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PROSPECT AND POTENTIAL OF RURAL TOURISM IN BODHGAYA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the prospect and potential of rural tourism in Bodhgaya. Although there is phenomenal growth of religious tourism in Bodhgaya, as it is one of the most prominent Buddhist pilgrimage sites but the rural tourism was never given any priority. The scheme of rural tourism was started by the Ministry of Tourism in 2002-03 with the objective of highlighting rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages which have core competence in art, craft, handloom, textiles and natural environment. Bodhgaya is a small town of international renown with immense religious and cultural significance. The competitive advantage of Bodhgaya lies in the fact that it is one of the most prominent Buddhist pilgrimage sites and also houses a UNESCO World Heritage site within its boundaries. In addition, the proximity to Gaya, Rajgir and Nalanda offers further potential for development of the town as a bustling tourist hub. The city has potential to develop manufacturing units allied to tourism like making of handicrafts and artifacts. Rural tourism can develop win-win situation for this city, and generates increasing benefits to its rural areas in terms of rural productivity, economy, employment generation and conservation of rural environment and culture.

KEYWORDS

Bodhgaya, Rural tourism, UNESCO, Ministry of Tourism, Heritage, Pilgrimage, BTMC, BSTDC.

INTRODUCTION

Bihar's antiquity is evident from its name, which is derived from the ancient word "VIHARA". It is indeed a land of monasteries, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, and Sikh shrines abound in this ancient land where the India's first major empires rose and fell. This article helps to examine the prospect of rural tourism in Bodhgaya which is located in Gaya District of Bihar. It is the place where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment more than 2500 years ago. It is a small town surrounded by many small villages. The famous Mahabodhi temple which is a UNESCO World Heritage site attracts lakhs of tourists every year and large population comprising foreign tourists. Among all Indian states, Bihar is the one most intimately linked to the Buddha's life, resulting in a trail of pilgrimages which have come to be known as the Buddhists circuit. Bodhgaya is the spot where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, and is the most important of the main four pilgrimages sites related to the life of Gautam Buddha. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh along with the government of India are entering in to a dialogue with International Finance Corporation (IFC) to promote their Buddhist heritage in South East Asian countries. Although in Bihar, tourism was never seen as a potential business, but from last one decade government is giving importance to this sector. The number of tourist visiting Bihar has doubled between 2007 and 2012. As for the latest report, while close to 10 million tourist visited Bihar in 2007. The number doubled to 20 million in 2012. In 2014, the tourist influx in Bihar is expected to rich closed to 25 million. As the economy of Bodhgaya is largely driven by tourism and agriculture, rural tourism can be better prospect to benefit local community economically and socially.

The motivation behind of this article is based on the scheme, that ministry of tourism has recently implemented to promote rural tourism as the primary product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and its new geographic reason in India. The Primary beneficiaries are rural communities (Especially women and unemployed youth), PRI representatives, tourists etc. Rural tourism includes a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business. The rural tourism is another kind of sustainable tourism that exploits resources in rural regions, causes little or no harmful impact and generates increasing benefits to rural areas in terms of productivity, employment, conservation of the rural environment and culture, improved distribution of wealth and a suitable way of adapting traditional believes and values to modern times.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Some of the main objectives of the study are as follows:-

- To understand the potential and prospect of rural tourism in Bodhgaya.
- To find the key issues involved in the development of rural tourism in Bodhgaya.
- To find out the impact of rural tourism in Bodhgaya in terms of employment generation, rural productivity and tourist inflow.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities to implement rural tourism in Bodhgaya.
- To find out the extent to which rural tourism contributes to the economy of the Bodhgaya.
- To identify the essential element for development of rural tourism in Bodhgaya.
- To find out the extent to which rural tourism increases the foreign exchange at Bodhgaya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed research work is confined to the **Bodhgaya**, which is divided into **19** wards and had a population of **38,439** of which 19,908 are males while 18,531 are females (census 2011). The research methodology involves both the desk research and the field research. This is an **exploratory** study, which attempts to analyze various factors that affect rural tourism in **Bodhgaya**. The study analyzes the responses provided by the **tourists, local people, Hospitality and tourism personals**, who are working in government and private organizations. The study also analyzes to see perceptions, preference and satisfaction of respondents in contrast of implementation of policy rural tourism in Bodhgaya. The two basic technologies used for the research, i.e., **observation method** and **survey method**. A literature survey was conducted to identify the domains and to find out the items to be generalized for the study. **Primary data** was conducted through a set of standard **questionnaire** (both open ended and close ended). The **sample** was selected **randomly** and the respondents were personally interviewed by the researcher. Additional discussions were also organized with the officials of the **BSTDS, BTMC** personals and **Hospitality** experts to understand the issues related to rural tourism and its implementations. The **empirical** data was collected to understand the market potential for rural tourism to evaluate its positive and negative impact on the society. The survey was conducted with the **random sampling** method.

RURAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Definition:- "Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism."

The scheme of Rural Tourism was started by the Ministry of Tourism in 2002-03 with the objective of highlighting rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages which have core competence in art, craft, handloom, textiles and natural environment. The intention was to benefit the local community economically and socially as well as to enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. The promotion of village tourism was also aimed towards generating revenue for rural communities through tourist visits, which may stop exodus from rural to urban areas. Rural

Tourism can be harnessed as a strategy for rural development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India where almost 74 percent of the population resides in its 7 million villages. On the other hand, the growing trend of urbanization has led to falling of income levels lesser job opportunities leading to desertion of villages. Rural Tourism could be a solution to this. The basic concept of rural tourism is to benefit the local community through entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and development of rural arts and crafts, investment for infrastructure development and preservation of the environment and heritage. Rural tourism will bring people of different cultures, faiths, languages and life-styles close to one another and it will provide a broader outlook of life. It will not only generate employment for the people but it can also develop social, cultural and educational values. In Asia, especially in India, rural tourism in its true form is relatively new. The potential for rural tourism to be a major force in rural economic development resulting in poverty alleviation is yet to be realized to the fullest extent. Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for Rural Development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Rural Tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to these problems. Besides, there are other factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness.

POTENTIAL OF RURAL TOURISM IN BODHGAYA

Bodhgaya is a small town of international renown with immense religious and cultural significance. Bodhgaya consist of 198 Villages and 18 Panchayats . Tetaria Khurd is the smallest Village and Mocharim is the biggest Village. To develop Bodhgaya as an international tourist destination it is important to preserve its cultural heritage by providing all basic infrastructure service to its citizens and tourists in an eco-friendly way and develop other prospect of tourism. The town has seen high growth rate of especially in the last three decades with the population doubling in the last two decades. As, the economy of this town largely depends upon tourism and agriculture, it is utmost important to develop other means of employment .Rural tourism in Bodhgaya not only diversify the concept of tourism, but also generates increasing benefits to its rural areas in terms of rural productivity, economy, employment generation and conservation of rural environment and culture. As, this town is surrounded by many small villages rural tourism can develop a win-win situation for this city. It can be promoted by making aware local community with its important and by implement certain rural activities such as,

- Promoting Buddhist arts , Antiques and crafts.
- Promoting local festival such as Buddha Mahotsava, Kalchakra puja , Buddha Jayanti , Nyingma festival , International Buddhist conclave , etc .
- Promoting local culture inform of dance and drama.
- Farming .
- Promoting rural lifestyles.
- Promoting local sports and other activities.

CONCLUSION

Rural tourism can be harnessed as strategy for development of villages in Bodhgaya. The development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism is definitely useful for this place, where almost 85 percentage of its population resides in rural area. Rural tourism can bring various benefits to this place in terms of employment, foreign exchange better food, education and infrastructure development. As the local community largely depends on agriculture, rural tourism can be additional source of income. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics, like, it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture heritage and tradition. It is utmost important to involve local community, as without their involvement we cannot develop this place a tourist hub. We have to make them understand about their roles and contribution and how they will be benefited. Bohgaya is an international tourist place where millions of tourist visits every year. Therefore, it is important to preserve its natural environment. Rural tourism not only preserves Bodhgaya's natural environment, culture and heritage but also leads to economic development, infrastructure development and employment generation. It will promote harmony and understanding and helps to retain the tourist for longer period of time. Rural tourism can develop win-win situation for this city, and generates increasing benefits to its rural areas in terms of rural productivity, economy, employment generation and conservation of rural environment and culture.

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