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A Gist of Kurukshetra Magazine (April 2019 Issue)

Rural Tourism in India

Prospects of Eco-Tourism

Agri-Tourism in India

Rural Sustainable Tourism

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Kurukshetra Compendium

April 2019

Rural Tourism in India

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Context

- India being a nation of diversities has a lot to offer to tourists.
- Rural tourism in India is still in 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.
- 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 snow capped mountains, golden beaches, rich forests and verdant deserts all make India an 'Incredible' destination.
- Mahatma Gandhi had 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.

What is meant by 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.
- It includes farm based holidays ,special interest nature holidays and eco-tourism, fishing, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism and ethnic tourism.
- In simple terms, Rural Tourism can be defined as the touristic activities happening into rural environments to experience rural taste.
- UNWTO understands Rural Tourism 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".

Features

- Rural Tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics:
 1. low population density,
 2. landscape and land use dominated by agriculture and forestry and
 3. traditional social structure and lifestyle.
- The direct contribution of the tourism section to GDP was 3.77 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.
- 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 section 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.
- 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.

Types

- 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.

Examples of Rural Tourism destinations in India

- 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 Punjabyat:** 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 closknit into the community's life.
- 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 weaving of the famous silk sarees known by the same name.
- Sunderbans Village Life:** The UNESCO World Heritage Site with the largest mangrove vegetation in the world is a great attraction for tourists.

Socio-Cultural Impacts

- 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.
- Increased social contact brings opportunities for cultural exchanges, greater awareness and the revitalization of local customs, crafts and cultural identities.

- 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.

Case Studies

1. **Shaam-E-Sarhad, Hodka, Gujarat:** As part of the Endogenous Tourism Project of UNHDP, this village was selected for rural tourism in 2004. This village is known for its rich embroidery and art work mostly done by women.
 - 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 to buffalo of India. The Rann festival also originated from here.
2. **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.
 - The weaving of Naggar is famous and that has been used as an unique selling point to attract tourists.
 - The entire site is run by the local inhabitants and the women are earning extra through their weaving work.

How rural tourism benefits women?

- Rural Tourism can create long term employment and provides skilled/ unskilled training and career development opportunities for women.
- Rural Tourism will boost women's empowerment and provides young/ agriculturist livelihood diversification.
- Rural Tourism has the potential of establishing medium and small enterprises started by women entrepreneurs.
- Rural tourism will promote local production, education, art and architecture, community self esteem and pride, heritage and nature conservation.
- Rural Tourism will create new infrastructure superstructure, helps to maintain local services and facilities and improves quality of life for women.
- 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.

Problems & Challenges

1. **Acculturation:** Acculturation is a process of adaptation and adjustment. It is the change that one culture has on another. Typically in tourism, the community being acculturated is the destination community, which then experiences dramatic shifts in social structure. These changes over a period of time severely dent the original rural structure.
2. **Cultural Commodification:** Cultural commodification results in the transformation of value - from sacred to profane and from real to the unauthentic. 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. 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.
3. **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. This can lead residents to adopt tourist's demonstrated behaviour.
4. **Standardization:** 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 tourist. 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.
5. **Staged Authenticity:** 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.

6. **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.
7. **Cultural Clashes:** As the local rural population feels threatened by the constant flow of tourists due to the changing pattern of their world, anti-tourist attitudes may begin to manifest amongst the rural population.
8. **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. Rural areas may also experience a surge in flesh trade as these bring easy money.
9. **Chief amongst the challenges are that of marketing.** 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 successful marketing effort by the State Government of Kerala.

Steps Taken To Promote Rural Tourism

- 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 develop lesser known destinations located in remote areas of the country.
- The development of Bhitharwa, Chandrahia & Turkaulia in Bihar and Malanand Malabar Cruise Tourism Project in Kerala has been undertaken under Rural Circuit theme.
- 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.
- Community ownership and management is central to the alternative models of endogenous tourism developed across India.
- 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.
- 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 storytellers.
- 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.
- 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.

Conclusion

- Since the positive and negative outcomes of tourism depend on human factors, including the attitude and behaviour of tourists and hosts during the interaction, so tourists, tourism and hosts are jointly responsible not solely.
- In Indonesia, local people agreed to stage dance and music, but disagreed to stage rituals because they did not want to commodity their core value. The success of rural tourism lies in creating a balance between the positive and negative impacts of tourism and maintaining a healthy rural environment.

Prospects of Eco-Tourism

What Is Ecotourism ?

- Ecotourism is a responsible travel to undisturbed natural areas that conserve the natural environment and enhance the well-being of the local people.
- It 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.

Benefits of Ecotourism

- An alternate tool for providing livelihood benefits to the marginalized community members in terms of employment, income generation and training.
- Also facilitates saving pattern among them.
- Employment opportunities to the marginalized and economically backward community members.
- Various training/skill development programmes enable them to acquire and update their knowledge on different concepts of ecotourism management.

Ecotourism In India

- The top eco destination in the country in Kerala is the narrow piece of land tantalizingly wedged between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats.
- 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.

Examples

A. Leh Nutrition Project:

- 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.

B. Ecotourism for a Better Future- Himachal Pradesh:

- Himachal Pradesh Forest Department has taken steps to carry forward the concept of ecotourism in the state.

C. Ecotourism Initiatives in New Delhi:

- Ecotourism Society of India has played a key role in ecotourism initiatives in the capital city of India.
- Places in the city like the Chhawla-Kanganheri – an ecotourism park near Najafgarh drain has been revamped for recreational activities.
- Farm tourism is another activity that is catching up with tourists largely in city outskirts, JNU caves. The Yamuna Biodiversity park .

D. Ecotourism in Uttarakhand:

- 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.

E. Ecotourism initiatives in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Assam:

- These states of north east have a unique identify 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.
- Kaziranga National park in Assam is such a destination famous for the one horned Rhino.
- The mountainous state of Sikkim famed for its close association with nature has made ecotourism a livelihood activity through organized 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.

F. 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.

G. Ecotourism in Kerala:

- Today the state has established 23 protected areas 110 (16 wildlife sanctuaries and 5 national parks) thus providing a natural advantage for developing ecotourism.

Agri-Tourism in India

What is meant by Agri-Tourism ?

- 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.
- World Tourism Organization (1998) defines agri tourism as “involves accommodation being offered in the farm house or in a separate guesthouse, providing meals and organizing guests’ activities in the observation and participation in the farming operations.”

Benefits

- Agriculture currently is under stress in terms of farmers' earning and vagaries of nature. Through Agri-tourism the farmer benefits by increasing his earnings and this benefit could percolate to the village community.
- Agri-tourism could be beneficial to the community by
 - Generating additional revenue for local business and services from the tourist.
 - Upgrading and revitalizing community facilities.
 - Helping preserve local traditions, art forms and culture.
 - Helping in diversifying and strengthening the rural economy through job creation.
 - Empowering the women in the villages
 - Interacting with the urban tourist could also help in reducing the impact of the social ills like superstitions etc.

Strategies To Promote Agri-Tourism

- Proper recognition of the Agri-tourism industry.
- Government supported policy structure. There is a need for the government to develop and implement policy measures in this regard.
- Education of the farmer and the farm owner for development of the entrepreneurial skill in their work operations.
- Creation of a community level cooperative for the implementation of Agri-tourism at the village level.
- Interest free loan to be given to such cooperatives for the development of Agri-tourism.
- Product and service quality improvement training programs.

Rural Sustainable Tourism

What is meant by 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.”

Challenges

- There is an increasing concern that the negative impact of tourism on the natural environment can ultimately hurt the tourism industry itself.
- 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 of its key attractions.
- 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.
- 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 destination.

Suggestions for Promoting Sustainable Rural Tourism in India

- *First* and foremost step is preservation of traditional culture. The income generated from tourism can be utilized in preserving ethnic forms of art, dance and folk songs.
- *Second*, eco-tourism can help in preventing further degradation of the forests and providing protection to the wildlife there.
- *Third*, community development and involvement can help in sustainable tourism.
- *Fourth*, promotion of non-intrusive tourism, meaning those coming from outside should not hurt cultural, religious and societal ethos of the locals.
- *Fifth*, the sustainable tourism should be seen as poverty reduction strategy as envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.
- *Sixth*, legislative backing for sustainable tourism to ensure its development and ecological goals are met.