

EMERGING TOURISM SECTOR IN MAJULI: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

Tourism sector holds a considerable potential in uplifting Indian economy. Presently it contributes around 4.7% to the GDP of the country. In this regard, places like Majuli with an extraordinary cultural heritage and engaging scenic beauty presents significant opportunities to earn income. This sector can create immense employment opportunities for the young generation, while aiding the overall growth of the economy. This newly emerging sector can open new vistas in the area by which it can uplift the socio-economic condition of the people. Tourism is one of the major components of service sector. Majuli Island is a unique creation of nature and one of the biggest river islands which is the nerve-centre of Vaisnavite culture. This paper tries to make an in-depth study to find out the challenges and prospects of tourism industry in the island.

Keywords: *Tourism, potential, uplifting, extraordinary, heritage, immense, components etc.*

I. Introduction

Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. It falls under the purview of service sector. Presently, expansion of service sector, particularly in Indian context, is remarkable. Contribution of service sector to GDP is nearly 65%. If we include construction segment in it which is the highest compared to other sectors of tourism is one of the dominant sectors the economy. Among the service sector which is considered as vibrant and potential one. According to Indian tourism statistics, only tourism sector contributes 12.7% to our GDP. This sector provides more jobs and capable of creating employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled labour. The village tourism or rural tourism is another important component of tourism industry which is considered as potential to promote pro-poor growth compared to any other sectors. Rural tourism industry covers numbers of activities like transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking, establishment of retail shops, entertainments, hospitality, services etc. From this point of view, rural tourism could be one of the strategies for rural development. Hence, development of the rural tourism for generating employment and enhancing villagers' income deserves serious attention in case of our study area- Majuli.

II. Objectives of the study

- To know the various prospects relating to employment opportunities.
- To find out the prospect of home-stay facilities in the study area.

- To find out income generating sources of tourism in the rural setting.
- To find out and know the constraints associated with this sector.

III. Methodology:

Historical and exploratory methods have been used to prepare this paper. Most of the data have been collected through book, journals, monuments and reports published by concerned authorities in this regard. Secondary data collected through observation and from secondary sources which have been intensively studied.

IV. Discussion:

Majuli is the largest river island of the mighty river Brahmaputra. It is one of the best Vaishnavite cultural centres of Assam. It has already been recognized as one of the best tourist spot of India. The island is a strong contender of world heritage site recognition by the UNESCO. Presently it has attracted the attention of domestic as well as foreign tourists all over the world. Every year large number of domestic and foreign tourists visit the place. The island is a unique creation of nature. Presently, only a few sattras where Vaishnavite culture is extensively practiced by disciples are mainly highlighted but there are other vast areas which are not yet harnessed. Majuli is a rural landscape. The village life of Majuli depicts the rural life of Assam. There is a great potential of rural tourism development in Majuli. The slow pace of life in villages, pollution-free atmosphere, varied culture and traditions, languages, festivals, rituals, various agricultural practices, lush green fields with natural flora and fauna, rivulets and rivers, rich folklores each one may offer an exciting experience to many tourists. Of late, perception of tourism has changed to a great extent. Tourists are exhausted by urban monotony, fatigue, job-stress, pollution, traffic jams which compel them to search for an excellent alternative with a wide range of mental happiness and peace to the tourists as well as service providers in the rural areas.

Another important component of rural tourism is community based eco-tourism. Majuli is a land of diverse culture which has full of hidden potentials for tourism and it would definitely bring inclusive growth in rural communities. Each community and village would be able to provide unique experiences to the tourists with richness of culture and tradition which are special, distinct from modern urban life. In Majuli, we find different ethnic communities such as Mising community, Deuri community, Sonowal Kachari community, Ahom community, Chutia community, Koch community, Nath-Jogi community and Motak community etc. which have special and unique culture. Due to lack of proper initiatives this area is not yet properly explored. There is also general apprehension that development of tourism needs luxury hotels and modern infrastructures. But it depends on how we can present the authentic life experience and colourful traditions of community villages in the rural settings. If we systematically project these

wholesome experiences in a positive way, it would definitely attract the socially and environmentally conscious tourists.

Another area of encouraging rural tourism in Majuli which is endowed with beels, wet lands, rivers with pristine natural beauty, camping spots, resounding music flowing water, mesmerizing sites of thousands of migratory birds, scenic beauty of the sun setting in the mighty river Brahmaputra. Introduction of Ro-Ro ferry service has opened up a new opportunity to have the taste of exciting and comfortable journey to Majuli. Besides, the government of Assam has declared Majuli as a clean and carbon-free district which has special significance to rural eco-tourism.

Rural tourism -particularly introduction of 'Home-Stay' system helps in capacity building by opening new vistas of employment opportunities for rural youths. To get the benefit of employment opportunities, the rural youths have to be provided training in different aspects for enhancing their professional efficiency. Recently, Government of India has taken many steps in this regard. One of the most prominent programmes under Skill development programme where rural youths can get training at different qualification level in order to get jobs of rural tourism. The Ministry of Tourism and Travel industry has fixed the target of providing training to fifty lakh personnel by the year 2022. Moreover, some private agencies also provide training in the field of Tourism and Travel Management. Since rural people will be hosting their villages and tourists spots, they must be made aware of the pros and cons involve well in advance. Host is to be educated about the new practices. Because, people are the core of delivery mechanisms and the sense of belongingness is generally natural to the host. Simultaneously, sense of pride in delivering services to the guests needs to be injected. To achieve desired result- a systematic assessment and review report needs to be prepared by inserting some vital questions such as "what are the expectations of community? How they behave?" etc. After careful analysis of collected data, it gives accurate information to proceed in this regard with corrective measures. On the other hand, the role played by guests or tourist is equally relevant in this context. As the hosts have high expectations- the tourist also has the same. But the objectives of visitors to rural destinations are quite different from one type of tourist to other type of tourist. So, on the process of designing promotion strategy, a detail understanding of the guest is a must to be analyzed and foreign tourist are different in nature. A domestic tourist, for example, may visit sites to get relax from stress, connect to forgotten roots whereas a foreign tourist may visit with the purpose of education to understand rural life style and to learn about cultural heritage. A foreign tourist may want to have experimental learning through participation such as festivals, agricultural practices, interaction with artisans etc. Already a few domestic and foreign tourists have been participating in the Raas festival of the island. The interaction between the guest and the host in the given context result in rural tourism of mutual benefits. We all know that the island is endowed with a

rich folk and classical culture. For timely and systematic presentation of the rural culture in front of the national and international tourists, it needs proper training, guidelines at rural platforms. In Majuli, we find number of cultural centers or community halls which are used once in a year during the time of Raas festival which can be used as cultural tourist spots in rural areas. The rural artists can earn additional income by engaging themselves in cultural activities.

Marketing of rural richness: Majuli has an ocean of experiences to offer. Potential visual products and experiences of rural richness need to be promoted in a systematic manner. We are all aware that tourism industry largely relies on marketing experiences and tourists pay for the experiences. Our rich marketing products such as masks and their manufacture at the Samagurisatra, pottery and their making at Salmora area, Mising and other traditional clothes, cane and bamboo products in Auniati and Kamalabarisatra, mat making in different villages, khadi and handloom products, pure Majuli brand mustard oil can be presented action and man in a systematic manner. These products need planning and promotion. By selling these products to the national and international tourists we can occupy global market in future.

V. Conclusion

After all, community based eco tourism development totally depends on community ownership and will open a new dimension in tourism sector of Majuli. Sensitize the communities with funding support from the government and NGOs are essential in this regard.

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