

RURAL TOURISM: AN INSTRUMENT FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN HAMLETS AROUND DHARAMSHALA, HIMACHAL PRADESH (INDIA)

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism is now the new buzz word for the development of tourism in Himachal Pradesh, a beautiful mountain state of India. The concept of Atithi Devo Bhava has been further enlarged by the Government of Himachal Pradesh (India) by steering a new scheme of “Har Gaon Ki Kahani” — the story of every village. The scheme has been implemented keeping in mind the rural status of the state and the Historic and traditional fables associated with a number of villages. The scheme has been cautiously prepared in order to encourage more tourists in the rural areas of the state. According to 2011 census of Himachal Pradesh, 89.96 % of the state dwells in the villages. As such the rural environment, rural culture and rural people can play a vital role in the local development by involving the concept of rural tourism. A group of villages around Dharamshala have got immense potential in terms of rural tourism product to showcase the rural life, art, culture and heritage thereby benefitting the indigenous population economically and socially as well as enabling a rich and real tourism experience.

This research paper is exploratory in nature and inspects the rural tourism resources of the villages around Dharamshala. It further focuses on identifying the rural population’s understanding of the rural tourism’s development and its consequent benefits. Further, the research examines the willingness of the communities to participate in rural tourism.

KEYWORDS: Rural Tourism, development, resources, community approach, benefits, challenges, impacts.

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Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading and top growing industries in the world. It provides work for millions of populace and generates 9% of the worldwide GDP. In more than 150 countries, tourism is one of the five pinnacle export earners, and in 60 it is the number one export. It accounts to 6% of the world's exports amounting to US\$ 1.3 trillion and generates one in eleven jobs. In India, too tourism has shown an impressive growth. It contributes 6.23 percent to the national GDP (WTTC) and provides 7.9% of the total employment in India (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India). According to the World Tourism Organization, by the year 2020, it is expected that India will become the leader in the tourism industry in South Asia, with about 8.9 million arrivals.

The inclinations of the world market, the user needs, the revision of the opinion concerning what describes life quality and principal goods, the development of ecological awareness and the understanding of universal tourist experience accrued throughout the entire years, the alteration of the policies and strategies that have been implemented in the field of tourism up to the present all have contributed to the evolution and expansion of new niche's in tourism. Now, alternative forms of tourism are being developed keeping in view of the consciousness man has developed over the years with regard to environment, minimizing the negative impacts of tourism and avoiding the hectic, complex monotonous routine ways which has resulted due to modernization, globalization and industrialization.

Rural tourism was an alternative form of tourism which developed throughout the world to support the rural economies of regions which were far off, inaccessible, non-industrialized and largely agrarian. It is a tourism which was alternative to mass tourism. This novel type of tourism started to expand after the commencement of rural mass departure to urban areas during the Industrial revolution. And a need was felt to create employment opportunities in rural areas, so that these areas also develop hand in hand with urban areas. Agriculture is the main stay activity in rural areas and majority of people are dependent on it. But, there has been continuous slowdown in agriculture throughout the world, so, apart from diversification of Agriculture, a need was also felt to focus on vocational activities which could benefit the rural population socially and economically. Saxena et al in 2007 have clearly pointed out that the rural spaces should no longer be seen as purely associated with agriculture production but seen as locations for the stimulation of new socio-economic activities incorporating tourism, leisure, hospitality, food production and consumption and e-commerce.

The rural tourism is also seen as a way to get disadvantaged rural areas out of crisis. And to provide solutions that tourism could provide to rural less-favoured areas problems (Sharpley, 2002; Sarasa, 2001). Tourism has been studied for its economic (Martin and Uysal, 1990; Mathieson and Wall, 1982), environmental (Farrell and Runyan, 1991), cultural (Chambers, 1997; Smith, 1989), and social (Milman and Pizam, 1987; Wyllie, 2000) impact. Rural

tourism strategies in various countries have in common that they are a major growth areas that can be used to boost local communities, and aid the seasonal and geographic spread of tourism (Richards¹, 1996). Tourism also contributes to the local community by improving the standard of living, providing employment opportunities, providing investment for the development of infrastructures and as a mean of financial and social development. (Smith and Krannich², 1998; Verbole³, 2000; Keller, 2002; Andriotis, 2001). But apart from the affirmative effects, tourism at times also has a negative side such as the imitation of foreign models by the local community, the commercialisation of human interactions, the transformation of regions of exceptional natural beauty into over satiated urban regions, the pollution of the surroundings, the pessimistic cultural changes, etc, (Kokkosis, 2001; Kokkosis and Tsartas, 2001; Spilanis, 2000). Tourism is often criticized for its evil or monstrous effects (Romeril⁴, 1985; Vanhove⁵, 1997) which result in demolition of tourist regions and their cultural fabric.

The three villages Dharmkot, Satovari and Barnet have been selected for the qualitative research (Fig 1). The study area lies in the lap of Dhauladhar range and is marked by steep mountain ridges and valleys.

Objectives of Research

The broad objectives of the research study are as follows:

- (a) To inspect the rural tourism resources of the three villages (Satovari, Barnet and Dharmkot) around Dharamshala for rural tourism.
- (b) To identify the rural population's understanding of the rural tourism development and its consequent benefits.
- (c) To examine the willingness of the communities to participate in rural tourism.



Figure 1: Aerial View of the study area (Dharmkot, Satovari and Barnet villages)

Research Methodology

This study is exploratory and qualitative in nature and is based on the experience of the researcher after visiting the three villages (Satovari, Barnet and Dharmkot) around Dharamshala for rural tourism. The study is ethnographic in nature aimed at exploring the potential of rural tourism phenomena in three villages and exploring it as a mean of local development. The participant observation has been done which is overt observation. The information has been gathered after interacting with the villagers informally; knowing their understanding about rural tourism and their willingness to participate in it. The information provided in this research study is fully reliable, vigorous, logical and reliable. The author has tried to compile a comprehensive and complete view of villagers by continuously interacting with them.

Limitations of the Study

The study has been carried through overt observation (Participant Observation Type) and two days each has been spent by the researcher at each village. One of the major drawbacks with this type of research is that it may be affected by Observer effect, where the conduct of folks under study may change due to the presence of the researcher.

Advantages of the Study

The main advantages of the use of overt observation are that:

1. It may lead to evasion of nuisance of ethics in that the group are conscious of the researcher's function.
2. The grouping is examined in its standard surroundings and data can be openly recorded.
3. Problems of 'going native' are avoided.
4. The researcher gives the viewpoint after having experience in natural setting of the three villages.

Rural Tourism in India

In India, the scheme of rural tourism was launched in 2002-03, not merely keeping in mind the economic objectives, but also the social, cultural and ecological aspects of the rural destination. The Rural Tourism project has also been taken up with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the Ministry's Endogenous Tourism Project in 2003 to support community and village based tourism in India⁶. The five broad objectives of this initiative were to do capacity building at the local level, try out with location - specific models of community tourism enterprise, put together strong community-private ventures, maintain pioneering and promising rural tourism projects and provide inputs to national and state tourism policy.

Till January 2012, rural tourism projects at 183 sites have been sanctioned in India and 52 rural sites have been commissioned (June 2011). Also, this segment of Indian Tourism has been winning accolades in the international arena. For example, the rural tourism project at Hodka village in Kutch district of Gujarat have received PATA award in 2010 for Heritage category and CNBC Awaaz Travel Award in 2008 for Best Tourism Income Generating Community. Also, Village Naggar, District Kullu, Himachal Pradesh has received PATA award in 2008 for Demonstrating Women Empowerment at its best.⁷

In the twelfth five year plan (2012-2017), in order to develop rural tourism, emphasis has been given on cluster approach i.e. Rural Tourism Clusters (RTCs) rather than the single village approach. For the development of rural tourism clusters, a three phase process has been adopted. The first phase involves selection of site by national level consultant of the Ministry of Tourism in consultation with state government and travel trade. The second Phase involves review of the DPR by Ministry of Tourism through independent agencies and sanction of central financial assistance by Ministry of Tourism for approved projects. The third phase involves execution of rural tourism cluster project. For a cluster of 6 villages a central financial assistance of 11 crore is recommended for physical infrastructure and capacity building. For each village a amount of Rupees 1.5 crore is allocated, keeping Rupees two crore for common facilities/activities in each cluster.

Rural Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh is one of the states in India which has got great diversity in terms of travel and tourism. It offers a colourful, extravagant, graceful, and diverse aspect of her personality to each traveller. Himachal Pradesh provides varied kinds of tourism options such as Adventure Tourism, Religious Tourism, Rural Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Green Tourism, Golf Tourism, Nature Tourism, Medical Tourism apart from Cultural and Heritage Tourism. Himachal Pradesh is a land which is bequeathed with natural splendour at its best – picturesque locations; snow capped mountains, luxuriant green valleys, a cool climate and hospitable people. Himachal Pradesh has got immense tourism potential.

The State government tourism policy is now diversifying tourism to regions which are novel and have tourism potential. That's why efforts are being made to promote rural tourism and diversify tourists to countryside or new areas and decongest the over saturated tourist destinations. The State received over 150 lakh tourists (2012), from which 4.85 lakh was foreign tourists. On the whole the regime is committed to have sustainable tourism with special importance on diversification, accessibility and job creations.

Rural tourism is now the new buzz word for the development of tourism in Himachal Pradesh. The concept of Atithi Devo Bhava has been redefined by the Govt. of Himachal

Pradesh by steering the new scheme of “Har Gaon Ki Kahani”—the story of every village. And this Tourism scheme was carefully prepared in order to persuade more tourists in the rustic areas of the state. The Himachal Tourism Department has recognized 12 villages to be developed for promoting Rural Tourism. And a total budget outlay of Rs 20243.92 crore has been declared for this purpose. Through the ground-breaking scheme of ‘Har Gaon Ki Kahani’, rural infrastructure would be developed in Himachali hamlets for the endorsement of the rural tourism. In this programme there will be contribution of all government departments as well as the local community. This will give a major boost to the development of the rural areas besides promoting the local handicrafts, indigenous products and cultural activities. The ‘Har Gaon Ki Kahani’ scheme was first launched in 2010 under which the Tourism Department had asked villagers to come up with popular stories related to their villages for attracting tourists. As per the plan one village from each district was selected such as Shamsher in Kullu, Salasi in Bilaspur, Bela in Hamirpur, Sangrah in Sirmour, Baggi in Mandi, Saho in Chamba, Nerti in Kangra, Udaipur in Lahaul and Spiti, Brua in Kinnaur, Baniya Devi in Solan, Hewan in Shimla and Nari in Una.⁸

Rural Tourism Resources of the Villages Selected

The three villages (Satovari, Barnet and Dharmkot) are located on the vicinity of the Dharamshala town, which itself is main hub of tourism activity. And renowned throughout the world for its picturesque beauty and is a seat of the Tibetan government in exile. It is the winter capital of the state of Himachal Pradesh and recently it was in news for its cricket stadium.

The three villages selected for the study have great potential for rural tourism. The village Dharmkot is a small hill village on the crest of a hill above McLeodGanj; near Dharamshala. It is located at a distance of 14 Km at an Altitude of 2100m. Dharmkot is an gorgeous village that presents a extensive sight of the Kangra valley and the Dhauladhar ranges. There are a number of Ghaddi families present here. Also, there are a number of eateries and guest houses flocked by a large number of foreigners. Lots of foreigners have made Dharmkot their home and have taken fields and houses from local Indians on rent. It is also branded as a hippie colony, where Hebrew is spoken most commonly. There are also a large number of local meditation centres. Also, Dharmkot acts as the starting place for a large number of trekking routes such as Triund, Ilaqua. Also temple of Galu Devi temple and Bhagsu Nag temple are located on the surroundings of this village. This village is also very famous for Pizza which is made on a traditional base. The most famous restaurant for Pizza’s is Pizzeria which is owned by a Gaddi family. The speciality of this pizza is that it is made on a traditional base made at home and cooked on a Chula (traditional wood stove).



Scenic View of Dharmkot from top of village



Galu Devi Temple at Dharmkot

Satovari is also a small picturesque village located North West and at an approximately 14 km of the Dharamshala town at an elevation of 1729m. This village also has number of tourist resources such as picturesque view of Kangra valley and Dhauladhar ranges; Dull Lake; lush green Pine forests; flora and fauna; tribal culture of Ghaddi's; Trekking; Hiking etc.

Barnet is one of the most beautiful village present in the surrounding of Dharamshala at an distance of 17 Km away having an altitude of 1458m. The majority of houses present here

Table 1: Rural tourism attraction inventory of the three villages

Type of attraction	Resources	Dharmkot	Satovari	Barnet
Natural attraction	Scenic Beauty/ Mountains/ River/Rivulet/ Fields/Waterfall/Lake/Forest/Flora/Fauna/ Protected national park/ Sanctuaries/ Sunset / sunrise view/ Landforms/ Unique Geology site	Present	Present	Present
Cultural attraction	Culture/Folklore/ Handicraft/ Cuisine / Music Language/ Historical monument/ Vernacular Architecture/ Cultural landscape/ Temple Religion	Present	Present	Present
Activity	Mountaineering/ hiking/trekking/Swimming/ Camping / Paragliding potential	Present	Present	Present
Events/ festivals		Present	Present	Present



(Top Left)-Scenic View of Satovari village; Left- Barnet Village.

TABLE 2: Elements of Tourism product present in the three villages

Elements of Tourism Product	Dharmkot	Satovari	Barnet
Accommodation	Present	Present	-
Accessibility	Present	Present	Present
Attraction	Present	Present	Present
Activities	Present	Present	Present
Basic amenities	Present	Present	Present

have a vernacular architecture made of mud bricks with the roof made of slates and present in the mid of the fields. Barnet is located 3km away from Satovari and gradually descends. The village too is inhabited by the Gaddi Tribe and the main occupation of the rural people is Agriculture. The researcher has revealed ample scope for rural tourism in the three villages selected for rural tourism. The inventory of attraction clearly demonstrates the vast potential available for rural tourism.

Resident Profile: Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in the two villages i.e. Barnet and Satovari, but in case of Dharmkot rural people are also involved in guest houses, small restaurants and adventure activities. Majority of the residents from which researcher interacted were higher secondary and very few were graduates and postgraduates.

Rural Population Understanding of the Rural Tourism, Rural Development and Rural Participation in Tourism

The rural people present in the three villages had clear understanding and awareness with regard to the tourism. But however, their understanding with regard to rural tourism was not very well developed. They had a lot of confusions. Also, they were not aware of the tourism policies at state and central level. Some of the residents were aware of the Home stay scheme which was launched by the government in 2008 to augment the rural areas in terms of accommodation and to provide clean, comfortable and affordable supplementary accommodation to tourists in rural areas. But overall the residents of the three villages were aware of the benefits of tourism for the local community in terms of employment, rise in income level, local development, high quality of life. On contrary they were not worried much about the ill effects of tourism such as overcrowding, congestion, inflation of goods and services, crime, overdevelopment, traffic congestion, pressure on local resources, value of the real estate etc. Few individuals however voiced their concern over the environmental, social and cultural issues. The researcher observed that the residents of the three villages especially Barnet and Satovari was that still people need a lot of awareness about rural tourism and the pros and cons associated with it.

Findings and conclusions

The majority of rural population of the three villages is aware about tourism and the benefits associated by it; however they have little understanding about rural tourism and rural tourism policy implemented by the government (State as well as Central). Also, they are very receptive about the benefits of tourism, but not having a very clear view of the negative aspects of tourism. The territorial diagnoses of the three villages clearly help us to understand the potential of tourism and assets associated with it. And to reveal the overall perception of the local community to involve in rural tourism.

But still local community is unaware about the basic concept of rural tourism. They don't have a clear understanding about what is rural tourism and that what is the role of the local community.

Table 3: Opinion of the Rural Community in the three villages' w.r.t rural tourism and rural development.

Area of opinion	Sub-issues	Dharmkot			Satovari			Barnet		
		Opinion → yes	Can't say	No	yes	Can't say	No	yes	Can't say	No
Tourism	Awareness of tourism	90%	10%	-	80%	10%	10%	80%	10%	10%
	Knew about rural tourism	30%	40 %	30 %	25%	15%	60%	15%	20%	65%
	Government policies w.r.t Rural Tourism	20 %	60 %	20 %	20%	10%	70%	20%	30%	50%
	Basis of tourism should be based on decisions of local community & community participation	80 %	10%	10%	80%	10%	10%	90%	10%	-
	Sustainable development	80%	10%	10%	85%	10%	5%	80%	10%	10%
Positive effect of Tourism	Employment	75%	15%	10%	80%	15%	5%	80%	10%	10%
	Encourage investment in local community	70%	15%	15%	60%	10%	20%	65%	15%	20%
	Enhancement of infrastructure	80%	-	20%	70%	15%	15%	70%	10%	20%
	Enhance quality of life	60%	20%	20%	55%	25%	20%	80%	20%	-
	Development of the village	80%	10%	10%	70%	10%	20%	75%	15%	10%
	Development of the recreation facilities for locals	55 %	25%	20%	50%	30%	20%	25%	40%	25%
Negative effect of Tourism	Destruction of environment	30%	20%	50%	35%	15%	50%	35%	10%	55%
	Congestion & overcrowding	35%	5%	60%	25%	15%	60%	30%	10%	60%
	Burden on community services	25%	10%	65%	20%	20%	60%	20%	15%	65%
	Crime	20%	10%	70%	20%	20%	60%	25%	5%	70%
	Higher taxes	35%	15%	50%	25%	15%	60%	35%	5%	55%
	Overdevelopment	25%	25%	50%	20%	10%	70%	30%	10%	60%
	Inflation	30%	20%	50%	30%	10%	60%	25%	20%	55%
	Increase in the cost of Land	60%	10%	30%	25%	25%	50%	30%	20%	50%

Table 4: Opinion of the Rural Community in the three villages w.r.t their willingness in rural tourism.

Area of opinion	Sub-issues	Dharmkot			Satovari			Barnet		
		yes	Can't say	No	yes	Can't say	No	yes	Can't say	No
Willingness to involve in Rural tourism	Rural tourism will lead to overall well-being of village	80%	10%	10%	70%	20%	10%	60%	20%	10%
	It will provide new opportunities	75%	15%	10%	65%	15%	20%	60%	10%	30%

It clearly underlines the importance that if we want to develop rural tourism in these villages, a rural tourism awareness campaign should be launched prior to rural tourism activity, so that the sustainable development occurs and that negative impacts w.r.t economic, social and ecological could be avoided.

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Footnotes

1. ***** provide text *****
2. Smith D. and Krannich S. (1998) Tourism Dependence and Resident Attitudes. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 25, No 4, pp. 783-802.
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