Rural Tourism: Need, Scope and Challenges in India

Dr. Tukaram Vaijanathrao Powale
Associate Professor, Department of Economics Late Babasaheb Deshmukh Gorthekar ACS Mahavidyalaya, Umri, Dist. Nanded (MS)

Abstract: Rural Tourism exhorts tourists to spend quality time in a nuanced fashion by engaging them in different ethnic, indigenous and aesthetic practices in rural areas. The stresses generating from urban life and the detachment and distance from natural environment occasionally provoke the urbanites to escape from their monoculture city life. In such case, rural locations seem to be an ideal place to release stress and also provide an opportunity to be re-engaged in a simpler way of life that offers rest and absolute peace for a certain period of time. Not only that, such form of tourism is widely acknowledged because it can shape up rural society by bringing benefit both in monetary and social terms. Although the concept is relatively new one and has both positive and negative impacts, it has gained immense importance around the world in recent time. A large population in India, staying in rural areas, are still primarily dependent on traditional age old practice i.e. cultivation. But the profit, generating from agriculture is falling down day by day and these villagers are lacking sufficient alternative job scope. This situation is enforcing them to settle down in nearby urban localities in search of better income and better livelihood. If the rural India can be re-developed, rejuvenated and promoted as tourist spots, these villagers will obviously get adequate number of alternative job scope that can possibly reduce the tendency of leaving native villages and in such way the socio-economic condition of rural India can also be improved. In India, Rural Tourism is still an emerging concept and the sector is quite open and untouched for marketing. Now, thrust will be to promote village tourism as the primary tourism product to gain maximum socio-economic benefits from it .In this connection, we need to understand the rural setting, people, social, political and environmental background, local sentiments etc. of any place. In addition, we have to work out an effective plan that will involve the rural people in such form of tourism that can enhance their economic condition towards a positive direction. Marketers and entrepreneurs have already realized the scope and market opportunity and have adopted many effective strategies both for the short-term profits and its success in the long run. But they are also facing a number of challenges while marketing and promoting Rural Tourism. These challenges have to be overcome in coming future to get maximum benefits from Rural Tourism. This paper has highlighted the need, scope and marketing strategy for Rural Tourism in the India .

Key Words: Rural, Tourism, Rural Tourism, Marketing, Sustainability, Development

INTRODUCTION

'Rural Tourism' has gained immense importance since last two decades and has created a niche impact on tourists' mind as a special-interest form 'The aim of tourism development in rural areas is to solve key business objective outside motivation and satisfaction of tourism and economic issues related to the depopulation of areas caused by migration of rural population to urban centres'. Rural Tourism is playing a significant role not only in the global scenario but also it has the potentiality to become equally important in rural India. Such form of tourism not only provides rewarding and individualized holiday products to tourists by ensuring absolute peace from monotonous urban city life and its traffic, noise and pollution but also it generates employment for the local community and diversifies the economy and regional employment. Even the concept is a relatively new concept; it can definitely be useful if it will be sensibly nurtured in a country like India, where almost 68.84% population reside in 6, 38,000 villages where most of the villagers are mainly dependent in agricultural activities and are eagerly looking for alternative job scope on an urgent basis for survival, as many a time due to drought, flood like natural calamities they suffer a lot and even incident like suicide is not rare one in rural farmer-communities. Like many other forms of tourism, Rural Tourism has also positive and negative impacts and those affect both rural as well as urban life. Hence its significance is not ignorable. Seeing the stressful urban lifestyles leading towards "counter-urbanization" syndrome, growing curiosity of urban people regarding rural culture and heritages, downfall of income level from agriculture and related works, lack of alternative way outs for earning sufficient money, scope for new business opportunities, changing attitude in Indian and global tourists' behaviour in terms of nature awareness and increasing demand for niche

tourism and green products -it is evident that the future of Rural Tourism in India is going to be very promising one. In this connection, the role of Government and local monitoring bodies is going to be very crucial. Govt. should educate rural villagers to enhance their communication skill, create sense of ownership, make them aware of the value of their culture and heritages and motivate them to take active participation. Side by side to encourage local entrepreneurs, private enterprises, investors and other tourism stakeholders to come under a common umbrella for basic rural infrastructure development activities – is also essential. Finally and most importantly, to maximize the benefits from Rural Tourism, all need to understand the present business opportunities, environment, rural demography, socio-cultural situation, community sentiments and also economic and political stability of an identified place. Encouraging and supporting such kind of tourism will no doubt offer the deprived villagers the much-needed way out for a better livelihood than ever before. Moreover, the urban tourists are becoming more conscious about the impact of their presence while visiting any rural place. They are taking responsible approaches to save the nature and biodiversity. They are playing active role for the welfare of the rural community by purchasing or consuming rural products. The substantial growth in disposal income has increased the number of tourists (especially urban tourists) and gradually this form of alternative and niche tourism is strengthening its footholds as it has less adverse effects on nature and society compared to mass tourism.

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the significance and need of Rural Tourism in Indian Context
2. To highlight the scopes of Rural Tourism.
3. Way Out of Effective Strategy for Rural Tourism Marketing
4. Finding out the Benefits and Challenges of Rural Tourism in Indian Context
5. Suggestions to maximize benefits

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is based on majorly secondary data derived from various literature sources which includes various research papers, news articles, and websites. The findings and statement of the paper carries the effect of personal visit to different rural tourism spots and discussions with entrepreneurs, villagers, tourists, officials and other stakeholders.

UNDERSTANDING OF RURAL TOURISM:

Rural tourism can reinvigorate the conventional concepts and views on tourism and it can bring a new dimension to the sustainable development concept. The term “Rural Tourism” is composed of two terms: ‘Rural’ and ‘Tourism’. The term ‘Rural’ is viewed differently from one country to another defined ‘Rural’ as ‘the rural lands under agriculture, forest and woodland, as well as wild uncultivated tracts in a natural or semi-natural state’. Whereas, ‘Tourism’ is acknowledged as an economic activity that is characterized by involvement of tourists who are facilitated by a set of tourist facilities. Stated that tourism should be assimilated into the environment and the local culture of an area. Most probably the simplest definition of Rural Tourism is that it is an activity that takes place in the countryside **.** But this definition does not include the complexity of the activity and the different forms and meanings those were developed at the different time in different countries.

Different scholars defined Rural Tourism differently in different scholarly debates but they failed to arrive at any general agreement that could be universally accepted. Early researchers like indicated that a simple definition of rural tourism is inadequate for many purposes. H. Grolleau defined Rural Tourism as a concept that includes all sort of tourism activities taking place in rural areas. But a number of scholars have opposed it saying that ‘a trip with a carriage or a picnic or other activity carried out as same day excursion in a remote countryside cannot be considered as Rural Tourism.**,** argued that rural tourism can be defined as ‘tourism in a non-urban territory where human activity is going on and primarily agriculture’. According to, the rural people offer such form of tourism along with small-scale accommodation units and ‘the implication of important components and customs of life’. Such form of tourism showcases rural life, promotes culture and heritages of rural locations and at the same time benefits the host community economically and socially. Rural Tourism is multi-faceted and may entail different forms of tourism.’ There are a variety of terms such as farm tourism, agro-tourism, soft tourism, ecotourism etc. are used to describe tourism in rural areas’ suggested an

integrated rural tourism model. Rural tourism and local economy both are interdependent and it is considered as a key strategy player for the regional development.

NEED FOR RURAL TOURISM FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM :

Infrastructure limitation is a common problem in Rural India that can be solved by promoting Rural Tourism as it creates favourable condition for basic infrastructure development. It has a significant economic contribution as different tourism associated activities actually generate cash inflow that benefits rural community. Varieties of earning scopes provide better possible ways to maintain daily day living. Rural producers, marketers, suppliers all get benefit from such alternative tourism. 'Fundamental for a sustainable tourism industry is accepting the key principles underlying the concept of rural tourism'. Promotion and responsible marketing approaches help the host community and local entrepreneurs to recognize the intrinsic value of rural tourism. Ethical responsibility motivates both the host and the tourists to behave sensibly towards the environment. Such behaviour prevents the exploitation of tourism resources and as a result, all get long-term benefit as the principal and primary product of rural tourism is always rural culture and heritages along with nature and its rich bio-diversity. In addition, from direct participation tourists get real time experience and opportunity to mingle with the hosts' culture and it helps to build up harmony and fraternity in between tourists and local community.

SCOPE FORRURAL TOURISM IN INDIAN CONTEXT:

In 2002 National Tourism Policy, Rural Tourism was recognized as a focus area for employment generation and sustainable livelihoods. In that policy it was clearly being said that, "Special thrust should be imparted to rural tourism and tourism in small settlements, where sizable assets of our culture and natural wealth exist." But in a country like India, where almost 70% of the total population stay in rural areas and a good percentage of rest of the number have their own origins in different rural Indian villages and even after they are staying in urban areas, they have a habit to go back to their village homes on different occasion throughout the year, the idea of rural tourism is a kind of puzzle for the Indians as it is obvious to raise one important question i.e. "why should Indians pay good money to go to some other villages?" Answer is that, in recent time the tourists' attitude has been changed a lot and it is true both for the domestic and foreign tourists. The tourists are now looking for such a trip that can offer them meaningful experience and quality environment. These better-educated travellers are very much interested in different outdoor amusement and recreational activities. Moreover, the concern for nature and its sustainability is growing day by day. In this connection, the interest for alternative tourism such as eco-tourism, special interest tourism, heritage tourism etc., is also increasing and such change of preference is driving these tourists to go to rural areas where fragmented nature and rich bio diversity can easily satisfy their ultimate desire i.e. to experience and to enjoy the rustic charms of rural India in the lap of the nature. Apart from that, meaningful holiday and fulfilment of expectation at a reasonable price also increase the chance of repeated visits by the backpackers.

EFFECTIVE MARKETING STRATEGTY FOR RURAL TOURISM IN INDIA:

'Implementation of the marketing concept is one of the key factors of success in initiating activity and survival of rural tourism in the tourism market'. The major advantage of adopting marketing strategies of rural tourism is that it can identify a number of problems that may occur during the execution of development projects from the very beginning. A large potential market for rural tourism is open as it is an emerging concept still in India.

BENEFITS FROM RURAL TOURISM:

Rural Tourism as a form of tourism that takes place in non-urban settings. Rural tourism, still capturing a minority tourism market in India, can make a valuable contribution to the rural economy. It can enhance job scope in the rural area. The government of India, of late, has also realized its contribution as a potential development driver and how far rural India can offer to the world It will be an injustice to its actual contribution if we express its benefits only in financial terms. Rather it has a great impact in case of maintaining the sustainable

livelihood of the rural population, promoting local culture and heritages, empowering local women, alleviating poverty, conserving and preserving natural resources, improving basic rural infrastructure, adopting new work culture and overall developing a better impression of locality and its people in tourists' mind. It can be an important force to develop underdeveloped and disadvantaged rural areas. Some of its benefits are as follow:

Socio-Economic Development:

Rural tourism is actually the development of the region and wellbeing of the local community. has said that development increases the number of travellers and the frequency of travel. Rural Tourism facilitates the declining areas to be developed with basic infrastructure facilities and provides the host community alternative ways of employment and side by side it reduces out-migration. It fosters a closer relationship between city dwellers and rural communities. While tourists enjoy the natural environment and learn about nature, rural culture, tradition and heritages, farm work, art of living etc., the host receives income from tourism. It empowers local people and they take participation in different decision-making occasions.

Alternative Way of Earning:

Most of the rural dwellers in India are dependent on traditional agricultural activities to maintain their livelihood. In this connection, rural tourism can be a potential tool to reduce their over-dependency on cultivation and it contributes to the overall economic development of an area that would otherwise be deprived.

Employment:

Rural tourism creates a large number of semi-skilled jobs for the local population in not only local hotels and catering trades but also in other fields like transport, retailing, heritage interpretation etc. Moreover, it ensures revival of traditional arts, crafts, building art etc. and brings marketing opportunity for rural producers to sell their products directly to the tourists. Rural performers are hired for cultural programs where they can exhibit talent and also can earn money. It allows alternative sources of earning opportunities from non-agricultural sectors that improve living standards of the rural dwellers to some extent.

Job Retention:

Cash flows generating from rural tourism can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality, medical care etc. It provides additional income for farmers, local fishermen and local suppliers. Job retention does not sound as glamorous as job creation but it helps the viability of small communities.

Alternative Business Opportunities:

Rural Tourism generates new business opportunities even those rural businesses, not directly related to tourism can also gain benefit from tourist activity through developing close relationships with tourist facilities. For example, a number of tourists love to taste local cuisines of different tourist spots. Therefore any restaurant serving ethnic foods can also attract tourists though many of these restaurants are not directly related to tourism business.

Poverty Alleviation:

Rural Tourism is being admired all over the world because such form of tourism can shape up rural society both by economic and social terms. It brings both monetary and social benefits to the rural people. It alleviates poverty by creating alternative sources of earning.

Empowerment of Localities:

Rural Tourism cannot be flourished without the involvement of local people in it. Accommodation facilities are being provided by local hotel owners whereas local suppliers supply food and beverages to the local hotels. Local producers produce locally made products as per tourists demand and earn money by selling them in the local market. To entertain tourists, local organizers conduct different cultural programmes where local performers exhibit their art and culture through live performance. Not only that, rural people also become engaged in different decision-making processes. All such engagement actually empowers the localities.

Entrepreneurial scope :

Rural Tourism is an emerging concept in India and its market is still open for all. The tourism industry needs energetic and enthusiastic young people. Rural Tourism has increased career options for these young entrepreneurs.

Arts and Crafts Sale :

Arts and crafts are the evidence of local culture and heritages of a community belonging from any region or any nation. The urban tourists, wherever they go, generally prefer to have a collection of local arts and crafts to make their trip-experience a remembering one. Such tendency motivates them to purchase local arts and crafts from the local producers and artists. Side by side it encourages the local community to sell their products in local market. Such practice opens an alternative way of earning to the rural people.

Environmental Improvement:

"Environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and litter disposal can be assisted by tourism revenues and political pressures from tourism authorities. These help develop pride of place, important in retaining existing population and businesses, and in attracting new enterprises and families".

Heritage Preservation:

Rural Tourism brings a strong sense of emotion in everyone's (both community and tourists) mind to preserve and reserve the local culture and heritages to make any place attractive for the tourists to visit it and also for the host community to live in. Such sense is maintained through rural museums that play a significant role in local heritage preservation.

CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING AND MARKETING RURAL TOURISM IN INDIA:

Deprivation, Improper Communication Facilities and Embryonic Stage of Rural Market:

Rural markets are often characterized by rural population and majority of them still come under below Poverty Line. These villagers are less involved in showcasing their culture and heritages in front of the tourists visiting their places as they are not very much aware of the potentiality of rural tourism that can act as an alternative source of earning and therefore there will be lesser need to go to nearby town in search of job. Moreover, most of the rural markets are underdeveloped with lots of hindrances. Long distance from nearby towns, absence of proper mode of surface transportation, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate lodging – fooding-amusement facilities, inconsistent electricity, telecommunication problem etc. cause difficulties to attract valued consumers (tourists) in many rural sites though those are very much promising in term of the availability of tourism resources.

Communication Skill:

There is no doubt that communication skill is an essential tool for producers, marketers and suppliers to draw the attention of potential buyers. The difference in languages and lack of basic education are the two basic obstacles for the rural marketers. Much of the success of tourism marketing depends on the ability to give warm welcome to the guest, to understand the clients' (here tourists) demand and to provide right services at right time.

Legislation Problem:

Generally, owners of licensed accommodation units pay taxes to the government. But it is kind of burden for the poor rural marketers to pay tax at a regular basis as they lack sufficient financial backing and many a time they face losses in business because of seasonal demand.

Insufficient Financial Support:

Most of the rural tourism marketers come from the poor family background and not every time they are financially supported by the local banks or local Government bodies through loan facilities. Therefore, though these marketers have unique business ideas, most of the time because of insufficient fund, inadequate technical knowledge and skill they fail to startup businesses as per their desire.

Lack of Trained Human Resource :

The success of rural tourism depends on the quality of hospitality service from welcome to see off the tourist as we all know the first impression is the last impression. But in rural areas, lack of trained human resource is a common issue that affects directly the tourism and hospitality industry badly. Moreover, the trained people from urban areas normally are not interested in going to rural areas to work due to lack of basic infrastructure facilities.

Lack of Proper Physical Communications:

Proper drinking water, sufficient electricity, good telecommunication, safety and security, etc. are the few basic needs of a tourist while he or she is visiting any place individually or in a group. It is unfortunate but true that nearly half of the villages in this country do not have all-weather roads and above said basic facilities.

SUGGESTIONS

- Product development as per tourists' changing demands.
- Proper planning and conservation of natural resources and local heritages for the sustainable development of Rural Tourism
- Government initiatives to support the young entrepreneurs by providing loans.
- Rural Tourism should be tax free.
- Taking Rural Tourism Circuit development approach for overall regional development.
- Any museum or interpretation centre can be set-up to provide information to tourists.

CONCLUSION

It is apparently simple to define Rural Tourism but it is actually complex in nature and has different forms and meanings in different countries. In India, Rural tourism is an emerging concept and the scope for its marketing is still open. It is also realized that the future of such niche tourism is very promising as rural India boasts of rich culture and heritages. Moreover, its greeneries, fabulous scenic beauty and wide range of biodiversity can easily grab the attention of city dwellers. Therefore, seeing availability, accessibility and affordability some macro-level marketing strategies should be adopted along with long-term planning, scrutiny, monitoring and regular inspection. In addition, proper market research will remove the uncertainty of business and can bring lots of socio-economic benefits to the rural community. Rural Tourism is a kind of sustainable revenue generating activity that ensures inflow of money from urban to the rural economy and side by side it also prevents the tendency of migration from rural villages to urban cities in search of better livelihood. Such form of tourism motivates host community to stay in their own soil offering them alternative opportunities of earning. It is an important instrument for sustainable human resource development. Poverty alleviation, employment creation, environmental regeneration, basic infrastructure development of remote areas, advancement and empowerment of host community especially women and other disadvantaged groups in the country are a few of many positive impacts of Rural Tourism. It also promotes social integration and international understanding. Preservance of nature and natural resources, market awareness and active participation, sound legislation, sustainable marketing policies and realistic planning and marketing strategies are also crucial for flourishment of rural tourism in India.

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