

IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM ON RURAL ECONOMY

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Most of the village tourist sites have been part of the Endogenous Tourism Project which has brought in huge investments in these areas. It has helped to safeguard the local heritage sites making the local inhabitants aware of the rich culture, tradition and heritage that they have, which may be explored for their economic betterment and to bring their villages on the global map.

India resides in the villages” wrote Gandhi ji and he wanted the economy to be village based. A contradiction to this view is that all over the world one of the parameters to measure economic prosperity is the rate of urbanisation. In the past several decades since the country got independence, there has been a push towards urbanisation from rural to urban taking place in large numbers. Urbanisation brings with itself many incentives which lead to better standards of living for individuals and also economic growth for the economy. However it is also marred with ill effects. One of the off shoots of urbanisation is that people are stressed out and look for avenues to relax. Tourism or vacations provide the perfect get away for the residents of concrete jungles. This sector has a humane dimension to it but the economic impact of tourism cannot be overlooked. Initially the places with historical importance or of natural beauty became tourist destinations, in turn these destinations developed economically. In India, states like Goa, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh primarily depend on tourism for their livelihood. Considering the importance of

this sector initiatives have been taken to promote tourism. Rural tourism is part of one such policy where the stress is on developing rural areas as tourist areas. In India this is a modern concept, however at the global level this trend started in the seventies. Rural economy needs to be revitalized as there is over dependence on agriculture and with the lack of forward linkages, agro based industries have not grown at the required pace. As a result, the rural economy has been in doldrums. Rural tourism can play a very important catalyst in such a scenario.

The analysis of the role of rural tourism in rural economy requires defining the term “rural” and “rural tourism”. The term rural has different connotations for different countries and there is no consensus on its definition. Broadly it may be defined as an area which has low population density, large open fields, less degree of pollution and less technology driven means of livelihood. In India as per the Census of 2011, rural area is defined as an area which has population less than 10000. In the same survey it has been said that there are about





Economy and Tourism

The direct contribution of the tourism sector to GDP was 3.7 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 percent and for 2028, it is 6.9 percent. 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

seven lakh villages and around 69 percent of the population resides in these villages. In addition to this the fact that 62 percent of the total population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Now defining rural tourism, it is any form of tourism that showcases rural life, culture, traditions, folklore, handicrafts, heritage at rural locations. Rural tourism may include agri tourism, eco-tourism, adventure sports and cultural tourism. The main focus is on giving the tourists a firsthand experience of rural life and its various dimensions. One of the objectives is also to connect the people with their roots as there are families who have lived in urban spaces for generations. Less pollution, less density of people, natural produce, less technological interventions and cheap facilities are some of the pull factors for rural tourism.

potential of this sector 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. The total foreign exchange earned from this source is INR 180379 crores showing a growth of 17 percent between 2016 and 2017.

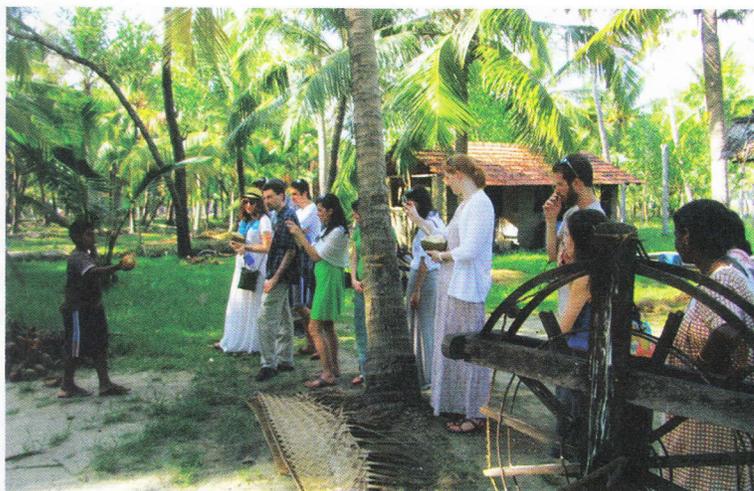
Rural tourism was first introduced in India in the National Tourism Policy whereby 103 projects were sanctioned by the government during the Tenth Five Year Plan. In the Eleventh Five Year Plan rural tourism became one of the primary tourist product and the government sanctioned 69 rural tourism projects. By the Twelfth Five Year Plan it was decided to develop clusters, proposing 70 such clusters with a total investment of INR 770



crores. Rajasthan and Kerala were the early movers to take advantage of this scheme. Villages with special art form, cuisine, historical importance, and beauty or adventure sport sites have been developed in various states. Jammu and Kashmir has the highest number of rural tourist sites (26). Economically these villages were already developed as they had a distinct art and culture. However tourism is providing a perfect showcase for these handicrafts, culture, heritage at the global level. It is also providing them with extra cash especially in the off season. While developing these villages as tourist sites the infrastructure in terms of power, connectivity, sanitation and health was also developed in the process. This is an added advantage for the population living in these areas. Moreover the development of tourist sites also puts a brake on migration.

The states which have high tourist sites in general have less rural tourist sites like Rajasthan and Maharashtra. The North Eastern states have large number of villages that have been identified for tourism mainly because of the ecological beauty and the handicraft of the region. As these economies are female led, these rural tourist sites provide additional income to them.

Sustainable development has been the core of all developmental policies across the world since it was first mentioned in the Brundtland Report in 1987. The current debate on circular economy is dealing with the same issue and rural tourism is a means to achieve this goal. All around the world rural tourism deals with using local resources- both physical and human and using it to market the place for tourism. Infrastructure development is very important, especially in countries like India. When a village gets selected to be a part of rural tourism destinations then the state machinery helps in developing these amenities. Secondly it draws the attention of the local residents on the



heritage and culture that they uniquely possess which needs to be showcased to the world. Thirdly there is capacity building in these sites in terms of culinary skills, soft skills etc which provides indirect employment. Fourthly the local business gets boost as the number of consumers go up making it beneficial for local consumers as well as they get more variety of products. Fifthly, employment also goes up but it may not be permanent in nature but there is diversification from agriculture which is a positive sign for the rural economy. There is huge infusion of investment in the core and periphery of the villages thereby improving the overall economic health of the villages.

It is to be understood that though there are large number of positive socio-economic effects of rural tourism, there is also the need to analyse the negative effects of rural tourism on village economy. The urban mass brings with itself new technology and means which destroys the serenity of these places. The very environment which acts as a pull factor becomes polluted because of tourists harming the health of the local people. Many a times the local resources go out of bounds for the local people as they are treated as special incentives so as to draw more tourists. The work culture of the villages gets disturbed as tourism is usually part time, thereby the working ethos changes. Though there is a shift of employment from





agriculture to tourism but it has been observed that the by product is given more importance than the main occupation which is detrimental for village economy. There is also local price inflation that reduces the local demand and thus makes the model unsustainable.

Gender is another aspect that needs to be looked into closely. The women are the uncoun- ted and very often unpaid labour who does most of the lowly jobs. In the case studies of various rural tourist places, an aspect that has been highlighted is that women continue to do their household chores apart from contributing in the business. As these sites are community run, most of the work is done by the local people which is a positive for the economy but for women it adds to their work burden.

Case Studies

Shaam-E-Sarhad, Hodka, Gujarat: Hodka has been named after a jheel (lake) by the same name that existed some 300 years ago at this place. As part of the Endogenous Tourism Project of UNDP, this village was selected for rural tourism in 2004. This village is known for its rich embroidery and art work mostly done by women. The basic idea of tourism here was to give the feel of rural life amidst rural set up and for this the villagers built mud houses which blended with the local landscape. These mud houses were decorated with local artwork and this gave a big impetus to local artisans. The annual income has increased from one lakh per annum to 45 lakhs per annum which is used for the development of the region. 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 of buffalo of India. The Rann festival also originated from here.

Naggur, Himachal Pradesh: Naggur 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. Famous Russian painter Nicholas Roerich called it his home after he settled here. The government turned his villa into a heritage site. The weaving of Naggur is famous and that has been used as an unique selling point to attract tourists. As it is between Kulu and Manali, it is easy to get tourists for this village. The entire site is run by the local inhabitants and the women are earning extra through their weaving work. The local youth has been trained to act as guides and capacity building has been done so as to stop migration.

Conclusion

Rural tourism not only promotes tourism activities in general and generates employment but also makes the villages self reliant in many ways. Most of the village tourist sites have been part of the Endogenous Tourism Project which has brought in huge investments in these areas. It has helped to safeguard the local heritage sites making the local inhabitants aware of the rich culture, tradition and heritage that they have, which may be explored for their economic betterment and to bring their villages on the global map. There are certain negative factors too that have come in with the positive ones to these areas but a cost benefit analysis shows that the standard of living of the people have improved. As these sites are run and maintained by the local people, the originality of the area is not being lost and the youth are engaged in this work which gives them an enhanced sense of belongingness and they are finding newer methods to augment their income. As Gandhiji wrote, "the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed" and this is true for all the rural tourist sites.

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