driver of economic growth and employment in more than 80 countries. Similarly, rural India besides contributing in the agriculture sector, has immense potentials of growth in various sectors of tourism viz. rural tourism, cultural tourism, agro- tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, religious tourism etc. The richness of the rural India- the people, their lifestyle, traditions, locations, arts, crafts, handicrafts can be used to the very advantage of the rural people. The Ministry of Tourism is also committed to develop rural tourism in rural areas in a "sustainable manner" while simultaneously promoting and popularizing it through active multimedia campaign.

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