



Rural Tourism: An Option For Development Of Rural Economy In Kashmir

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Abstract:

Rural tourism is currently the focus of attention throughout the world and is being recognized as an important instrument for growth of rural economy. There is much scope and need in diversifying the tourism within the Kashmir valley in order to develop the rural economy and diverging the benefits of tourism also to rural people. Rural tourism is one option in initiating the process. The present paper a descriptive study based on secondary sources and the insights gained through the field visits of various rural areas in the valley. The present paper sheds light on various dimensions of rural tourism in Kashmir. It deals with the various options available in rural Kashmir, if properly planed, utilized, rural tourism can became one of the success stories in this direction.

Key words: *Tourism, Rural Tourism, Farm Tourism.*

1.Introduction

The practice of holiday making away from one's normal place of residence is known as tourism. Tourism is termed as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. In travelling to a tourist spot, the tourist can have various reasons behind his/her tour to any place. On the other side, in a particular geographical area, different places, things, historical monuments, religious sites can be the attraction points for the tourists. So we have pilgrimage tourism, eco tourism, agri- tourism etc. differing from each other on the basis of purpose of the visit and also place of the visit. New places can be added to the list of tourist attraction sites and cannot be limited to a few. The valley of Kashmir has been traveler's destination from times immemorial. Kashmir is known all over the world by its natural beauty. The Westerners call it the Switzerland of Asia. Its name is one among the most famous tourist places of the world. It has become the center of attraction of the tourists all over the world and tourists visit the valley throughout the year. Tourism in Kashmir plays a vital role in the state economy and simultaneously is the source of job to a large number of people of the valley. There are a number of locations which are untapped and can be developed as major tourist destinations having all the natural as well as the cultural resources for attracting tourists. There is much scope and need in diversifying the tourist attraction sites within the Kashmir valley. Rural tourism is one of the options that can be operated in the valley as an instrument for developing rural economy, diversifying it, creating employment options for the rural people.

2.An Overview Of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is currently the focus of attention throughout the world and is being recognized as an important instrument of growth for rural economy. It is defined as 'any form of tourism that showcases rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between tourists and locals for a more enriching tourism experience. Rural tourism encompasses a broad range of activities yet it is often seen to be synonymous with the "farm tourism". Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multifaceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and ecotourism. Strategies to use tourism as an instrument of growth in rural areas emerge in different contexts. They are, at heart, about enabling rural producer to reduce reliance on agriculture, and engage in new economic

opportunities. In India, the scheme of rural tourism was started 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 is 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 is also aimed towards generating revenue for local communities through tourist visits, which may stop exodus from rural to urban areas.

3. Discussion on Rural Tourism in Kashmir:

Jammu and Kashmir is a place where the roving eyes of travelers come upon one endearing natural vista after another. A visit to this Eden revitalizes everyone – body, mind and soul. Kashmir is one of the most beautiful tourist destinations of the world. It used to attract enormous number of domestic and international tourists. Characterized with young folded mountains, deep gorges, waterfalls, cascades, scenic beauty and alpine pastures. Its lush green forests, rich wild life, snow clad peaks, mountainous gorges, giant glaciers, rich fishing grounds, lofty skiing grounds, carpet green turfs, perennial rivers, gushing fountains, floating gardens in Dal Lake, hissing springs, cool breeze, shimmering lakes, invigorating climate, apple-almond orchards, saffron fields and benevolent and kind hearted folk are well known all over the world. Tourism, however, is dominating economic activity in the state. Moreover, about, 20 percent of the workforce of the state is directly or indirectly dependent on tourism. In changing economic scenario of the world, tourism has emerged as one of the world's largest service industries with sizable economic benefits. So in a region like Kashmir, blessed with enormous sites and locations of tourist attraction, there is much scope for accelerating the process of tourism. New areas need to be identified and developed in order to attract the more tourists. In a region inhabited by more than 70 percent rural people mostly dependent on agriculture. The rural areas need to be selected as the sites of attraction for the tourists in order to benefit the rural people also from the process of tourism. In bringing the rural areas and rural people on the scene of tourism, rural tourism is one of the important options for the state, its agencies especially those concerned with the rural development. Rural development and rural tourism can facilitate the ways of progress for each other. This in turn can develop and diversify the

rural economy. The subsequent paragraphs are being devoted to discuss the option of rural tourism in developing the rural economy of Kashmir.

4.Land As An Option For Developing Rural Tourism In Kashmir

Majority of people in Kashmir reside in villages and agriculture is their main source of livelihood and income. Economy of Kashmir is agriculture based. Widening the scope of tourism in a region like Kashmir is the need for the region, due to various reasons like huge number of unemployed youth, lack of industrial development etc. Tourism, if given considerable importance in Kashmir can become source of creating employment and income. Rural tourism in simple terms means carrying the process of tourism in rural areas. Rural Kashmir comprised of villages, where we have ample availability of land. Land is the major source of livelihood and income of the rural people in Kashmir. Land is mostly used for the agricultural purposes. And people are mostly dependent on agricultural. Their livelihood and income from agriculture is subjected to out of control forces like nature, climate and market. The same land under the same crops cultivated in villages can be brought on the scene of tourism in the form of rural tourism. It needs just the planning and developmental initiatives on the behalf of the state. Rural tourism, as an option can cover the rural areas of Kashmir and make these the sites of attraction for the tourists coming to the valley. Rural tourism in Kashmir on one side can benefit the rural people socio-economically. It can also bring diversification in the agricultural activities, which in turn will develop the rural economy of the valley. On the other side, it will decrease the burden on the urban centers of the valley in terms of reducing traffic jam, pollution etc. and also tourists can become familiar with the rural society of Kashmir, its culture, craft works, art etc.

Land in rural Kashmir is used for cultivation of different crops, different income generating activities. The utilization of land for cultivation of different crops and other income generating activities itself is the source of attraction for the tourists. The land under different agriculture activities throughout the agriculture cycle provides beautiful and charming scenes to us at different times in a year. To mention, the green paddy fields after plantation, the yellowish paddy fields at the time of its harvest, the blooming yellow flowers of mustard fields in the months of March, April, the variety of large vegetable fields, the large fields under the orchids especially at the time of flowering, the flowing water in the *Doodhgaga and Sukhnag*, meadows etc are few examples that can attract the attention of tourists towards the rural areas and can initiate the process developing

rural tourism in Kashmir. Visiting to any rural area by the tourists is accompanied by various other income generating activities like trained tourist guides, trained cooks, hotels, stalls etc.

There are various beautiful places in valley within the rural areas surrounded by villages and laying close to these villages. Unfortunately, has not been yet identified by the government and still remained untapped for the tourism activity. To mention few Tosamaidan, Mujipatheri, Labkhal, Hackhal, are few places in the sub district Khansahib, if given consideration can give birth to other tourist spots like Yousmarg. All these places have such features that can attract the domestic and international tourists. Developing these places in rural areas of Kashmir can benefit the rural people and can encourage the development of rural tourism in the valley. In addition to these existing untapped beautiful spots, the land under the utilization of agriculture and allied activities, the same land can be brought on the scene of rural tourism by establishing agri-farms. Agri-tourism is the concept of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. In general Agri tourism is the practice of attracting visitors to an area used for primarily for agricultural purposes.ⁱ

In the hilly areas of the valley, the production of land is very low because of climatic constraints and practice of single crop cultivation. For example, the villages lying on the banks of Nallah Sukhnag in Khansahib area cultivating only single crop of rice throughout the year, because of climate. The people of these villages mostly depend on the agriculture. Due to less production, they are facing the rural poverty. To solve the problem of rural poverty needs to avail the allied sources of income generation options to these people. They have land but less productive, needs to be utilized for farm tourism activities like establishing large dairy farms, fish ponds, poultry farms, sheep farms, floriculture units, horticulture units etc. Such units should be established in such a way that can become the examples in order to attract the domestic and international tourists. In addition, these units should become spots of recreation for the local people. These types of innovations in terms of rural tourism can become the instruments of increasing rural economy. They can diversify the land use activities, create employment avenues and can reduce the rural poverty. So the land already available can be utilized for the upliftment of the farmers. Kanir is one of the villages of tehsil Chadoora, which houses a cave being referred to Sheikh ul Aalam^{RA}. People came to visit this place from different areas at few times in a year mostly in the days of urs(a religious event). Few years back,

an initiative was taken to develop a park in this place of village Kanir. The park is based on land of 10 kanals. With the construction of park at the place the place has become a point of attraction for people though out the district Budgam. Recreation is one important motivating factor of tourism. So this type of steps can became the spots of recreation for the rural people. In other case they had to spent large amounts on the recreation. This type of developing recreation spots in rural areas can also prevent migration of rural people to the urban destinations and with the passage of time these recreation spots can become attraction for tourists.

5.State Sponsored Schemes And Rural Tourism

The department of fisheries till to the end of 2012 had sponsored 872 carp culture units and almost 250 trout rearing units under the RKVY scheme in the state. These units had been fully subsidized by the concerned department. A single carp culture unit needs 3 kanals of land, while trout unit needs 30* 60 square feet of land for the construction. These small units became sites of attraction for the local people and people from other villages often pay visit to these units. If, these units would have been constructed in clusters on land of various farmers in order to make larger fish ponds. These could have been the sites of tourist attraction in rural areas. Ten units of carp culture if established at a single spot means fish pond of size 30 kanals, that could be most beautiful spot for the rural tourism.

The various departments in service of rural development are similarly implementing various schemes for the rural development. However, if these schemes can be planned in line with initiating the rural tourism in Kashmir, will be one of the important steps towards creating more jobs for rural people and developing rural economy and finally accelerating the process of rural development. The agriculture department in villages of Kashmir is engaged in implementation of various schemes and experiments at the ground level, like vermi -composite units, mushroom cultivation, and vegetable cultivation under polygreen houses. The floriculture department is facilitating the commercial floriculture in the valley through its schemes. The animal husbandry is facilitating the establishment of poultry farms, dairy farms under the various schemes. Large number of entrepreneurs had started their own units by the help of various government departments on small scale. We can find now the units of commercial floriculture, dairy farms, large poultry farms, plant nurseries, strawberry units in our villages. Most of these units had shown positive results in creating more employment and increasing income. For example, a

small unit of commercial floriculture unit at Chadoora owned by Rubeena Tabasum (woman entrepreneur) based on land of one kanal has given full time employment to two persons for the whole year. In addition to this, other persons are also part timely earning from this small unit. In addition to this, this small unit of commercial floriculture unit is being visited by the local people frequently and also by the researchers, officials of various departments. So the need is to motivate farmers and to support them financially, technically to establish these agri based farms at large scale, so that tourists can get attracted to these rural places.

6.Rural Life And Rural Tourism

People in villages of Kashmir are engaged in multiple livelihood activities and agriculture being their most important livelihood activity. The Kashmir art works are famous all over the world. People in the villages are also engaged with these art works and whole process of these art works take place within the villages. It is worth for tourists to pay a visit to these villages in order to know the process, people engaged in these art works and their socio economic conditions involved in these works. Carpet weaving, shawl weaving, embroidery works, paper machie etc are few among these art works. The urban population having roots in villages always has curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses, and rural life style. Rural tourism revolves around the villages, village people, their agricultural activities, their craft works, has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of the tourists coming from urban centers. Along with this, increasing the level of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility and environmental consciousness is also increasing the importance of rural tourism.

7.Rural Development And Rural Tourism

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 region like Kashmir where more than 70 percent of the population resides in rural areas. The trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach across the world. Along with this, the stresses of urban life styles have led to a counter urbanization syndrome. This led to growing interest in rural areas. Rural development initiatives if taken in consideration with the concept of tourism can facilitate the process of rural tourism in rural areas. The progress of rural tourism in turn can facilitate the process of

rural development of the rural areas. Taking initiative for introducing rural tourism in Kashmir primarily demands the development of the rural infrastructure; that is at the centre of rural development programmes. So the two processes of rural development and rural tourism are dependent on each other. After all there is a limit to the number of tourists we can accommodate in hotels, houseboats in Srinagar. There is a scarcity of land for dumping of the wastage generated by the human activities during the tourist seasons in the Srinagar city. Dal Lake , Jhelum are facing severe problems of pollution. Noise pollution, water pollution, air pollution and traffic jams are other problems faced by the Srinagar city. To all these problems, tourism is one among the causative factor. Centralizing tourists within a particular area of Srinagar city has various ill consequences and such a planning is neither desirable nor safe for the Srinagar people and administration and need to address. Rural tourism is best option in tackling this problem. Firstly, it can decrease the burden of tourists on the Srinagar. Secondly, various problems for administration like problem of pollution, management of waste disposal, traffic jam to some extent can be checked. Thirdly, it will diverge the benefits of tourism to rural people. Fourthly, tourists can enjoy the quite, calm and natural environment of countryside, free from noise. At last we will give an overview of the resources available in Kashmir, that can become the sources for the rural tourism and also the various benefits of the rural tourism to the community and the tourists.

Resources available for developing the rural tourism in Kashmir:

8.Natural Resources

- Land utilized for cultivation under various crops and various income generating activities.
- Water and water bodies.
- Vegetation
- Forests and wild life
- Flora and Fauna
- Climate
- Landscape

9.Cultural Resources

- Historical monuments

- Religious places

10. Benefits To Communities From Rural Tourism

- Diversification of agrarian economy, which in turn will strength the rural economy by creation of more jobs.
- Upgrading the rural infrastructure for the rural people and for visitors.
- Preservation and transmission local traditions, art and craft.
- Generating additional income by using the land for rural tourism.
- Facilitating inter-generational, inter- cultural communication and understanding.
- Improving socio economic conditions of the farmers
- Accelerating rural reconstruction and rural development.
- Protection and development of rural landscapes and natural environments for tourists and local people.
- Increasing the ways of recreation for local people.

11. Benefits To Tourists From Rural Tourism

- Accommodation in quiet and calm environment in the lapse of the nature.
- Can visit diversified tourist spots in a single trip and can save their money and time and also make them aware about the different aspects of area of destination.
- Relationship building of tourists and local people.
- Research benefits.

12. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say rural tourism can be an effective option for developing the rural economy of the region. It can create many employment options for the rural people and can diversify the agricultural activities in the region. Rural tourism showcases the diversity and uniqueness of our rural life, rural art and craft works, agriculture, thereby increasing the visibility and the appeal of locally grown products. In order to develop the rural areas, eradicate rural poverty, it is imperative to use the regions, natural resources for the upliftment of the local people. The government should promote rural tourism to ensure sustainable rural development and to develop the rural economy. Therefore, to promote rural tourism as primary product and to spread tourisms socio-economic

benefits to rural and to new geographic regions, key regions would be identified for the development of rural tourism.

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