

RURAL TOURISM- SHOWCASING INDIA'S RURAL HERITAGE

- India's tourism attractions are large and varied. Our culture, which is both syncretic and dates back to ancient times, is our most visible attraction.
- 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 snowcapped mountains, golden beaches, rich forests and verdant deserts all make India an 'Incredible' destination.
- Be it Medical and Wellness Tourism, be it Golf courses and be it Adventure Sports, India has it all.

Relationship Between Tourism And Its Cultural Assets

- India has a unique cultural heritage in which lies its competitive strength. It has vast array of arts and craft spread through the length and breadth of the state.
- The conservation, preservation and integrated development of the areas around these art and craft not only provides an additional opportunity for growth and expansion of rural and heritage tourism in India but also enhances the experience of the tourist visiting such sites.
- While **tangible heritage** has been in the mainstream of tourism development in India, the **intangible or living tourism** has tremendous scope for increasing India's tourism offering not only to the world, but also to its own citizens. (*The intangible heritage includes folklore, cuisine, customary practices, etc.*)

Need For Promoting Rural Tourism

- The villages and the rural economies also have **practitioners of unique arts and crafts** in their original forms that are hard to come by in the cities.
- Rural areas are mostly farming communities and in many cases the **incomes are not as good** as they are in cities.
- Many young men and women are **increasingly migrating to the cities** looking for better opportunities. This has also led to *some of the arts and crafts traditionally being practiced in the rural communities dying a slow death.*
- Rural Tourism is one of the solutions which can cater to all the above questions.
- Rural Tourism focuses on the visitor actively participating in a rural lifestyle. The tourist travels to a rural location and experiences the life while taking part in the daily activities of the village.
- Many cases of rural tourism also include **voluntourism** in which the *tourists spend some time in volunteering and giving back to the community* they visit in the form of teaching at local schools, helping out in the farming activities, etc.
- As a result, the **National Tourism Policy** of India recognizes that special thrust should be imparted to rural tourism.

Opportunities

Increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage & culture, improved accessibility and environmental consciousness are some of the factors responsible for shifting the trend towards rural tourism.

Steps Taken And Success Stories

- 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 **Bhititharwa, 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**.

Challenges

- 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.
- **Awareness is being created** about the various products and destinations including Rural Tourism amongst the trade and consumers by participating in exhibitions and by organizing roadshows etc. as part of ongoing promotional activities.

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF RURAL TOURISM

- Today tourism is recognized as one of the largest industries of the world. It contributes to employment generation, enhances income and enables fair distribution of wealth from an economic perspective.

- Simultaneously it provides a ground for cultural exchange, enhances tolerance and mutual respect amongst different cultures and promotes international friendship.
- It is also one of the surest and economical means of gaining exchange income.

Introducing 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.
- Prerequisites of rural tourism that lend a unique experience to tourists are that the destination should be:
 - Located in a rural area
 - Functionally rural
 - Traditional in character, growing organically, and connected with local families.
- Rural tourism must be in balance with other rural needs and a long term protection of rural resources.
- Rural community-based tourism is small scale tourism in rural areas, where the local people are actively involved in tourism development.
- It is often perceived as a sustainable and responsible form of tourism.
- However, in practice, the planning and evaluation of the tourism development is often concentrated only upon rapid economic and environmental impacts and the socio-cultural significance is left without proper attention.

Positive Impact in Building Rural Societies

- 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.*
- 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.**
- It contributes to the social benefits in several ways. It leads to the maintenance and support of public transport.
- It can also aid in preventing the youngsters of these communities to shift to urban centers as they are now exposed to an array of alternate income through tourism.
- The **role of women** can also gain momentum.
- One of the major positive impacts on the rural society is the *resurgence of cultural, traditional environment for conservation and sustainable management of local and indigenous culture, arts and crafts.*
- However a **systematic and integrated approach to planning and managing** rural tourism is necessary. The fundamental and dominant land use in rural areas in agriculture and this is a fragile resources highly susceptible to environmental and social change.

- It is vital therefore that the very characteristics that attract tourists are not degraded due to excessive tourism development.
- It is important to address the negative implications of tourism so that these can be countered before they impact and socio cultural structure of the rural society.

Challenges

A. 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.

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. 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.

E. 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.

F. 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.

G. 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.

H. 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.

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.

BRANDING RURAL TOURISM

- Untapped tourism potential like medical, rural, tribal, eco, adventure, heritage, spiritual, food and many more are being explored in recent times.
- Thus, the witness of practicing tourism now a days has been shifted from traditional to non-traditional thrusts.
- Many key concepts like sustainable tourism development, alternate tourism, pro-poor tourism, volunteer tourism, responsible tourism, green tourism, community based tourism, special interest tourism etc. are being coined.
- The developments of Rural Tourism has now gained popularity and proved to be a sword with double edge i.e, source of employment for local community (Pro-poor Tourism) and preserving its rich culture and heritage (Sustainable Development).

What Is Rural Tourism?

- In simple terms, Rural Tourism can be defined as the touristic activities happening into rural environments to experience rural taste.
- There are many aspects of rural tourism like eco-tourism, green tourism, wilderness tourism, volunteer tourism etc.

- Rural Tourism activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with the following characteristics: i) low population density, ii) landscape and land use dominated by agriculture and forestry and iii) traditional social structure and lifestyle.

Rural Tourism Products

- As a tourism product, Rural Tourism in India offers green walks through meadows and orchards, bullock cart ride, fishing, agriculture based activities, bird watching, indigenous games etc. Though the climatic conditions in India are full of variations, therefore the rural tourism products also vary.

Rural Tourism concentrates on following important aspects:

- Showcase all the rural background i.e. rich culture heritage and rural life.
- It is a beginning of pro-poor tourism linking benefits of tourism to the local community in the area of employment and social development.
- The tourists get involved in one to one interaction with locals, open the path for many enriching tourism experience and other community based tourism development projects.

Conclusion

- The major focus in developing Rural Tourism is on identifying its strength and opportunities to attract visitors.
- An assessment of the local environment is also important because that will boost up the link of PPP model. It also ensures the sustainability of Rural Tourism in the concerned village.

ECOTOURISM FOR PROMOTING LIVELIHOODS AND CONSERVATION

- Ecotourism is a term in which Conservation, preservation and sustainability are embedded.
- Any tourism activity which is detrimental to local community will also cause irreparable damage to environment.
- The age old traditions and values that are ethnic in nature need to be conserved and nurtured for future generations. Ecotourism has established itself as a livelihood activity to local community in remote destinations around India particularly in Kerala.
- Ranking top among consumer states in India, Kerala banks heavily on ecotourism activities to provide livelihood to local community.
- Rural community with their wealth of knowledge in terms of environment, local flora and fauna have managed to earn a decent income through ecotourism initiatives undertaken from time to time.
- Carrying capacity of eco destinations is a major cause of concern particularly in terms of damage caused to bio diversity of the region. Systematic approach based on regular training to local community has ensured that environmental impact due to these activities is minimal or zero.

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.

- Keeping in mind the importance of the development of ecotourism, ecotourism zones are being developed in the protected areas network across the world.

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 in catching up in other states as well, some of which like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh to name a few.

Some ecotourism initiatives related to livelihood of local community in Indian states other than Kerala are

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 Bio diversity park is.

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 Indian 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- interwomen into the Fabric of Society:

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

The Eco Development Project

- India Eco Development Project aims to reduce the dependency of local community on forest and conserve the biological diversity of protected areas with the **support of World Bank and Global Environmental Facility (GEF)**.
- Considering the biological value of Periyar Tiger Reserve for the state, the India Eco Development Project is launched by the Department of Forest and Wildlife in 1996 in this reserve.
- The major objectives of this project are following:
 - Improve the capacity of protected areas management to conserve biodiversity, increase collaboration of local people and increase opportunities for local participation.
 - Reduce the negative impact of local people on biodiversity.
 - Develop more extensive support for eco-development.
 - Prepare future biodiversity projects

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.

INCREASING INTEREST IN RURAL TOURISM

- India with all its geographical and cultural diversity has always been an attraction for tourists.
- Rural tourism holds immense promise for India. When developed to its fullest potential, it could provide jobs to many young men and women who otherwise are increasing migrating to cities.
- Rural tourism can revive many of the arts and crafts traditionally being practiced in the rural communities but dying a slow death.
- Socially, it can open rural mindset to new thoughts and ideas from the outside world. On the other hand, for the urban citizen, a few days spent amidst traditional rural lifestyle may prove to be a great stress reliever.

Major Types of Rural Tourism in India

- **Agricultural Tourism**
- **Cultural Tourism**
- **Nature Tourism**
- **Adventure Tourism**
- **Food Routes:** Where wanderlust meets the variety that persists in our cuisine.
- **Community Eco-tourism**
- **Ethno- tourism:** To expand the horizon to view different cultures.

Some popular Rural Tourism Destinations:

- **Kutch Adventures India**
- **Itmennan Lodges Punjabiyat:** Farming in Rural Punjab
- **Ecosphere Spirit:** High altitude rural tourism; visits to Buddhist monasteries etc.
- **Lachen, Sikkim**
- **Ballabhpur Danga, West Bengal:** Ballavpur danga, 3KM from shantiniketan, is a **Santhal Adivasi tribal** community in the pastoral beauty of rural Bengal.
- **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**
- **Pochampally, Telangana:** Tourists can have a look at weaving of the famous silk sarees known by the same name.

Rural Tourism and Rural Women

- Rural Tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for women, which makes the gender equality perspective highly relevant.
- In the tourism industry, the percentage of women who work in the industry is high but function is dominated by unskilled, low paid jobs.

Challenges

- Rural women and farmers have inadequate knowledge, education and exposure which construct problems in understanding and management of travel and tourism sector which is most dynamic and vibrant.
- They have modest business proficiency and deficient in business and market opportunities.
- Inadequate infrastructure, lack of financial support, unsatisfactory training and education opportunities are other problems.

Way Forward

- Instead of having more hotels or guest houses in rural areas, it is better to encourage homestay.
- Women can be encouraged to cook local food for the tourists.
- Tourists may be given the option of interpreters in case they face any difficulty. Rural women can be trained and educated to act as interpreters. This will increase their income and self confidence.

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.

RURAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

- The tourism has grown manifold in India with its contribution to the national Gross Domestic Product being 6.3 per cent and that to total employment in the country 8.3 per cent.
- Rural sustainable tourism is defined as one which can reinvigorate the conventional concepts and views on tourism and it can bring a new dimension to the sustainable development concept.
- In this, rural people offer small-scale accommodation units and showcase their culture and heritages while getting economic and social benefit from the activity without having any adverse impact on local environment.

History

- The first mention of sustainable tourism can be traced back to the **Sargent Committee report of 1946**, which said that Indian culture promotes sustainable way of living.
- And hence, **cultural tourism** remained the central plank of India’s tourism strategy and various surveys show that heritage and culture are the two biggest draws in attracting foreign tourists to India.
- **As per a scheme** to promote rural tourism, in which thrust is given to promote village tourism to new geographic areas.
- Under this scheme, **a convergence committee headed** by district collector is formed and activities like improving the environment, hygiene and infrastructure are taken up.
- Apart from providing assistance, the focus is to converge various rural development schemes to provide village tourism in a sustainable manner.
- For promotion of Rural Tourism several steps have been taken which underline development of Rural Tourism Infrastructure, promotion of organizing fairs, festivals and Tourism related events and encouragement to rural people to learn hospitality trades of food production, food and beverage service, housekeeping and bakery and patisserie for their economic empowerment.

What Needs To be Done to Boost Rural Tourism

- **Accessibility** to destinations should be the first criteria for selection of destination to be developed for rural tourism.
- **Advertising** the destinations will help artisans in selling their products better and proper marketing of the project is required to increase tourists.
- Projects should be **re-strategized in terms of proximity** to popular sightseeing destinations and maintenance of the projects is required to keep up the momentum.

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 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.

Promoting Sustainable Rural Tourism

- 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.

Way Forward

- Though taking about sustainable development looks niche, challenges are many. Some of them are poor connectivity from nearest towns, bad condition of roads, inadequate maintenance of facilities created for tourists, very less community participation and poor quality of service leading to slow death of the rural tourism village.
- As India is a country of diverse languages, communication with tourists including sign boards in local languages also becomes a bottleneck for rural tourism.

AGRI-TOURISM: POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES

- 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.

- It helps the child especially the urban child who normally lives in closed door school, watches television and mostly remains confined to the four walls of the home to understand and appreciate the traditional way of farming, milk production etc.

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
 1. Generating additional revenue for local business and services from the tourist.
 2. Upgrading and revitalizing community facilities.
 3. Helping preserve local traditions, art forms and culture.
 4. Helping in diversifying and strengthening the rural economy through job creation.
 5. Empowering the women in the villages
 6. Interacting with the urban tourist could also help in reducing the impact of the social ills like superstitions etc.

Different Products Offered by Agri-Tourism

1. **Farmer's Market:** Here the farms products can be purchased by the tourist at any time and in any quantity.
2. **Pick your own products:** Here the tourist can be encouraged to enter the farms and pick up the products directly.
3. **Savour local flavor:** Typical village breakfast, lunch or dinner may be offered, for instance in Maharashtra "kandapoha" is offered for breakfast.
4. **Participation:** Tourist may be requested to try lighting the 'choolah' and cook simple food.
5. **Experience Rural life:** A conducted tour around the village may give insight about the rural life. In Mumbai, for example one of the world's largest slums is located at a place called Dharavi. Foreign tourists like visiting Dharavi just to understand life in a slum.

Implementation of Agri-tourism is not without some challenges. Some of them are:

1. **Quality and complexity of services**
2. **Cooperation amongst the stakeholders:** Agri-tourism involves working together of both private and public organizations in tandem. The farmer who is at the center of the Agri-tourism network of stakeholders is the key to success.

Some Strategies In Promoting Agri-Tourism Could Be

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

7. Timely delivery of services
8. Proper development of the 4 Ps Marketing Strategy and
9. Setting up of a proper public private partnership development model.

Conclusion

Agri-tourism is a supportive system complimentary to the agricultural activities. The development of Agri-tourism can perhaps help a great deal in socio economic empowerment of the farming community.

IMPACT OF RURAL TOURISM ON RURAL ECONOMY

Economy and Tourism

- 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.

Background

- 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.
- Rajasthan and Kerala were the early movers to take advantages of this scheme.

Case Studies

- **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.
- **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.
- The weaving of Naggur 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.

Conclusion

Gandhiji once 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 sites.

BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURISM

In contrast to conventional tourism, rural tourism has the following typical characteristics:

- The locations are sparsely populated
- The setting is predominantly in natural environment.
- It blends with seasonality and occurrence of local events, and
- It revolves around preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

Benefits of Rural Tourism

1. Benefits to the Local Community:

- a) Providing alternate and novel employment opportunities in the village.
- b) Supplements household income in a big way.
- c) Throws up opportunities to showcase their cuisine, heritage and artifacts.
- d) Facilitates and broadens their vision and outlook, thanks to interaction with the tourists from different places and backgrounds.
- e) Entrepreneurial instincts which are hitherto innate get tickled by showcasing their wares to the tourists.
- f) The feeling that they are less privileged compared to the urban dwellers may be assuaged.
- g) Provides gainful employment to the women folk villages.
- h) With the revenue that villages will get from the tourists through entry fee, parking charges and the cess levied on local service provides, the village administration comes in handy for improving the facilities like sanitation, drainage and internal roads. This is how rural tourism empowers the villages and the much avowed ‘*Gram Swaraj*’ becomes a reality.

2. Benefits to the Tourism Industry

- a) The pressure on conventional tourism destinations may be brought down.
- b) The few villages selected for rural tourism promotion will eventually emerge as rural promotion will eventually emerge as rural tourism hubs.
- c) The scope of tourism industry could be enhanced as the product mix gets enrich with the inclusion of rural tourism in the product basket.

3. Benefits to the Society at Large

- a) Rural tourism may be used as a tool to mitigate the rural unrest prevalent in most of the rural areas due to low incomes and deprivation of even the basic amenities apart from unemployment.
- b) Since rural tourism provides an opportunity to engage the local resources – both physical and human, it will have a positive impact not only on the incomes of local people but also lends a sense of pride to them.
- c) Facilitates creating a favorable ecosystem in the rural areas conducive to tourism through enabling people in the villages hitherto untouched by the whole gamut of modern tourism.

d) Rural tourism acts as a tool with minimum cost to bridge the psychological and emotional gap between the urban and rural populace, as consumers of the product and markets of the products respectively.

Some Of The Famous Destinations

- It is worth mentioning a few rural tourism destinations which have gained visibility in the rural tourism map of India.
- **Banavasi** in Karnataka where wood carving, artifacts, musical instruments and stone cuttings ensures tourists.
- **Raghurajpur** in Odisha is known for **Pattachitra painters and Gotipura dance** troupes, the precursor to the Indian classical dance form of Odissi.
- **Hodka village** in Gujarat is another popular rural tourism destination where finest leather craft artisans and embroidery craftsmen arouse lots of curiosity.
- Similarly **Pochampalli in Telangana** state has its unique character of designing and weaving a wide range of silk sarees.
- Pochampalli has found place in UNESCO tentative list of World Heritage Sites as part of "*Iconic saree weaving clusters of India*".
- Destinations like these may be identified across the country and these successful rural tourism business models can be replicated.