

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF RURAL TOURISM IN BIHAR: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for Rural Development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where around 70 percent of the population resides in 7 million villages. Across the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of Urban lifestyles have led to a “counter-urbanization” syndrome. This has led to growing interest in the rural areas. At the same time this trend of urbanization has led to falling income levels, lesser job opportunities in the total areas leading to an urbanization syndrome in the rural areas. This paper is a modest attempt on the study of major problems and prospects of rural tourism in Bihar.

Key words: Convergence Committee, Lifestyles, Rural Tourism, Urbanisation.

INTRODUCTION

Rural Tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to these problems. Besides, there are other factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness. 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 concept has taken the shape of a formal kind of Rural Tourism.

Under this Scheme, thrust will be to promote village tourism as the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and its new geographic regions. Key geographic regions would be identified for development and promotion of Rural Tourism. The implementation would be done through a Convergence Committee headed by the District Collector. Activities like improving the environment, hygiene, infrastructure etc. would be eligible for assistance. Apart from providing financial assistance the focus would be

to tap the resources available under different schemes of Ministry of Rural Development, State Governments and other concerned Department of the Government of India.¹

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 natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

Each State/UT Govt. would be requested to furnish one proposal for promotion of rural tourism. Based on the merits and after a joint inspection by the Deptt. of Tourism, and the State/UT Govt. if required ten proposals would be identified for implementation in the country.

After short listing the proposals, the State/UT Govts. would be requested to draw up a detailed plan of action. The thrust here would be to achieve convergence between the different schemes of the Govt. of India and the State Govts. It should be ensured that at least 50% of the project should be implemented through achieving convergence of different schemes. Assistance up to 3 lakhs would be provided to the State Govt. for engaging an expert for preparing the project report. A maximum of 50 lakhs would be sanctioned under this scheme.

The following works may be taken up under the Scheme:

- i. Improvement of the surroundings of the village. This would include activities like landscaping, development of parks, fencing, compound wall etc.
- ii. Improvements to roads within the Panchayat limits. This shall not include major road which connects the village.
- iii. Illumination in the village.
- iv. Providing for improvement in solid waste management and sewerage management.
- v. Construction of Wayside Amenities.
- vi. Procurement of equipments directly related to tourism, like Water Sports, Adventure Sports, Eco-friendly modes of transport for moving within the tourism zone.
- vii. Refurbishment of the Monuments.

- viii. Signages
- ix. Reception
- x. Other work/ activities directly related to tourism.
- xi. Tourist Accommodation.

State tourism Development Corporation are entrusted with responsibility of Focal Point of formulating and implementing Rural Tourism Projects in consultation with District Collector/ Deputy Commissioners to ensure convergence from other yojnas, schemes and allocations for broader/integrated development at the site to benefit local communities.

A Convergence Committee would be set up under the chairmanship of Managing Director, State Tourism Development Corporation/Commissioner of Tourism to oversee the implementation of the project.

The execution of the work would be entrusted to any Central Govt. State Govt. agency and the funds would be released directly to the implementing agency by the Govt. of India as recommended by the State Govt.

On sanction of a work the first installment of 80% of the sanctioned amount of CFA will be released. The final installment of 20% would be released on submission of the UC for the first installment or on completion of the projects.

The executing agency shall follow all codal formalities while awarding contracts and procurement of equipments and ensure complete transparency in its transactions.

The infrastructure and assets created will be maintain and managed by the State/UT Governments or their agencies with no financial commitment to Govt. of India except those assets created in the protect areas of ASI.

While executing the works the executing agency shall follow the Schedule of rates prescribed by the CPWD or the State PWD.

The executing agency shall furnish the Utilisation Certificate through the State Government for release of the second installment. A Completion Certificate has also to be furnished through the State Govt. before the release of the final installment.²

RURAL TOURISM: A STRATEGIC FORCE FOR RURAL ECONOMY

Rural tourism is one such sector, which has tremendous potential to resolve the issues of poverty elimination, employment generation and infrastructure development in the rural areas to a great extent and also bridge the gap between the rural and urban people. Though the sector might be new for India, internationally it has been well recognized and considered as an important part of rural economy. In European Countries it started as early as 1950. In France, agro-tourism started in 1950 and today nearly 2.8 percent of the farmers (about 20,000 farmers) offer their services to tourists interested in rural tourism. Likewise in Spain, it started in the eighties and the country has nearly 7,000 rural resorts comprising 50,000 beds for people interested in visiting the countryside. In United Kingdom, rural tourism started in mid seventies, and today it is a strategic force in the rural economy. Overall speaking, in Europe 2 - 5 percent farmers are directly or indirectly engaged in rural tourism.

In countries like Australia, Ukraine, Canada, Phillipins and Italy agriculture tourism in emerging as a mini-boom to the rural economy. According to United States Department of Agriculture, tourism in rural areas is becoming increasingly important to the US economy (Thakur, 2010).³

Biodiversity is the key to human development. It is of paramount importance not only due to the goods and services it provides, but also due to the fact that an estimated 45 percent of the global economy is based on biological products and process. There is a win-win relationship in between rural tourism and biodiversity.⁴ Tourism is increasingly being recognized as a significant beneficiary of biodiversity conservation, but it is also regarded as a possible threat as well by virtue of its direct and indirect impacts. Nature- based tourism in rural areas and ecotourism are some of the clearest examples of how tourism benefits from biodiversity conservation. Rural Tourism, when properly managed and directed, can contribute to biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction, both directly by capitalizing on biodiversity assets and indirectly by reducing the vulnerability of the poor to environmental degradation through biodiversity conservation.

Rural Tourism (which draws on the principles of sustainability) can directly contribute to biodiversity conservation in the following ways:

- **Less destructive livelihood:** Rural Tourism offering less destructive livelihood alternatives to local communities and landowners in buffer zones and conservation corridors, away from unregulated logging, intensive cattle-ranching, monoculture, hunting, and unsustainable tourism.

- **Incentive for landowners:** Rural Tourism provides an incentive for public and private landowners in critical ecosystems to permanently conserve biodiversity-rich properties, by offering revenue-producing, low-impact economic use.
- **Additional financial resources:** It provides protected-area managers with additional financial resources from visitation and donations.
- **Community involvement:** Rural Tourism promoting community involvement and interest in conservation issues, and generating political support for conservation through environmental education.
- **The move towards sustainable tourism:** Within the overall framework of sustainable development, there is increasing emphasis on the need to promote and enact sustainable tourism. Ecotourism is one aspect of this, but the category as a whole is much broader, as indicated by the definition given by the WTO.
- **The classes of protected areas:** Tourism and biodiversity are closely linked to the protected area concept. Most promotions for wildlife tourism or ecotourism in rural areas focus on specific protected areas, such as national parks. These present the image of a discrete area concentrating on conservation, which is easier to market than a more diffuse presence of biodiversity.
- **Revenue rising for local communities:** Tourism is an opportunity for business development and job creation, as well as for stimulation of investment and support for local services, in remote communities.
- **Education/awareness rising:** Tourism can help promote conservation by raising awareness amongst visitors through well- designed interpretation programmes. It can raise the profile of biodiversity conservation at national and local levels.
- **Sustainable land management:** Tourism can become a force for more sustainable land management in all parts of the world by providing additional or alternative forms of livelihood for farmers and rural communities that are dependent on well maintained natural resources.
- **Strengthening cultural appreciation:** Tourism in rural areas can provide self-esteem and incentives for maintaining traditional arts and crafts, traditional knowledge, and practices that contribute to the sustainable use of biological diversity. Yet, interactions between tourism and local cultural values can be complex, and tourism development can lead to the loss of access by indigenous and local communities to their land and resources as well as sacred sites.
- **Economic incentives for habitat protection:** Tourism can bring tangible economic value to natural and cultural resources. This can result in direct income from visitor spending for their conservation, and an increase in support for conservation from local communities.

- **Supports research and development:** Tourism in rural areas supports research and development of good environmental practices and management system to influence the operation of travel and tourism businesses, as well as visitor behaviour at destinations.
- **Protecting the natural and cultural heritage:** Tourism based on protected areas can be a key factor in supporting the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage. It can generate the funds through entrance and service fees, local taxes and in many other ways that can be used directly to help meet or offset the costs of conservation, maintaining cultural traditions and providing education.
- **Environmental Purity:** Rural tourism helps to minimize the pollution of air, water and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.⁵

EMPLOYMENT IMPACT OF TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS

According to the Planning Commission, the sector creates more jobs per million rupees of investment than any other sector of the economy and is capable of providing employment to a wide spectrum of job seekers, from the unskilled to the specialized, even in the remote parts of the country. The sector's employment-generation potential has also been highlighted by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), which says India's travel and tourism sector is expected to be the second-largest employer in the world.⁷

SCOPE OF TOURISM IN RURAL INDIA

1. Rich rural tradition of art, craft and culture.
2. Cost effectiveness.
3. Labour intensity.
4. Curiosity about rural life style.
5. Targeted towards all segments.
6. Motivated towards nature.

MODELS OF RURAL TOURISM FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

Many attractions and activities have evolved as viable models of sustainable development of tourism in rural areas. They are:

- Arts & Crafts Demonstrations and sales
- Farm Store: Exhibition of farm equipments

- Processing of farm products and sale
- Demonstration of Agri-activities
- Sheep Shearing and Wool Processing
- Fishing/hunting
- Farm Vacations and Tours
- Horseback Riding
- A shady spot for visitors to rest like a big banyan tree
- Educational Tours for school children, officers and progressive farmers
- Farm Schools to teach a particular skill
- Outdoor Schools which are mobile in nature teaching agriculture
- Workshops on agriculture topics
- interesting, emerging
- Festivals with wide publicity and sponsorship
- Regional Themes like tribal coffee of Kerala, Andaman Spices etc.
- Historical Recreations like hightighting an oldest farm etc.
- Antique villages and collection of old farm machinery,
- Gift shop and Antiques
- Cold Drinks, Restaurant. ⁹

CHALLENGES OF RURAL TOURISM

There are so many challenges in the way of development of rural tourism in Bihar. A few of them which need mention are:

- Lack of Suitable Environment.
- Lack of Trained Manpower.
- Legislation Problems.
- Insufficient Financial Support.
- Lack of Communication Skills.
- Lack of Proper Physical Infrastructures.
- Community Involvement.
- Illiteracy.

- Lack of Basic Education.
- Language Hindrance.
- Business Planning Skills.
- Trained tourist Guide.⁹

IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM

Positive Impact

The most important impact of increasing rural tourism is the impact on economy. With increased number of tourists visiting the countryside, there will be a boost in the income level of the people due to increased level of trade among the people. This will also generate jobs among the youths.

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.

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 transports, etc.

Villages which are close to sanctuaries and reserve parks can teach the idea 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.

Negative Impact

However, rural tourism may have certain negative impacts. To facilitate tourism, there would be an increase in the infrastructure development of the countryside. This may lead to concretisation of rural area and may distort the natural beauty. Besides, influx of tourists may lead to exploitation of natural resources.

Tourism may have an adverse effect on the traditional livelihood of people. The village people may shift from agriculture and other traditional livelihoods to lucrative livelihoods related to tourism. This may, in turn have a negative impact on rural tourism.¹⁰

SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Every aspect of life has both positive as well as negative views. For sustainable development, it is essential to optimise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts. The same is true for popularising rural tourism also.

In order to make tourists feel comfortable while visiting any place, they may be provided detailed information regarding their place of visit in advance. They may also be informed about any particular custom prevalent in that region so that the tourists may prepare themselves accordingly.

There is a necessity for having good infrastructure and logistic support in villages. Roads connecting to the nearest railway station or highways would improve accessibility to the villages. That would benefit both the tourists as well as the villagers. However, instead of having more hotels or guest houses in rural areas, it is better to encourage home stay. 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.

The exotic flora and fauna of rural India can be a huge source of learning for students. Student excursions can be allowed with proper permission from competent authorities. The students will learn to value nature in this way.

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.

Most villages of India have a traditional entity that makes them unique. Many such traditional products are recognised by conferring the Geographical Indicators or GI tags. These may be agricultural products, handicrafts, textile products, sweets, natural goods, manufactured goods, holy goods etc. All these GI tagged products are always showcased on the national as well as international platforms and have a huge market demand. The Government may take steps to ensure that tourists get a first-hand experience in seeing how these products are

being made, packed and showcased. That may lead to increased interest among the tourists and eventually rise in the number of tourists in these rural regions.

Many states of India are blessed with medicinal herbs and other ayurvedic products which have strong medicinal values. The Government can develop suitable infrastructure to capture such tourists who can avail medicinal facilities in such villages of India.

The role of State Governments is very important when it comes to rural tourism. Each State has different potential to attract tourists. Hence, it is necessary that State Governments identify this potential and work in close coordination with the Union Government to promote rural tourism. That will benefit the tourism sector of the country on the whole.

Tourists may be advised well in advance not to get involved into any local issues which may lead to law and order problems. The Government may conduct a survey among the tourists and get to know about their feelings regarding the place of their visit. Based on their feedbacks, measures may be adopted to improve tourism.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Promotion of agro and rural tourism can contribute to major socio-economic changes of the rural localities and can be an alternative source to provide additional income for the population of rural areas. In conclusion, to achieve sustainable development through rural tourism and agro tourism what is needed is the close cooperation between all the stakeholders involved in the activities of tourism. All of us have a shared responsibility in the realization of sustainable tourism and in protecting the environment besides generating additional income for those engaged in this noble profession.

India is an agriculture based country and most of its people live in villages. The same situation is attached with Bihar. The villages are generally cut off from the cities and have a different kind of life. Establishment of agri tourism units will promote livelihood security through improving the diversity and security of resources, skills and technologies that are available to agricultural communities. It will help to achieve income, employment and economic stability in rural communities India as well as in Bihar. It would help boosting a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract urban tourists to their area thus providing opportunity for urban people to get back to the roots.

Experience in rural tourism has suggested that even in the absence of any promotional activity, thousands of foreign tourists visit rural areas in Rajasthan, Gujarat and South India every year and it is the proof of the viability of the concept of rural tourism. And once infrastructure reaches to villages and the concept is marketed well domestically and internationally, nothing can stop a mini-boom in tourism industry in India and its penetration deep inside the unexplored countryside. The success story of Ukraine can happen in India as well.

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