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Rural Tourism and Economic Development: A Case Study of Mayapur Village in Nadia District, West Bengal

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Abstract:

The rural tourism industry creates a large number of jobs and plays a very important role in the economic development of the region. For the development of rural tourism, we need to understand the socio-economic background of this place in order to improve the living conditions of the rural people. Priority should be given to strengthening the tourism infrastructure of these destinations so that they can attract domestic and international tourists and create various employment opportunities based on local tourism assets. The current study of Mayapur, a religious tourism hub in Nadia district of West Bengal, seeks to show the nature of economic empowerment through rural tourism.

Keywords: Employment opportunities, Quality of life, Rural tourism, Rural community, Income generation, Temples.

Introduction: Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in India and the second largest revenue generating industry in the world after the oil industry, but rural tourism has never attracted much attention, although most cultural and eco-tourism or heritage, historical or religious sites are located in rural areas. Rural tourism can create large scale employment opportunities and local people can benefit from it. The quality of life of local people can be improved through rural tourism development.

Rural tourism brings people of different cultures, religions, languages and economic status closer to each other and provides a holistic view of life. The Indian tourism industry contributes 6.23% to the national GDP and provides direct and indirect employment to 6.4% of the total workforce (WTTC-2009).

Rural tourism can play an important role in developing and improving the quality of life of the rural poor through proper management of rural tourism. The local body should take the responsibility for the development of tourism infrastructure and other essentials that attract local, national and international tourists. West Bengal has many wonderful tourist

destinations like hills or mountains, beaches, forests, cultural, traditional, historical and religious places. West Bengal is known for its rich cultural heritage, which is exhibited by various religious sites and temples in beautiful rural villages. Mayapur village in Nadia district is an example of a Hindu place of worship. Mayapur attracts tourists from all over the world. Mayapur is a renowned centre of the ISKCON (International Association for Krishna Consciousness) and attracts devotees from all over the world, especially Vaishnava people. Based on the sacred temples of Lord Krishna and other Hindu idols, Mayapur has created various employment opportunities which will accelerate the economic development of Mayapur and its environs as well as the entire Nadia district.

Objectives of the Study: The present study aims to evaluate the potential of economic empowerment of the study area through rural tourism. The specific objectives of the study are –

- 1) To understand the potential of rural tourism
- 2) To find out the impact of rural tourism on local people
- 3) To identify the essential elements for development of rural tourism
- 4) To identify various employment opportunity which can improve the quality life of local people
- 5) Finally , to propose suggestions for future development

Methodology: The methodology for this current study includes both primary and secondary data. Extracted from extensive field surveys, personal interviews and questionnaires. To assess the economic impact of tourism in the study area, 140 households (20% of the sample) were randomly selected. Furthermore, to assess the status of employment opportunities, a survey of 20% sample respondents was conducted among individuals involved in various income generating activities related to tourism.

Secondary data were obtained from human development reports from the RI office of West Bengal and Nadia district and Mayapur, based on a comprehensive study of the religious place in the framework of rural tourism and the following hypotheses were formulated about the perception of the local people. -

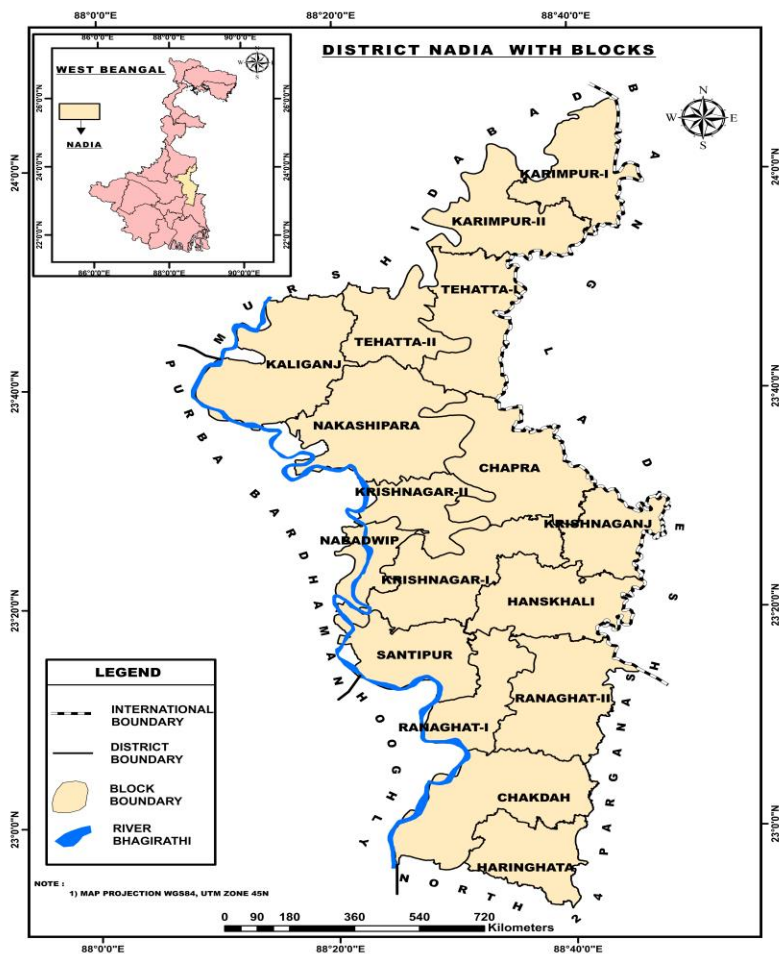
- 1) Is there any relation between rural tourism and employment opportunities in the study area?
- 2) Is there any relation between rural tourism and income level of the people?
- 3) Is rural tourism ensuring all rural year earning opportunities than agriculture and related sectors?
- 4) Is rural tourism beneficial for rural society?

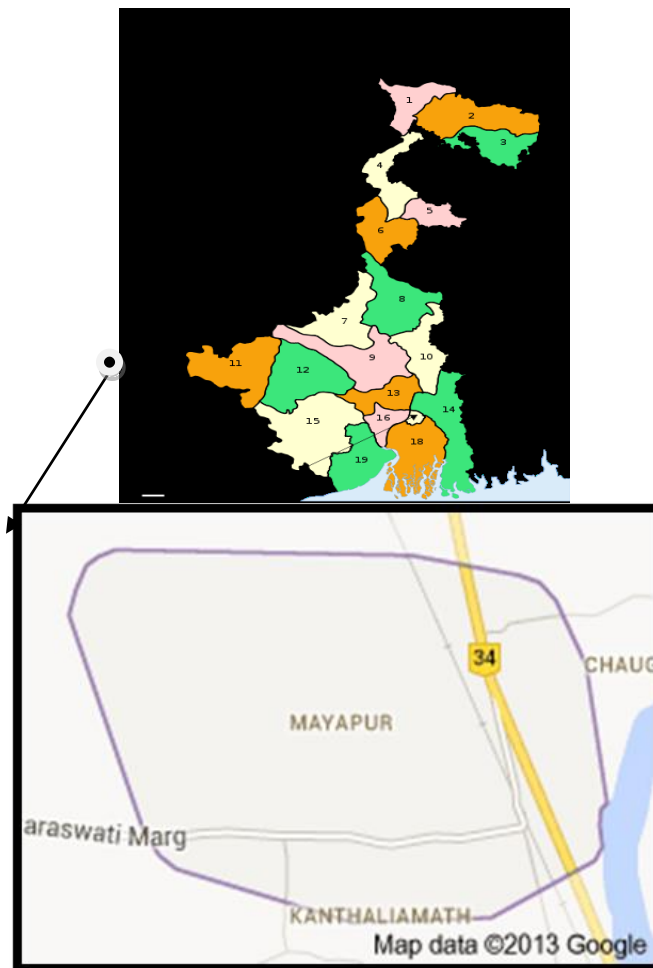
Study Area: The study Area is one of the famous religious tourist destinations of West Bengal, located in Nadia District, 19 km from Krishna Nagar (Nadia District Sadar) and 120 km north of Kolkata, on the banks of the Bhagirathi River .Connected by bus service from Krishna Nagar and by ferry ride over the Bhagirathi River , by train from Kolkata and Nabadwip, Mayapur is the headquarters of ISKCON. There are the Chandrodaya temple, in the middle of a beautiful garden has a panoramic view, as well as some other large and

small temples. According to the latest census report that the village covers an area of 700 square kilometres.



Chandroday Temple
Location of Mayapur





Mayapur in West Bengal

Historical Background Of The Study Area

The Navadvipa-Mayapur region is an important place for "Vaishnavism". Nabadwip is the birthplace of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the propounder of that religious belief. There are many temples and moths related to Sri Chaitanya Dev. The village of Mayapur is also connected to it. The area is known for its rich cultural and educational background and is known as the "Oxford of the East". Mayapur is the headquarters of the ISKCON and now has a special place on the West Bengal Tourism Map as the largest temple in the world is under construction and will be completed soon. Apart from ISKCON, there are other interesting places like Jagannath Temple, Raja Ballal Sen's Dibi, Chand Bibi Tomb, Chaitanya Maha Temple etc. which attracts visitors to come and spend some quality time with family and friends in lap of mother nature far away from the hustle and bustle of the city or town in the lap of nature.

ISKCON: The ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) Temple was first built in 1902 by Sri Abhaycharan Bhaktibedanta Sila Swami Prabhupada, a devotee of Sri Chaitanya Deva. The temple at that time was a simple hut made of clay and straw. Later the followers of Sri Prabhupada also built a large temple. Inside the temple there is a golden idol of many idols like Radha Krishna, Prabhupada etc.

Main Season: The main season that is mostly visited by tourists even though the locals visit regularly for holidays or entertainment-

1. Rash Purnima. 2. Dol Yatra, 3. Rath Yatra 4, Birthday of Radha and Krishna 5. Birthday of Sri Prabhupada etc.

On those occasions many people come here from all over the country and from outside the country. According to local estimates, about 80,000 to 100000 people gather annually, of which 16000 to 20000 are foreigners. Apart from ISKCON, there are other places like Jagannath Temple, Chand Bibi Ka Mandir, Ballal Sen Dibi and Chaitanya Temple.

Results and Discussion: Today tourism is not only associated with religious and cultural beliefs, but also with the natural beauty and festivals and charges are not enough to quench the thirst of the tourists. India is famous for its religious places. Visiting religious places is the biggest reason to travel in West Bengal and Nadia district. Small scale industries makes the products related to religious activities will be developed through the development of rural tourism.. The tourism industry already developed in the district can ensure a large net domestic product in the secondary sector. It also creates a backward connection to tertiary sector development. Below are some indicators showing the current scenario of the study area, which raises questions for preventive measures offered only by a well-managed tourism industry.

Per Capita Income: Per capita income is a significant parameter determining the economic situation of a region. Rural tourism can aid to rise in per capita income by generating simultaneous employment for both skilled and unskilled people.

Occupational Structure of the Study Area: Most of the people of the study area are dependent on primary sector of economy. Although there are also some other types of occupations like van, rickshaw pulling, boat drivers, shop owners, domestic help etc, but agricultural based occupation provides ensuring for most of the people directly or indirectly. There is huge demand for offering materials, incense sticks, sindur, alta, sweets in Mayapur. And hotels and lodges are also an important source of income for the local people. Evident of boating is also very good source of income. Huge no. of foreign tourists will percolate in the economy and show a multiplier effect in the overall development of the area.

Human Development Index: West Bengal Human Development Report (2004) also shows the condition of the district Nadia that said the condition of the area. In term of HDI and GDI the district Nadia ranks 9th out of the 17 districts of the state.

District	Health Index	Income Index	Education Index	HDI	RANK	GDI	RANK
Nadia	0.65	0.41	0.66	0.57	9	0.50	9

Source - West Bengal Human Development Report [2004]

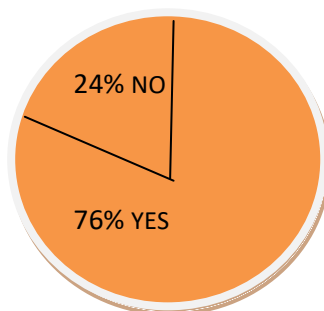
After a detailed analysis of the major issues related to economic development and economic empowerment, it becomes clear that the livelihood of the people in the area under study is growing rapidly. Apart from agricultural activities, tourism offers many employment opportunities to the people. The current study of Mayapur, which is not enriched with alternative employment opportunities instead of tourism. A systematic approach should be taken to ensure that the majority of the rural population participates in the revenue generation opportunities of the tourism industry and enriches the entire area.

Economic Empowerment Through Rural Tourism: The table shows the views of the local people regarding additional employment opportunities created through tourism industry at the study area. Almost 95% respondents opine that the effects of the rural tourism are very high (78%) and high (16%).

Impact of rural tourism on Employment opportunities

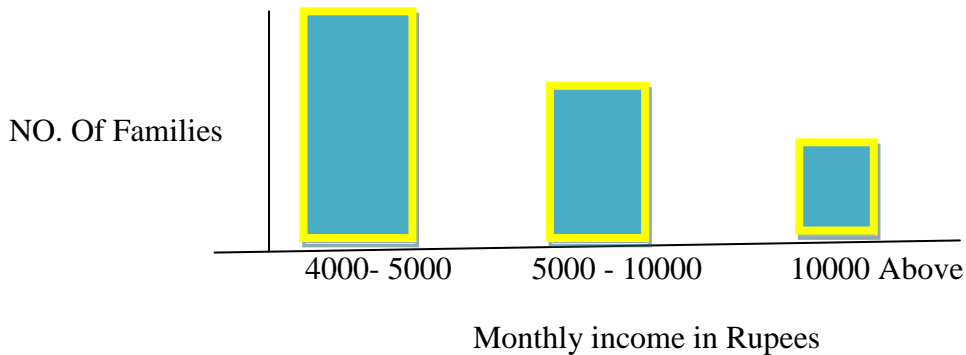
IMPACT	OBSERVED	PERSENTAGE	TOTAL RESPONDENT
VERY HIGH	110	78.57	140
HIGH	22	15.71	140
MEDIUM	6	4.28	140
LOW	2	1.42	140

Above 75% of the respondent are agreed that rural tourism is beneficial for rural society.



Rural tourism beneficial for the urban society also.

The study regarding monthly income of the employee attached with tourism of the employee attached with tourism reveals that more than 40% people earn an amount of Rs. 4000- 5000 followed by 35% 5000- 10000 and 20% 10000 and above income group.



Different Source of Income through Rural Tourism:

‘The village Mayapur situated on the banks of river Bhagirathi is blessed with its natural beauty. Not only for religious purposes, but also people from different parts of the districts comes here to spend some quality time with friends and family in the lap of the Mother Nature here on picturesque site of the river Bhagirathi. Although the visitors mainly come here to see the ISKCON Temple and earn virtue by offering puja but it is a very good holiday destination or picnic spot for the local people. Based upon the demand of tourist, various types of business activities are limited in Mayapur which together form an industry that occupies the people in rural livelihood. The field survey upon employee of tourism sector reveals the distributional pattern of total employee in various types of activities associated with tourism at the study area. Some of the occupations related to tourism are as follows-

Situated on the banks of the Bhagirathi River, Mayapur is a village of natural beauty. Not only for religious purposes, people from different regions also come here to spend some quality time with friends and family in the lap of Mother Nature in the beautiful location near the Bhagirathi River. Although visitors mainly come here to visit the ISKCON temple and earn virtue by offering pujas, it is also a very good holiday destination or picnic spot for the locals. Depending on the demand of tourists, Mayapur has a limited range of commercial activities that together form an industry that revolves around people in rural livelihoods. The field survey upon employee of tourism sector reveals the distributional pattern of total employee in various types of activities associated with tourism at the study area. Some of the occupations related to tourism are as follows-

1. Sweet shops beside the temples as sweet needed for offering puja.
2. Hotels and lodges and Restaurants and Food stalls on the footpath
3. Small shops selling Handicrafts, jute bags and others things which are needed for domestic purposes.

4. Boat man, Rickshaw pullers, Wirshepering (purohit), Cook for cooking 'Bhog', Guide etc.

Impact of Tourism on Environment and Society: Rural tourism has a huge impact on the natural environment. The visitors may overexploit natural resources may distort the natural beauty. Construction of large and tall buildings may effects on the stability of the land which will cause natural disaster like earthquakes. Ecological balance will be disturbed. Although tourism development provide higher standard of life of local people but modernization can affect their traditional values and culture. Foreign tourist will change the traditional culture of the local people very fast. Tourism is a part of entertainment industry. All hotels, lodges etc. having licenced are paying taxes to the govt. There could rise law and order problems, women and children can be abuse or exploited. Rate of crime and sexual harassment can increase. Most of the rural people have not much knowledge about rural tourism outsiders misled them and take most of the benefit from rural tourism . After a detailed survey of the area most of the local people and tourist have the following demands for the development of tourism here...

1. Improvement of ferry ride
2. Better communication or alternative way to reach Mayapur
3. Better Hotel facilities with fair rate
4. Security
5. Safe drinking water
6. Public sanitation and better food
7. Publicity
8. Guide with knowledge in Hindi and English for foreign tourist
9. Better Road and Bus service

Conclusion: After a detailed analysis of the employment infrastructure in Mayapur, a religious site, it becomes clear that rural tourism based on the same site can accelerate the economic development process of an area where other employment sources are inadequate. Since tourism offers employment opportunities to the both skilled and unskilled workers, there are enormous opportunities to engage local rural people who do not have adequate education or work experience. In recent times, the Government of India has placed great emphasis on rural development, including job creation and poverty alleviation, similar to the Integrated Rural Development (IRDP) program. Nadia district is a moderately developed area to accelerate the human development process in the area under study. The adjoining rural tourist area Mayapur –Nabadwip –Krishnanagar –may opens many scope for the growth of of rural tourism in the area and its surroundings in coming future.

With regard to the current scenario of rural religious tourism development in Mayapur, the following recommendations will help to sustain the tourism industry there -

1) Although Mayapur is a Hindu tourist destination, it attracts local and foreign tourists as many tourists from outside the country join ISKCON as members of that community. It is

therefore a very good source for attracting foreign tourists, which is very beneficial for the development of the local economy. Unlike private housing, low cost public housing should be developed.

2) Environmental compatibility is a requirement. The burning of the Bhagirathi River ghats on the banks of the Mayapur and the pollution from hotel sewage is a serious situation that needs immediate attention from the local authorities. In addition, extreme pollution from tourists has exceeded the environmental tolerance limits.

3) In order to achieve greater tourism benefits for the rural poor, it is necessary to increase the participation of local communities in the management of tourism products. This is particularly relevant for areas where large numbers of people live below the poverty line.

4) Finally, the development of tourism infrastructure such as transport facilities, souvenir products and quality accommodation is essential. Apart from government programs, the local body needs to develop infrastructure and manage tourism development in and around Mayapur.

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