

RURAL TOURISM FOR SUSTAINING RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN DARJEELING HILLS**Dr. Sherap Bhutia**

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Abstract

The rural areas of Darjeeling with 70% share of the total population are far flung and communication infrastructure almost non-existent. Access to the market is extremely difficult leading to an accentuated exploitative structure with remuneration for agricultural produce extremely low for the farmers. One of the effective ways of breaking from this bondage is in promoting, facilitating and strengthening people's organizations. These strengthening organizations will lead to development, of many one such activity being rural tourism or Community based tourism. The formal introduction of tourism was only in 1938 when the first hotel, The Darjeeling Family Hotel, was constructed. Till 1975, tourism was managed privately with little encouragement or interference by the government. The Tourism Department of the Government of West Bengal came into being in 1958, and the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation in November 1975, with the task of supplying the visitors with basic information about places of tourist interest. The area chosen for the present study has been delineated as cultural region where the elements in the landscape are closely interrelated. Darjeeling, known as the queen of the Himalayas is situated in the Northern Part of the Indian state of West Bengal. The ultimate aim of this study is to examine the trends and development of tourism in Darjeeling Hills and their impact on rural development for sustainable livelihood of the rural poor. Tourism is an important economic activity in this hilly area generating incomes and employment for the local population. The tourists every year spend to the tune of Rs. 70 crores. Darjeeling receives around 3.5 lakhs domestic tourists annually, besides 50,000 foreigners. Everybody right from a chaiwala upto the hotel owner benefits from the tourism. Apart from an increase in the income and the demand for local products, tourism also results in a multiplier effect. This refers to the way in which tourist expenditures filter through the economy and generate other economic activities. It reveals further that due to development of village tourism in Darjeeling Hills, the economy of the rural people has been improved drastically who are directly and indirectly associated to tourism.

In the rural areas of Darjeeling Hills, due to lack of proper hotel and other mode of accommodation for tourist, the concept of homestay has been flourished empowering the rural livelihood. Till date most of the local people of Darjeeling has seen tourism as a boon but it remains unquestioned by the masses whether it is really a boon. Because, ever since Darjeeling has been made the thrust area of tourism, we have seen adverse affects on its environment. The resource of Darjeeling is put under much strain during the tourist season. The people experience shortages ranging from fuel to water, Darjeeling being famous for its water crisis. And even if mass tourism does reach to the rural areas, the effects tourism will have on the value systems, culture and as mentioned above the health and environment remains to be assessed and analysed to come up with a suitable solution.

Keywords: *Tourist, Tourism, Development, Rural Tourism*

Introduction:

Darjeeling is one of the most magnificent hill resorts in the world. Perched at a height of 2,134 metres with a backdrop of the mighty Himalayan peaks, Darjeeling has attracted generations of visitors to sample the joys of cool, healthy gracious and adventurous living. This heavenly retreat is bathed in hues of every shade. The flaming red rhododendrons, the sparking white magnolias, orchids, the miles of undulating hillsides covered with emerald green tea bushes, the exotic forests of silver fir – all under the blanket of a brilliant azure sky dappled with specks of clouds, compellingly confounds Darjeeling as the “Queen of Hill Stations”.

The rural areas of Darjeeling with 70% share of the total population are far flung and communication infrastructure almost non-existent. Access to the market is extremely difficult leading to an accentuated exploitative structure with remuneration for agricultural produce extremely low for the farmers. One of the effective ways of improving the economic condition of rural areas is in promoting, facilitating and strengthening people’s organizations. These strengthening organizations will lead to development, of many one such activity being rural tourism or Community based tourism.

The Darjeeling Hills consist of eight Community Development Blocks which include 311 inhabited villages and 31 uninhabited villages as per 2011 census. The total population of the study area during 2011 is 8,75,703 persons, of which 5,83,639 persons are rural and 2,92,064 persons are urban. Darjeeling is located in the Lesser Himalayan range and provides beautiful views of the mighty Himalayas, especially Kanchenjunga the world’s third highest mountain peak. The tourism industry in Darjeeling is a large & diverse field & it provides challenging & exciting career opportunities for people of this hilly region of the country. After realizing the economic significance, a sizeable number of trained personnel’s were recruited in various segments of the industry, including food, lodging, recreation & convention and adventure

related activities. The tourism industry has achieved new dimensions with visitors coming from near & far, to enrich & experience the flavor of Darjeeling tea & natural beauty. Tourism is not only an economic activity of importance to Darjeeling's development, but also an important medium of cultural exchange among various nations of the world and the only industry, which generates maximum number of indirect employment also.

Methods & Materials:

The study has been based on empirical observation available from different reports, various journals, and e-journal. Collection of available literature, detection of situation in the place of importance was gathered through personal observations and, collection of related information's. Observations were made based on news reports, interaction with some of the local people associated with tourism and tourist, discussions with some of the Officials, NGOs, travel agencies etc. who are actively working on tourism. The nature of the present research work is explorative and the whole work has been done by descriptive as well as analytical methods.

Results and Discussion:

Tourism is an important fast growing smokeless industry of Darjeeling Hills. Due to pressure on urban resources in Darjeeling Hills, the concept of rural development through rural tourism is encouraging. It plays a vital role in the economic development of the entire region. It brings about changes in the life style and attitudes of the local inhabitants. This is only possible if tourism is taken proper care of and is well organized and developed. Tourism destinations require new guides, guards, researchers or managers to meet increased tourists' demands. Local people may be employed as taxi drivers, tour guides, lodge owners or handicraft makers, or they may participate in other tourism enterprises. Moreover many other employment sources are enhanced as tourism grows.

Tourism is an important economic activity generating incomes and employment for the local population. Darjeeling receives around 3.5 lakhs domestic tourists and 50,000 foreign tourists per year that generates near 30% of total tourism business of the region worth around Rs 350 crore per annum. Everybody right from a chaiwala upto the hotel owner benefits from the tourism. Apart from an increase in the income and the demand for local products, tourism also results in a multiplier effect. This refers to the way in which tourist expenditures filter through the economy and generate other economic activities. The multiplier effect is based on the concept of interdependency of different sectors of the economy the result of which is that any change in the host economy's level of output, income, employment, government revenue and foreign exchange flows will be greater than the value of the initial change. The multiplier is expressed as a ratio of change in one of the above variables to the change in tourist spending

that brought it about. In addition to its contribution to economic growth in the host economy, the labour intensive nature of tourism and tourism related industries results in a significant impact upon the level of employment in this sector. Income and employment generation are the most obvious positive impacts of tourism.

Any form of tourism which highlights the rural life, art, culture, heritage, at rural sites, thereby supporting the Hosts (Local) community socially, economically as well as enabling interaction among the Guests (tourists) and the Hosts (Locals) for more experience & enrichment can be called as rural tourism. This type of tourism takes place in rural sites of Darjeeling Hills and the concept of homestay is developing in rural areas empowering the rural economy of the region. Rural tourism's greatest potential benefit is its ability to generate money, which can translate into numerous positive economic opportunities for locals and their communities. For locals the first benefit of tourism development is jobs within the tourism sectors and outside of it. Tourism development means more income and profits for tourism related business. The economic multiplier model suggests that if local income from tourist expenditures is spent within local area, an increase in local income & jobs will follow.

Rural Tourism of Darjeeling Hills is a unique experience where one can experience village way of life which is inextricably intermingled with nature so much, so the origins of various ethnic tribes and clans find their roots in nature. The success of rural tourism in Darjeeling Hills owes to several factors like its location, climate, accessibility and the series of tour packages available. The varied landscape, eternal weather, and the slopes with tea plantations make up most of rural tourism in Darjeeling hills. There is a variety in scenic attractions that tourists would come across many villages. Thus, tea tourism in Darjeeling calls for thousands during the plucking season when women in the fields are plucking the leaves. The aroma in the hills engulfs international visitors. It conjures visions of snow peaks, serenity of vibrant green hills steeped in splendor, a land of breathtaking beauty crowned by the majestic Himalayas and attracts young, adventurous and enthusiasts across the age groups. Further, there are quite a few rural tourism spots like Lava, Mongpu, Alagarah, Munsung and Pedong around Kalimpong offering the serenity of the misty mountains.

Advocating for homestays in rural areas has been found to benefit both individual homestay owners and the communities in which they reside. Homestays resulting in increased economic stability have also been linked to provide various social benefits other members of rural communities, the extent of which hinges on the level of involvement from the community itself. The formation of rural homestays in small villages has also supported the opening of others in the same area. Thus, small enterprises that have formed to accommodate the needs of

various homestays are also helping refuel the tourist industry in the area. The female homestay owners recognized how their homestays were contributing to the local economy and the promotion of their village as a tourist destination, I found only those homestays that had been in operation for an extended period of time were able to make a significant social contribution to their community. At present many homestay were being opened in different parts of rural areas for tourist purposes and the through which it is helping in sustaining the development of the area as well as the source of livelihood of economically deprived population.

Rural Tourism helps to grow sustainable income in an area. When local people engaged in tourism, new sources of income are generated for the community as a whole as well as through individual employment opportunities. This income could be produced through collecting fees for access to trails, providing the accommodation or guiding services, preparing and selling food and handicrafts and so on. However the expenditures of tourists are normally expressed in terms of various sectors of tourism industry regarding accommodation, cuisine, transportation and entertainments etc. The money spent by the tourists goes to the local business in a number of ways. This money in turn is spent on salaries and on meeting the demands of tourists such as food, drink, entertainment etc. Each time a tourist makes expenditure, a ripple of additional spending is sent through the economy. Thus the expenditure incurred by the tourists supports not only the tourist industry directly but indirectly also supports a number of other activities which produce goods and services for the tourist industry. In this way money spent by tourists flows several times and spread in to various sectors of economy of the study area.

Conclusion:

Home stay or tea tourism is two of the options most popular among the tourist in rural areas in Darjeeling hills. The stay is with very basic facilities and creates less impact environmentally. A home stay concept preferred by most of the tourist is fast catching up locally and internationally. Home stay is arranged and run by villagers and it includes staying in Tea Gardens or Tea Estate or villages or a whole village set up made especially for the guest. Birding, short trails, angling are part of the stay and are not spoken or written separately, it is part of the concept. The stay is simple with basic infrastructure and is about bringing one closer to local cultures and environment. Local guide from the destination will help guest with their cultures and ways of life far better and earn a much needed income. Interaction with travelers and the knowledge that they are visiting for the richness in the culture brings in a sense of pride amongst the local people and also brings in supplementary sources of income hence it makes economic sense to the villagers as well. The popularity is fast catching up and many of the rural places in this region are setting up home stay facilities with some form of adventure for the

tourist. There are number of such home stay facilities in the region. The visit helps the economy, buying local products, buying art materials and using local villagers as guide or help.

Rural tourism will emerge as an important instrument for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environmental regeneration and development of remote areas and advancement of women and other weaker section of the society. If a proper planning is done rural tourism, could bring lots of benefit to the society. It could be a sustainable revenue-generating project for the rural people in this region. It can help inflow to resources from urban to the rural economy. It can also prevent migration of rural people to urban. Both short term and long term planning, implementing and monitoring are vital in avoiding damage to rural areas also. To conclude, the tourism potential in rural parts, if properly planned can become a source of further income and regional development for the rural livelihoods.

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