

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM

Madhura Roy

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A small break in the mundane life always acts as a great mood lifter. Generally, people like to take this break by travelling and exploring new places. However, time and affordability play an important role in selecting the destination. Traditional tourist spots are often quite congested during the peak tourist seasons. Countryside has always been a stress reliever for the urban people. Since majority of the society has now been urbanised, rural tourism is increasingly becoming popular among the urban population.

More than fifty per cent of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66 per cent by 2050. According to the World Urbanization Prospects by UN DESA's Population Division (2014), the largest urban growth will take place in India, China and Nigeria. These three countries will account for 37 per cent of the projected growth of the world's urban population between 2014 and 2050. By

2050, India is projected to add 404 million urban dwellers, China 292 million and Nigeria 212 million.

Concept of Rural Tourism:

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



Majuli Island, Assam



with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and tradition."

Ministry of Tourism in India has laid a great deal of emphasis on the development of such rural tourism sites which boast of rich **art, culture, handloom, heritage and crafts**. These villages are affluent in both natural beauty and **cultural splendour**. Rural tourism is supposed to generate increasing benefits to rural areas in terms of rural productivity, conservation of rural environment and culture, local people's involvement and a suitable way of adapting traditional beliefs and values to modern times.

Major types of Rural Tourism in India:

- **Agricultural Tourism:** To explore more about the agricultural industry and how farmers work with crops.
- **Cultural Tourism:** To allow tourists to be immersed in local culture related activities, like rituals and festivals.
- **Nature Tourism:** Responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.
- **Adventure Tourism:** Any constructive activity which tests the endurance of both a person and his equipment to its extreme limit is termed as Adventure.
- **Food Routes:** Where wanderlust meets the variety that persists in our cuisine. This tourism is all about food and knowing more about different 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 horizons to view different cultures. It is essentially to know more about various ethnic and cultural lifestyles and beliefs.

Increasing Interest in Rural Tourism:

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

Different Schemes of the Government of India:

Ministry of Tourism has identified many spots which are being developed as tourist destinations in rural areas. These sites are still unexplored. To help in the holistic development of such tourist places, the Ministry has introduced certain schemes, which are detailed below:-

Swadesh Darshan- Scheme Guidelines for Integrated Development of Theme Based Circuits:

India's rich cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage provide a huge potential for development of tourism and job creation. In due recognition of this potential, the Union Government, in the Budget Speech of 2014-15 decided to create tourist circuits around specific themes.

PRASAD- Pilgrimage Rejuvenation for Spiritual Augmentation Drive:

Pilgrimage tourism is a form of tourism motivated partly or wholly by religious sentiments. India is a land of many religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Jainism and Sufism, having their major pilgrimage centres in different parts of the country. Religion and spirituality are common motivations for travel, with major tourist destinations having developed largely as a result of their connections to sacred places, persons and events.

Special Tourism Zones:

The Union Budget of 2017-18 has announced that Five Special Tourism Zones, anchored on SPVs, will be set up in partnership with the States. This would help in introducing Incredible India's second global campaign to strengthen India's position as an attractive tourist destination.

e-Tourist Visa Facility:

To facilitate arrival of international tourists, Ministry of Tourism has been working very closely with Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs for easing of the Visa Regime in the country over a period of time. In order to make rural tourism attractive, Ministry of Tourism is promoting Farm Tourism as niche products. Ministry is also encouraging Home Stay Facilities in rural areas.

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.

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 homestay. The tourist can have a taste of the traditional practices along with local recipes prevalent in rural India. This would help the tourists to connect to the villagers in less time.

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 a 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.

Some Popular Rural Tourism Destinations:

- Kutch Adventures India: Community Tourism in Kutch: Forays into Rann of Kutch of Gujarat to visit artisans' villages as well as the salt desert.
- Itmennan Lodges Punjabiyat: Farming in Rural Punjab: Gives the tourist a taste of various farming activities
- Ecosphere Spiti: High altitude rural tourism: Visits to Buddhist monasteries, yak safaris, treks to villages, village homestays, and

cultural performances are some of the possible activities.

- Lachen, Sikkim: It is located at 8500 feet against the backdrop of snow-capped peaks, glaciers and rock cliffs, amidst mixed conifer and Rhododendron forests. Made accessible to tourists only a few years back, it retains an unspoilt freshness.
- Ballabhpur Danga, West Bengal: Ballavpur Danga, 3 km from Shantiniketan, is a Santhal Adivasi tribal community in the pastoral beauty of rural Bengal. The Sonajhuri forest lies to the east and the Ballavpur Avayaranya forest area and bird sanctuary is to its south. Santhali art, craft and culture is closely knit into the community's life.
- Sunderbans Village Life: The UNESCO World Heritage Site with the largest mangrove vegetation in the world is a great attraction for tourists.
- Majuli in Assam: The largest river island on the Brahmaputra river in Assam is a popular tourist destination
- Pochampally, Telengana: Tourists can have a look at weaving of the famous silk sarees known by the same name.

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

Conclusion:

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

(The author is currently Senior Research Officer in NITI Ayog, New Delhi. Email: madhuraroy@gmail.com)