

SWOT Analysis of Rural Tourism in India

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Abstract:- Tourism is one of the alternative ways that can create new jobs and reduce poverty for the communities in the remote and resource scarce regions. It can be helpful especially in the rural regions where there are less sources of livelihood. As various forms of tourism are coming into picture rural tourism is one of them. Rural tourism plays an important role in regional development and thus in national development and diversification of national economy. The present research paper is an attempt to find out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of rural tourism in India. The study was primarily focused on rural areas of India and the information was collected from various published and unpublished secondary sources. It was analyzed during the study that if the tourists are diverted towards rural areas it will create lot of opportunities for rural people which will create new jobs and thus prevent migration. Also it will exhibit a whole new picture of villages, which are in pristine form in front of the tourists. But as there are opportunities for future development there are also some threats which if not catered properly can lead to major problems in future. The paper will discuss these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the field of rural tourism.

Keywords:- Rural Tourism, SWOT, Development, Environment

I. INTRODUCTION

India stands unique in South Asia for its tourism. With rich heritage and its multitude attractions the country offers several activities for tourists from all over the world. Bestowed with distinct geographical entity India has several natural as well as artificial marvels that attract a good number of tourists. As per encyclopedia Britannica, “tourism is the act and process of spending time away from home in pursuit of recreation, relaxation and pleasure, while making use of commercial provision of services. As such, tourism is a product of modern social arrangements, beginning in Western Europe in the 17th century, although it has antecedents in Classical antiquity¹.

Mahatma Gandhi had once said that “India Lives in its villages”. Indian villages show the real picture of the country, they are store houses to varied culture, traditions, natural beauty, fresh environment etc. The stable rural tourism can improve the life quality of the host community and provide a worthwhile experience for the visitor and maintain the quality of environment that the host and guest communities are dependent to it².

II. TOURISM

“Tourism” is a French word rooted in “Tour”. Tour means rotational motion, travel, trip and circulation³. The travel has been an integral part of human life through ages. The need and want to seek out new places, experience unique environments, the urge to know the unknown, to gain his livelihood, to discover new land and for sheer thrill in seeing and enjoying the natural beauty the man started to move from one place to another. This insatiable wanderlust of man materialized into classical tours⁴. Tourism industry has now a days become one of the main pillars of the economy. According to Morgan Roth, tourism exactly is when “passengers are away from their residences to meet their personal, vital and cultural needs in the form of customers of economic and cultural goods”⁵.

III. CONCEPT OF RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism flow is defined for tourists who reside in a village or around rural areas for leisure and obtain information to know living conditions and environment of local village⁶. Tourism at any place is determined by its geography, climate, history, culture and natural environment. A place rich in any of these factors attracts a lot of tourists. There is only need to identify these niches for mass tourism.

Government of India explains Rural Tourism as: “Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefitting the local community, economically and socially, as well as enabling interactions between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity that takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agriculture tourism and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics, like it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is pre dominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and tradition ”⁷.

IV. TYPES OF RURAL TOURISM

As tourism is multi-dimensional so is rural tourism. Various dimensions of rural tourism are discussed as follows:

- **Agricultural Tourism** - It is defined as tourism activities connected with agriculture activities, like stays near agri-farms, connected with agrarian environment, using agrarian products for recreation, sale and daily use.

- **Eco-tourism** – It is defined by the International Ecotourism Society as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education.
- **Green tourism** – It is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small-scale alternative to standard commercial tourism⁸.
- **Heritage Tourism - Cultural Heritage Tourism** (or just **Heritage Tourism**) is a branch of tourism oriented towards the cultural heritage of the location where tourism is occurring. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States defines heritage tourism as “travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past,” and cultural heritage tourism is defined as “travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.”⁹.
- **Village Tourism-** It is a type of tourism in which tourists live in village families and participate in rural social and economic activities¹⁰.

V. SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT stands for strength, weakness, opportunity and threat. A SWOT analysis guides to identify these four characteristics and thus develop a fuller awareness of the situation, which helps in strategic decision making. The SWOT method was originally developed for business and industry, but it is equally used in the work of community, health, development, tourism, education and even for personal growth.

“It is impossible to accurately map out a small business’s future without first evaluating it from all angles, which includes an exhaustive look at all internal and external resources and threats”, said by Bonnie Taylor, chief marketing strategist at CCS Innovations¹¹. A SWOT accomplished thus in four straight forward steps that even rookie business owners can understand and embrace. The strengths and weaknesses of a system are determined by internal elements, whereas external forces dictate opportunities and threats. Strengths can be defined as any available resource that can be used to improve its performance. Weaknesses are flaws/shortcomings of any system that may cause to lose a competitive advantage,

efficiency or financial resources¹². Tourism being a business, it becomes important to do the SWOT analysis of the sector.

A number of researches have been conducted using swot analysis in tourism. **Daneshmehr H. et al. (2011)**¹³ have investigated the effects of ecotourism on rural development using SWOT analysis. The results showed that in their study area, “beautiful and unique landscapes of the village” component was strength beside “gardens and green areas”, “no government planning and investment” component was main weakness in the area, “more attention to planning and funding by authorities” component was the most important external opportunity and finally “lack of management knowledgeable about ecotourism issues” component was the main threat.

Mark Twain has said, “So far, as I am able to judge, nothing has been left undone by man or nature to make India the most extra-ordinary country that the sun visits on his rounds”. The importance of tourism as a creator of job opportunities can be understood from the fact that in India every one million invested in tourism creates 47.5% jobs directly and around 85-90% jobs indirectly. In comparison, agriculture creates on 44.6% jobs and manufacturing a mere 12.6% jobs. Moreover, tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner after gems and jewellery and readymade garments¹⁴.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Development of responsible tourism is a significant challenge especially in a diverse country like India. However, tourism is also one of the few available alternative pathways that can create new jobs and reduce poverty for the communities in the remote and resource scarce regions.

In the present study a SWOT analysis is done of rural tourism in India. Indian villages have great potential for rural tourism and it is in many places emerging as the largest job creator sector.

A SWOT analysis examines both internal and external factors. The internal factors being strength and weakness and the external factors being opportunities and threats. The following table discusses the internal factors i.e. the strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism.

Table 1.1 Internal Factors: Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
Economic Indices	
Generates employment, thus prevents migration and increases income of rural folks	Lack of skilled and trained forces in villages
Homestays have become beneficial to rural women who do not have earning source	Also, there are very few activities available for enjoyment and people do not want to travel long distances for few activities
Create local market for natives and provide natural and local products to tourists (e .g. Handicrafts, fresh fruits, jam, jelly, other local products etc.).	The rural areas are located far away from main center thus people find it difficult to reach there, often regular tourists do not prefer to travel to far flung areas
Agricultural prosperity: increases local production.	Low quality products- The products in these place are often single use or are decorative items which are difficult to attract tourists
Socio-Cultural Indices	

Mutual sharing of cultures results in greater understanding among people	People often tend to forget their local custom and tradition by adopting their ideas
Increased income elevates the economic status also resulting in increasing social status	
Village folks are friendly and cooperative, therefore a sense of oneness arises	
Environmental Indices	
When natural resources generate income they are cared for and conserved (e.g. Forests, waterfalls etc.)	Causes pollution: Increased tourists activities are increasing waste material in rural area, thus harming natural environment
Pure and serene environment liked by those who want peace, away from hustle bustle of city	
These rural places are resource rich spots like rich in architectural heritage, landscapes, folk culture, rural craft etc.	
Institutional Indices	
	No proper channel adopted by government or tourism department to divert tourists to these areas
	No infrastructural facilities: Absence of proper roads is the biggest hurdle to reach these places
	Lack of public investment, government policies planning and management

The table 1.1 above shows internal factors of rural tourism. It shows that there are 10 strengths against 9 weaknesses. From the table given above

The following table will show external factors of rural tourism i.e. opportunities and threats.

Table 1.2 External Factors: Opportunities and Threats

Opportunities	Threats
Economic Indices	
There is scope to develop more adventure activities, spiritual tourism, and medical tourism	Effect on agriculture: Local people are leaving agriculture and adopting tourism
There are a number of employment opportunities that are still waiting to be harnessed	
Private individuals should be motivated to invest in these areas	
The hussle- bussle of city life keeps people motivated for short breaks so these village can be the centres of peace	
The villages need a push towards product packaging and marketing for the locally produced goods	
Socio-cultural Indices	
Increased interaction with tourists will develop new ideas	The local culture and tradition will soon vanish, because people are adopting foreign culture
	Increase in crime
Environmental Indices	
Forests are store houses of many medicines, thus they need to be exploited	Increased pollution in future will destroy the scenic beauty
There are many sites, landscapes that are still undiscovered and many heritage sites have lost importance due to ignorance of local government. These new areas can be regenerated.	Infrastructure development requires concretization, which will lead to soil erosion, infertile soil etc.
	Destruction and overutilization of natural resources like forests, water resources
Institutional Indices	
A little boost and guidance from the government can develop these areas	
Proper channel to divert tourists to these areas will help to increase the number of tourists	
These areas hold a lot of potential and energetic people, who only require training programs to develop their skills	

The table 1.2 above shows external factors of SWOT, i.e. opportunities and threats of rural tourism. There are 11 opportunities as against 6 threats.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Table 1.1 of internal factors of SWOT matrix shows that there are 10 strengths against 9 weaknesses, which is a minor difference. Table 1.2 of external factors shows that there are 11 opportunities as against 6 threats which almost makes the half of the difference. These opportunities if converted to strengths can prove to be a major difference for the rural masses in India.
- The growth of economy along with protecting environment is equally important. Thus, a scientific environmental analysis system is necessary to establish a balance between environment and economy. Because these villages have the responsibility of generating income along with protecting the environment.
- Rural areas have pristine natural beauty and protecting it in its original form is foremost responsibility. Rural infrastructure should be developed in such a way so as to minimize the harm. A cost-benefit analysis system should be introduced which should assess the least cost of environment at maximum benefit.
- The rural people should have motivation to develop rural tourism and for those incentives can be provided to them but at the same time with a condition to preserve the environment.
- The advertisement of local activities like folk festivals, adventure activities, site seeing, local cuisines etc. will divert tourists to these areas.
- The tourists should be motivated towards green consumption. It will protect the environment along with generating income for the rural masses.
- Providing education, information and conducting seminars, conferences, workshops at rural level will help villages be aware with the changing needs of tourists.
- The tourists need diversified activities at one single place, thus providing them all kinds of activities and facilities at one place will attract tourists.

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