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PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF RURAL TOURISM IN BANKURA DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY

Jayanta Pramanik

Research Scholar, Department of Geography, University of Calcutta

Shri Sudhir Malakar

Associate Professor (Retd.), Department of Geography, University of Calcutta

Abstract

Rural tourism is such a relevant component through which development of rural areas can be possible with maintaining the quality of environment with sustainable manner. Tourism, especially rural tourism is now becoming an important tool in developmental process. Tourism is the industry of industries and has a great multiplier effect on the other industries. One out of every nine persons earns a living from tourism directly or indirectly. Most of the tourist places of the Third World countries like India are sited in rural places most of which are backward in terms of socio-economic condition and standard of living of the people. Proper utilisation and management of local resources could change the basic livelihood in areas with sustainable rural tourism. The present paper tries to analyse the recent scenario and the potentialities of rural tourism of Bankura district.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Alternative Tourism.

Introduction

Tourism termed 'rural' when the rural culture is a key component of the production offer. It is a form of tourism outside the formal tourist area and showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural location benefiting the local community economically and socially. It is a multi-faceted activity and characterised by small scale business sector develop in areas where land use is dominated by primary activities such as agriculture, forestry or natural areas. Rural tourism has been identified as one of the prime concerns for the development of Indian tourism. In the National Tourism Policy, 2002, the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India announced its plans for spreading tourism to rural areas as 'village tourism will be promoted as the primary tourism product of India; to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural areas'. The Ninth Plan of India identified the basic objectives of rural tourism as follows-

- a) Improve the quality of life of rural people
- b) Provide good experience to the tourist
- c) Maintain the quality of environment.

Endogenous Tourism Project is being implemented under the collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) across 36 sites in 20 states of India. Indian villages have a huge potential for tourism development. Attractive and unique traditional way of living, natural and cultural diversity, various types of art and craft, traditional folklore etcetera have made Indian villages the rural tourism hot spot in several ways. Almost 74% of the total Indian population lived in its 7 million villages where the basic amenities for normal livelihood is very much poor. On the other hand, rural tourism act as an important instrument for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, environmental regeneration, job creation, resource generation and development of remote areas and empowerment of women and other weaker section of the society. So, there is an enormous scope for the development of rural areas through rural tourism without investing large scale capital or raw materials but with proper management and utilisation of local resources in sustainable manner.

Study Area

District Bankura, the study area of the present study, is located at the south- western part of West Bengal. It is one of the seven districts of Burdwan division of West Bengal and has been described as a 'connecting link between the plains of Bengal on the east and the Chottanagpur Plateau on the west' (O' Mally, 1906). The district is bounded by 22°38' N to 23°38' N latitudes and between 86°36' E and 87°46' East longitude. This district is bounded by Paschim Medinipur and Hugli district in the east, Purulia in the west Burdwan in the north and east. Before popularised as Bankura in 1881, it was known as 'Jungle Mahal' till 1833 and became a part of west Bardhaman in 1876.

According to the latest census report, published in 2011, Bankura had total population of 35,96,674 resides in its 6,882 km² of geographical area with a density of 523 persons per km². Population is mainly rural in character. 91.67% of the total population



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have been lived in rural areas and rest of 8.33% in urban areas registered in the census report of 2011. Socio-economically Bankura is one of the backward districts of West Bengal. Overall HDI rank is 11th out of the 17th district of the state. Regional disparity of district is a major concern for the development. There are some isolated pockets of the district where the disparity is in maximum level. So, standard of living is also one of the biggest concerns. Livelihood options are limited because of poor natural resource management and related uncertainties of climatic conditions. About 42 per cent of the net cultivable area of the district with mainly agro-based economy and distributed in drought-prone or semi drought-prone area.

Objectives

The major objectives of the study are-

- To explain the concept of rural tourism.
- To analyse the present scenario of rural tourism in the study area.
- To identify the major problems of development of rural tourism in the area under study.
- To examine the prospect of rural tourism in the study area as a tool of development.

Methodology

The methodology broadly consists of collection of quantitative and qualitative data. The data has been collected in the form of primary and secondary data. The secondary data collected from different Government & Non-Government Offices, published and unpublished reports, and records. The primary data has been collected from primary field survey and informal discussions with different stakeholders in different conventional and non-conventional tourist destinations of the study area.

Concepts

The concept of travel and tourism is as old as the civilization. But it has now become world's most flourishing and fastest growing industry. Rural tourism refers to all kind of tourism activities in rural areas. Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural areas and thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially can be termed as rural tourism. Ministry of tourism, Government of India has identified some specific characteristics of rural tourism like

- it is experience oriented and be based on rural tourism's features,
- the locations are sparsely populated having small scale settlements, predominantly in natural environment,
- it engaged with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.
- It gives to visitors a personalized contact, a taste of physical and human environment of countryside and as far as possible, allows them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people (Aref and Gill, 2009).
- It is highly connected with local people and their families. Local people and tourists are the main contributors to rural tourism.

Rural areas have faced new challenges in recent years. Agricultural productivity and real income of rural people have decreased. Technological changes in agriculture have reduced agricultural employment. Growing levels of education, leisure time, health awareness, growing interest in preserving nature and heritage, improvements in transportation and communication systems have increased the opportunities for rural tourism. On the other hand, the 'counter-urbanization syndrome' of the urban population is increasingly encouraging people to spend their holidays in the countryside. The concept of rural tourism is to benefit the local community through employment opportunities, generation of income, conservation and development of local art and handicrafts and preservation of the environment and heritage (Meena,2015).

Present scenario of rural tourism in Bankura district

Tourism in Bankura district is centralised at Bishnupur, Mukutmanipur, Susunia and Joyrambati. Except Bishnupur, all others conventional tourist destinations of the district are located in rural areas. Some other non-conventional tourist centres are also spread over the rural areas of the district. The following figure (Fig-1) shows that the number of tourists is gradually increased over time. Tourist arrival was minimum during the year 2006-2007. Political disturbances and extremist activities in the 'Jungalmahal' region were the major threats for tourist arrival during this period. But after the year of 2011 number of tourist arrival is remarkably increased.



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Source: District Statistical Handbook, Bankura, 2013-2014

Tourist flow to Bankura follows a seasonal pattern. Tourists are preferred to travel mainly in the month of October to February which is the main tourist season of the study area. Majority (85.2%) of the surveyed tourists are came from different districts of West Bengal. Among them, 17.2% are from the home district who are basically the day visitors. and rest 67.5% from other districts. 13.3 % tourists are coming from the other states of India while only 1.95% came from other countries. Tourists are mainly coming for recreational purpose and most of the tourists are (62.12%) visited to the study area with their family. The average length of stay of tourists in this area is very short, generally 1 night 2 and days. Numbers of same day visitors are very high during the main tourist season. Majority of the tourists (43.58%) are staying for 1 nights and 2 days. Only 18.21 % of total surveyed tourists are staying for 2 nights and 3 days.

Major problems

Some physical and infrastructural weaknesses hindered the expected development of the tourism activity in the district. These are as follows:

- **Seasonality:** The main tourist season of the district is very limited in time. Generally, it extends from November to mid of February only. Due to the seasonality, most of the household has to choose alternative activities during the lean season for their livelihood.
- **Highly centralised tourist destinations:** One of the problems of the tourism industry in Bankura district is its highly centralised in nature.
- **Inadequate accommodation and transport facility:** Tourist centre-based accommodations have been relatively low in this district. There is no specific and regular tourist transport system throughout the district. The primary survey shows that the main places of tourist interest do not have transport facilities for commuters and even rents of private car are not specified.
- **Inefficient marketing strategy:** Proper marketing strategies like lack of proper vision for tourism development, lack of advertising or publicity about potential tourist destinations are some major problems.
- **Lack of basic amenities at tourist destination:** Basic tourism related amenities like drinking water, public toilet and urinal, public telephone booth, ATM facility, online ticket booking facilities are some major problems in most of the tourist centre of the district.
- **Lack of passionate and trained professionals:** Majority of the employees, who are engaged in various service and hospitality related activities, have no institutional and professional training regarding this
- **Recent extremist activity:** The Maoist activity in last decade is the major threat for tourism development mainly in the south-western portion of the district.

Potential tourist resources

District Bankura is one of the richest tourist destinations of the western part of West Bengal. The district has a long pre-historic past, cultural tradition, diversity along with a magnificent natural beauty. The Rarh Bankura changes her beauties from time to time with seasonal variation. During the scorching summer most of the district became a furnace with reddish Palash, after the rainy season it became a green canvass and in winter it is in festive mood with pleasant weather. Major attractions for the tourist are-

Natural Beauties

Undulating landscape, green forest areas, isolated mounds have created a unique natural beauty to attract people to make their holidays successful. Sutan, Ranibandh, Jhilimili, Talberia, Gangdoa, Amarkanan, Koro hill are the potential destinations for their natural beauties.



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Historical and Pre-historical Places

Historically the district is also very much potential for tourist destination. Bishnupur, the temple town of Rarh Bengal, was the capital of Mallabhum dynasty is one of the most valuable sites of the district. The town is also famous for its musical tradition. Pandit Jadubhatta, Pandit Ramsharan Mukhopadhyay were the musical maestro of the great Bishnupur Gharana in classical music. ‘Ramsharan Sangeet Mahavidyalaya’ of Bishnupur has carried the tradition of classical musical heritage of Bengal.

Ambikanagar and the Biharinath hill region are also some important examples of historical site of the district. Both the region is famous for ancient Jain culture. Ambinagar situated in the Khatra block and Biharinath hill is situated almost in the northern part of the district. Amarkanan of Gangajalghati block, Joyrambati of Sonamukhi and many other places of the district including Bankura town, Khatra, Sonamukhi, Chhatna, Beliatare, Onda have great historical status.

Cultural Diversity

The district is culturally sound and has a diverse cultural legacy during the historical era. The district comprises huge proportion of tribal population with their diverse cultural entity. The lifestyle, food habits, tradition, festivals, art and craft, unique folklore of every tribe may act as the cultural hotspot to bring the tourists from different part of the globe. Not only the tribal culture, but there are other cultural events throughout the district which have also very much potential to be the tourist resources. Bishnupur, Sonamukhi, Joyrambati are the most valuable cultural attraction of the district.

Art and Craft

Bankura is well known for its distinctive art and craft. Some traditional style of art and craft of Bengal are practiced here which provided the identity of Bengal throughout the world. Terra Cotta style is the most popular among the others. It is the burnt clay style and has a great tradition of Bengal art. Panchmura, Sendra, Bishnupur are famous for terra cotta style. Terra cotta horse of Panchmura becomes the international symbol of Indian handicraft. Dokra, the art of brass metal is another form of traditional art of the district. It is almost a decaying style of art of the country. The Bikna village near to the Bankura town is the only centre for such art form. Artisans of Dokra are rehabilitated here with their families from the different part of the state. Dashabatar Tass (special type of cards with ‘avatar’s of mythology), Lantern, Baluchari sharees of Bishnupur, Patachitra (pot painting) of Beliatare and Sonamukhi are the most important and unique form of art of Bankura district.

Analysis

From the above discussion a general perception should be made that the district is fully potential in tourism resources. Huge workforce, multi-dimensional tourism resources, on the other hand increasing rate of domestic tourists in the country and state as well indicate a positive sign to the development of rural tourism in the district. So many rural development programmes are initiated by the Government for the enhancement of the standard of living of the rural people most of whom are belong to the below poverty level. At the same time tourism, especially the rural tourism has a multi-dimensional impact for the enrichment of living standard of the rural poor. Now it is a challenge to integrate the functioning rural development schemes with rural tourism sector to develop the tourism infrastructure. Schemes like PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana)- linking of rural areas with all-weather metalled road; Sajaldhara- supply of safe drinking water to rural house hold and even the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guaranty Act) has been implemented in rural areas which are very much helpful for permanent resource creation and basic infrastructural development of rural tourism industry. Recently an amusement park namely the ‘Murutbaha Eco Park’ is formed at Susunia Hill area with the help of MGNREGA and the local administrative body which may increase the attraction of the hill area to the people. Integration of small and potential tourist centres with the main centres may offer the best diversified tourist experience to the tourists from all corners. Such type of integration, as the form of tourism circuit, can change the local transport scenario along with souvenir shop, demand of art and handicraft and other hospitality services which are directly related to the income generation and job creation of the local people. All such activities are small scale in nature which required not a huge capital or entrepreneurship but a proper management that may change the economy of rural people of the district.

Findings

Major findings of the study are-

1. Tourism industry is purely dependent on human contact and became one of the most promising sources of earning of the rural people.
2. Tourism is only concentrated in few locations like Susunia, Mukutmanipur, Bishnupur and Joyrambati of the district. But other than these few locations there are huge potential tourist spots in the district yet to be added to the tourist map of the district.



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3. Inadequate funding, lack of basic tourism infrastructures, lack of awareness and proper management are the major weakness of the tourism industry in Bankura.
4. The district has a long pre-historic past, cultural tradition, diversity along with a magnificent natural beauty.
5. With a varied tourism resources over the extensive rural areas of the district, Bankura has huge potential to become an important tourist destination of the state.

Summary

Tourism industry is the outcome of a chain of interactions among several components. Proper blending of such components may provide an alternative source of income as well as the social well-being for the rural people of the study area. On the whole it can be concluded that despite of various problems the study area has immense potential to become a complete tourist destination in the State of West Bengal. Although the Covid-19 situation has changed much of the traditional way of thinking about tourism, but it is safe to say that the urge to go out of human being will make tourism as popular before.

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