

RURAL TOURISM PROSPECTS IN BIHAR: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

DR. TEKNATH SINGH

M. Com, Ph.D

ABSTRACT

The history of Bihar indicates a rich heritage inherited from various dynasties & great personalities. It has immense potential for tourism activities like religious tourism, heritage tourism, natural tourism. Apart from that, the wildlife, birds & sanctuaries hold vast potential for ecotourism. But, the tourism potential of the state for generating much needed income & employment remains under utilized. This paper is a modest attempt to study the rural tourism in Bihar.

KEY -WORDS: Heritage Tourism, Natural Tourism, Religious Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Bihar is famous for religious tourism & cultural heritage sites. Historical importance of Bihar has been established again with the discovery of 'biggest ever Buddhist stupa' at Kesariya by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI). The most important religious & heritage sites are Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Vaishali, Valmikinagar, Maner Sharif, Motihari etc.

Places of tourist attraction in the state can be broadly classified as;

- Places of Religious Importance and Archeological/Historical Sites,
- Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks,
- Adventure tourism,
- Arts and Craft, Fairs & Festivals & Dances,

Based on the above classification different circuits have been identified for tourist destination.

- Buddhist Circuit
- Tirthankar Circuit
- Ramayan Circuit
- Islamic/Safi Circuit
- Gandhi Circuit
- Nature & Wildlife Circuit

There is no systematic account of wildlife available for Bihar by itself, but from different references, it is confirmed that the State was rich in its wildlife as the neighboring States of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. But the changes relating to destruction of Habitat and poaching are the most serious factors leading to the depletion of wildlife.

The wild life sanctuaries are;

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| • Valmiki Sanctuary (544.4 sq. km) | West Champaran |
| • Bhimbaridh Sanctuary (681.99 sq. km) | Munger district |
| • Rajgir Sanctuary (35.84 sq. km) | Rajgir district |
| • Kaimur Sanctuary (1342 sq. km) | Sasaram district |
| • Gautam Buddha Sanctuary (259 sq. km) | Falls in Ganga &
Hazaribagh & Jharkhand State. |
| • Udayapur Sanctuary (8.87 sq. km) | West Champaran |
| • Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (50 km, approx) | Bhagalpur district |
| • Kabar iheel Bird Sanctuary (63.11 sq. km) | Begusari |
| • Gogabil Bird Sanctuary (217.99 acres) | Katihar district |
| • Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park, Patna (153 acres) | Patna |
| • Nakti Dam Bird Sanctuary (3.32 sq. km) | Jamui District |
| • Nagi Dam Bird Sanctuary (1.91 sq. km) | Jamui District |
| • Valmiki National Park (335.6 sq. km) | West Champaran |

Tourism Department of government of Bihar has developed the Cemetery Ghat along the Matsgandha Pond as tourism complex. A large number of tourists come for boating in the pond. It is known as Matsgandha Tourism complex (Saharsa).

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. India's National Tourism Policy 2002 identified Rural Tourism as one of its focus areas. The Endogenous Tourism Project- Rural Tourism Scheme (ETP-RTS) is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated in 2003.

UNDP contributes Rs 20 lakh per site towards 'software' i.e. awareness creation between locals and outside agencies. The MoT contributes Rs 50 lakh per site as Central Financial Assistance (CFA) towards 'hardware' i.e. development of infrastructure, which includes improvement of roads, hygiene, surroundings of the village etc. Tie ups are done with hotel management institutes to train villagers in cuisine, cleanliness and sanitation. Institutions like IRMA (Institute of Rural Management, Anand) and heritage architects are roped in as consultants. Efforts are made to retain vernacular architecture, perhaps with a little landscaping that's in tune with the surroundings.

As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like it is experience oriented, the locations are thinly populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, engages local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. The implementation is done through a Paryatan Samiti headed by the District Collector of the concerned rural tourism site. The MoT has sanctioned Rural Tourism projects at 185 sites to various States/Union Territory Administrations upto 31st March 2012. As per the present

data available from the website of MoT, 52 rural sites have been commissioned across India. Each of these sites has a speciality.

In the year 2014, MoT introduced Swadesh Darshan, a Central Government scheme for Integrated Development of Theme-Based Tourist Circuits. A Tourist Circuit is a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located such that none of them are in the same town, village or city. Tourist circuit with a consistent theme such as religion, culture, ethnicity and niche is known as Theme Based Tourist Circuit. Rural Circuit is one of the thirteen thematic circuits have been identified for development.

Bihar has good potential for promoting rural tourism. Rural Tourism is unique in the sense that it banks upon the ownership and involvement of the community. Before construction at the rural tourism site, community needs to be prepared and a consensus on what has to be done in the village has to be drawn out. Government alone is not ideally equipped for this task; therefore NGOs (non-government organisations) were roped for the execution. NGO which understands the dynamics of that village becomes very important. Capacity building programme for the community is implemented with the help of NGOs operating in rural areas at the grass root level. The MoT cannot do things on its own, the focal point of implementation is the Collector assisted by Village Tourism Committee (Paryatan Samiti). Effective communication between the District authorities and the NGO involved is required. In projects of this nature, software (capacity building takes 18 months to 24 months) component execution is time taking. Firstly software i.e. community discusses among themselves and arrives at what they want to do with the tourism component and from that hardware component must emerge. Hardware component should not be the sole function of what the state tourism department decides.

Two step approach for these projects includes community mobilization & building capacities in the communities. The challenge is to create tourism products because they cannot be imposed from outside, they have to be generated from within the village. One of the project's aims is poverty reduction. It is not about enabling the already well off in the village to become richer, but it is about providing livelihoods to those who are not doing well - who can participate in tourism, whether in hospitality or in craft or in any other allied services that a tourist requires. The underlying idea of the projects was that a part of the revenue generated from tourism should be utilized for the general welfare of the community as a whole, even to those who are not participating in the tourism businesses in the village, as the moment we say community based tourism, the mere presence of villagers in the village contributes to tourism.

TOURISM CIRCUITS IN BIHAR

Bihar as of today is studded with monuments of its past glory. This is the land on which Bhagwan Buddha and Mahavira started their religious orders. A magnificent destination attracting throngs of tourist every year with tremendous potential of growth in number and quality.

Bihar is the land of origin of many religions and the land, which was the seat of great empire.

a. Buddhist Circuit

Bodhgaya — Rajgir — Nalanda — Patna — Vaishali — Lauriya Nandangarh — Lauriya Areraj — Kesariya — Vikramsila

b. Tirthankar Circuit

Vaishali — Patna — Rajgir — Pawapuri — Nathnagar — Mandar Hill — Bisram — Masadh — Champanagar — Nalanda

c. Ramayan Circuit

Valmikinagar — Pretshila Hill — Ahilya Asthan — Sitamarhi — Kako — Sitakund — Tar — Singheshwar Chankigarh — Buxar

d. Islamic/Sufi Circuit

Maner Sharif — Fulwari Sharif — Khankah Emadia — Dargah Sharif — Bihar sharif — Hazrat Jandaha — Hajipur — Serukahi — Kanti — Saran Khas — Hasanpura — Lakri Dargah Goraul Sharif — Masurhi — Tomb of Pir Shah — Nufa — Pir Pahar — Siris — Tomb of Chandan Shahid — Tomb of Hasan Khan Sur

e. Nature & Wildlife Circuit

Rajgir Sanctuary — Bhimbandh Sanctuary — Vikramsila Sanctuary — Udaipur Sanctuary — Kaimur Sanctuary — Gautam Buddha Sanctuary — Nakti Dam Sanctuary — Gogabill Sanctuary — Valmiki National Park & Sanctuary — Kanwar Jheel Sanctuary Refer—M-24)

f. Gandhi Circuit

Motihari — Betia — Bhitharwa — Brindaban — Sadaquat Ashram

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

In the true spirit of its multireligious heritage, Bihar celebrates its many religious festivals and fairs of great local appeal. Unique in Bihar is the Chhath Puja Festival, or worship of the Sun God. Most famous one is at the Sun Temple in Baragaon near Nalanda, where new paddy, sweets and fruits are offered in worship. Every year, Department of Tourism, Bihar organises Rajgir Dance Festival, a colourful festival of classical and folk dances held at the city Rajgir. The traditional Indian festivals of Ramnavmi, Dussehra, Diwali and Holi are also celebrated with great extravaganza in Bihar.

Another unique ritual confined to Bihar is the Pind-daan performed by the Gayawals in Gaya. It is considered to be an obligation of all devout Hindus to visit this place after the death of their parents, a mandatory rite believed to bring salvation to the departed souls. Though the pind-daan can be performed almost any time of the year, people prefer to do it during Pitrapaksha, which is the period just before Navratri and generally falls in September.

In the summer month of June, the people of Mithila In the village of Saurath organize a unique marriage mart in a mango orchard. During this fair, parents whose children are of marriageable age come here and the Mithila Brahmins settle a record number of marriages during this time.

Dances**Chhau Dance**

Speciality: Masks

Performed by: Men only

Themes: Based on Nature & Mythology

THE MARTIAL DANCE

Depicting immense vitality and virility, Chhau is the most vibrant and popular dance form of Bihar. The word 'Chhau' comes from the Sanskrit root 'Chhaya' meaning shade. As masks form an important feature of this

dance it is called 'Chhau', which means mask. The technique of the dance, in fact, draws on steps and gait, which have stemmed from the 'Pharikhanda System', which is a system of exercise.

Full of spontaneity and vitality, Chhau dance is performed by only the men of the region. Though mask is the most important ingredient of this art, the performers also carry swords and shields with them, during the dance. The dance is performed on a well-lit dais, which is decorated and brilliantly lit with a large number of torches, lanterns and flickering oil lamps.

The Body Language

It is basically a martial dance where the mask holds the dominant Rasa while the body creates, projects, and develops the moods. Chhau dance is a dance full of vitality and robustness, unlike any of the Indian dances. The body language is extremely poetic and powerful. The legs form an effective means of communicating the expression.

It can be performed solo, in a group or in a dance-drama fashion. The themes are taken from nature, mythology. The footwork involves a wide range of extensions and sweeps while the torso makes sudden emphatic turns and thrusts.

Theme

The themes are based on mythology, everyday life, aspects of nature or just a mood or emotion. Purulia Chhau, however, has a single focus - good triumphs over evil. They also depict nature and the animal world. 'Sagara Nritya' (ocean dance), 'Sarpa Nritya' (serpent dance), 'Mayura Nritya' (peacock dance), etc., are examples of the different forms of dances.

Accompaniment

The music is based on Hindustani ragas and the accompaniment is with a Nagara, a huge kettledrum, Dhol, a cylindrical drum, and a Shehnai or a reed pipe. The strenuous nature of the dance restricts performances to brief periods, but in Purulia Chhau a single item could be for forty minutes and a performance night-long.

Jat-Jatin Dance

This dance of the Mithila region is performed by the Harijans where one person performs the role of Jat (the husband) and Jatin (the wife) wearing masks and goes through the story of their life. Bidesia, a form of dance drama is extremely popular in the Bhojpuri-speaking region of Bihar.

Travel Circuits (Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation - BSTDC)

Pilgrim Circuits

National Circuit

- i. Patna — Ranchi — Bhubaneswar — Konark — Puri — Visakhapatnam — Tirupati — Chennai — Rameshwaram — Kanyakumari — Thiruvananthapuram — Cochiri — Ooty — Mysore — Bangalore — Hyderabad — Nagpur — Jabalpur — Maihar — Banaras — Patna (28 days)
- ii. Patna — Banaras — Maihar — Jabalpur — Ahmedabad — Somnath — Dwarka — Udaipur — Jaipur — Agra — Mathura — Lucknow — Ayodhya — Banaras — Patna (24 days)
- iii. Patna — Ayodhya — Lucknow — Bareilly — Rishikesh — Haridwar — Badrinath — Kedarnath — Dehradun — Mussoorie — Kanpur — Vindhyachal — Patna (18 days)
- iv. Patna — Jamshedpur — Bhubaneswar — Konark — Puri — Chilka Lake — Patna (10 days)
- v. Patna — Nalanda — Rajgir — Bodhgaya — Sarnath — Lumbini — Kushinagar — Vaishali — Patna (13 days)
- vi. Patna — Pokhara — Kathmandu — Patna (7 days)
- vii. Patna — Sitamarhi — Janakpur — Kathmandu — Patna (7 days)

Jain Pilgrimage Circuit

Patna — Vaishali — Rajgir — Pawapurl — Nathnagar — Deoghar — Giridih — Patna (8 days)

Buddhist Pilgrimage Circuit

Patna — Vaishali — Rajgir — Nalanda — Bodhgaya — Patna (3 days)

Nature Circuit

Patna — Urwan — Topchanchi — Maithan — Panchet — Jamshedpur — Ranchi — Betla — Patna (7 days)

Wildlife Circuit

Patna — Hazaribagh — Dalmia — Jamshedpur — Betla — Patna (6 days)

Package Tours (BSTDC)

Regular Package Tour (1 day)

- i. Patna — Nalanda — Rajgir — Pawapuri — Patna
- ii. Patna — Gaya — Bodhgaya — Patna
- iii. Patna — Vaishali — Patna
- iv. Patna — Maner — Patna
- v. Patna — Kakolat — Patna

CONCLUSION

After the encouraging results of initial efforts made by the pioneering NGOs and entrepreneurs, Government of India of late has realized what rural tourism can offer to the world. It has decided to promote the rural tourism. The policy makers now accept that rural tourism is a major vehicles for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihood.⁷ The Tourism Ministry in partnership with the UNDP(United Nation Development Programme), launched a Rural Tourism Scheme in 2002 to showcase the cultural heritage of rural India and to leverage this opportunity to generate livelihood opportunities for rural communities.

Rural Bihar has much to offer to this world. Rich in traditions of arts, craft and culture, rural Bihar can emerge as important tourist spots. Those in the developed world who have a craze for knowledge about traditional ways of life, art and crafts will be attracted to visit rural Bihar if the concept of rural tourism is marketed well. The core areas of the interests of tourists need to be identified in areas such as such as art and craft, handloom and textile among others. This is quite intricate and an elaborate procedure. Interaction between tourists and local population can be a mutually enriching experience. Intangible heritage has to be promoted and also safeguarded.⁹ Experience in rural tourism have suggested that even in the absence of any promotional activity, thousand of domestic and foreign tourists visit rural areas in Bihar every year. This itself is the proof of the viability of the concept of rural tourism.

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