

Rural Tourism As A Sustainable Development Alternative: An Analysis With Special Reference To Ballavpur Danga Near Santiniketan, West Bengal (India)

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Abstract: *Tourism is an economic activity that provides a country with income, fosters entrepreneurship, creates jobs, reduces unemployment, and stimulates production of food and local handicrafts. The Rural tourism or tourism in rural areas is a new form of tourism activity that can bring economic and social benefits to the society. For tourism to be described as rural tourism, it should mirror the characteristics that signify a rural area including small settlements, low population densities, agrarian-based economies, and traditional societies. Rural tourism can help in shaping our society. It can have both positive and negative impacts on rural as well as urban communities. This paper identifies the available tourist attraction facilities within Ballavpur Danga region near Santiniketan in and addresses how the locals can participate directly in tourism entrepreneurship and management. This research objective is to illuminate solutions for re-imagining rural area features and activities in order to make them tourist attractive and to relate this rural tourism with the economic and socio-cultural elements of the rural concerned communities. For developing the rural tourism we need to understand the rural environment, demography, socio-culture, economic and political background of that place. How we can involve the rural people to enhance their socio-economic condition.*

Keywords: *Rural Tourism, Impacts, Sustainable Development, Resident support for tourism, Ballavpur Danga (Santiniketan)*

I. Introduction

Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multifaceted and may entail farm or 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. The rural tourism is currently has got focus of attention throughout the world and also got recognition as an important instrument of growth of the rural communities. 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 helps in income generation and raising the living standards of the local population. In a country like India where approximately 70% of its population lives in villages, the concept of rural tourism certainly holds a lot of significance. From 2002 some schemes of rural tourism were started in India with the objective of highlighting rural life, art, culture, and heritage at rural locations and in villages. The main objective is to socio-economic development of the local community as well as to enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. The state, West Bengal has extensive variety of attractions in terms of tourist spots from the busy Kolkata megalopolis with its bygone-era and modern charms, to the regions of tranquillity like the Himalayan territory in the north to the Sunderbans in the south. From the tea gardens of Darjeeling to the cultural incubator of Santiniketan, West Bengal has much to offer to the world traveller, but it doesn't have a popular tourist destination status at that level. Only few of the destinations like Sunderbans, Darjeeling, Kolkata, Shantiniketan have a National and International recognition. The unfortunate fact is these destinations have reached the level beyond their carrying capacity and rest many are not even explored by the tourist community. One such destination is Ballavpur Danga near Shantiniketan which has rich potential to attract tourists. This kind of potential Rural Tourism destinations and their development will help the development of indigenous livelihood.

Location of the Study Area:



Source of Base Map: www.incredibleindia.org

This with careful development will have features of sustainable tourism. Ballavpur Danga, three km from Santiniketan and six km from Bolpur (Santiniketan) railway station, is a *Santhal Adivasi* tribal community in the pastoral beauty of rural Bengal. The Sonajhuri forest lies to the east and the Ballavpur Avayaranya forest area and bird sanctuary is to its south. The various types of *Santhali* art, craft and culture is closely related with the community's life. The *adivasi* communities are very much skilled for handicrafts terracotta works, batik prints, leather work, carpentry, mat weaving, broom binding with parts of trees, grass etc. and making ornaments with bena grass, date leaf, palm leaf and various kinds of seeds. Beautiful designs adorn the walls and floors of the homes of the *santal adivasis*, made from red earth, cow dung and lime. The tribal dance in the open air around fire, to the rhythmic beats of the *dhamsa* and *madal*, their traditional musical instrument; *Adivasi* myths and history remain woven in their songs and recitations. Ballavpur Danga Village is located in Birbhum District of West Bengal near Shantiniketan, the celebrated home of Nobel laureates Rabindranath Tagore and Amartya Sen. The village is fairly simple and mainly encompasses of *Santhal* community. The natural environ and exclusive lifestyle of the *Santhal* makes this village different from others. It is the lone village that has well-preserved rich tribal culture and generation old traditions. Ballavpur Danga will definitely transport any tourist to the timeworn memories of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore through his songs. Tour to the charming village of Ballavpur Danga can be truly exciting as well as educating too. An important festival is *Chabbish Prahar*, which is celebrated for three days based on *Adivasi* rituals and cultural program. Another festival, *Badna* is celebrated for 5 days, besides these *Charak Puja* and *Basanta Utsav* are also observed in the same ways. There is a 'Haat' named "*Sonibar Hat*" on every Saturday at Sonajhuri and '*Amader Haat*' every Saturday and Sunday.

II. Objectives Of The Study

As aptly evident from the title of the study, the major objectives are as follows:

- To understand the tourism potential in Ballavpur Danga village.
- To identify the natural and man-made resources in Ballavpur Danga village.
- To find out the impact of Rural Tourism on the residents.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities of rural tourism in Ballavpur Danga village area.

III. Significance Of Rural Tourism

i) Rural Tourism Creates Employment:

A content theme within the literature especially that generated by the government agencies, is the potential for tourism to create employment within rural communities, particularly labour intensive services and product development. (WTO, 1993; WTO, 1997b; USTTA, 1995; EC-AEIDL, 1997. Hall, 1997; NSWTC, 1991; ATSIC, 1996; DOT, 1995b). The Australian Tourism National Action Plan seeks to enhance the capacity of tourism to create jobs in regional Australia (DIST, 1998b). However, academic researchers point out that it can only do if the share of the tourism market is increasing. Rural tourism areas are reliant on stimulating demand both domestically and internationally. A survey of the Southern Highland community showed that 20% cited that one of the positive effects of the tourism was the creation jobs in the community and when asked if tourism did generate jobs 86% agreed. (Baric et al, 1997) This data is supported by findings that show 23% of farmers intended to employ skilled staff in order to manage their tourism business. (Knowd et al.1999).

ii) Rural Tourism as Opportunities for Youth:

“ A farmer in the Waipara area (of New Zealand) was complaining about tourist – he felt they disturbed his lifestyle and brought little benefits until he realised that it was tourists visiting a local winery that gave his daughter a summer job in their restaurant.” (Oelrichs, 1996:19). The employment theme is extended to include specific opportunities for young people within rural communities in the hope that tourism may provide an incentive for them to remain. (Oppermann, 1996; WTO, 1997b; USTTA, 1995; EC-AEIDL, 1997). The tourism industry is often promoted as an exciting and growing industry suited to the energies and enthusiasm of young people. (DOT, 1995b) Career options are enhanced with the opportunities for training and direct involvement in running tourism businesses, especially those within small communities. (ATSIC, 1996).

iii) Opportunities for Diversification:

Rural communities have been forced to try many different agricultural activities to try and survive the problems of rural downturn, drought and diminishing returns at the farm gate for their produce. Tourism is promoted as one way diversifying their economic base via the alternative “crop” that tourism can represent to rural communities. (Streckfuss, 1997; Hill et al., 1996; NSWTC, 1995; Bitz, 1993; USTTA, 1995; EC-AEIDL, 1997; DOT, 1995 b) For example the structural changes brought about by development of the European Common Market have meant diversification (Dolors Garcia- Ramon et al., 1995). Rural tourism development eventually diversifies the resident population of a community along with the product offerings of the region. (Huang et al., 1996). These offerings include changed agricultural activity and changed mix goods and services.

iv) New Business Opportunities:

Tourism generates new opportunities for industry Long et al., 1994; WTO, 1997b; USTTA, 1995; EC-AEIDL, 1997; Hall 1997). Rural tourism facilitates expansion of complimentary business such as service stations and new businesses are created to cater for tourist needs for hospitality services, recreational activities and arts or crafts (DOT, 1995b; ASTIC, 1996).

v) Preservation of Rural Culture and Heritage:

In rural tourism the ‘sense of place’ is fundamental element in brought the tourists’ and host community’s feeling of what the area attractive to visit and live in. This sense of place is maintained partly through rural museums which play a vital role in preserving heritage. (Macbeth, 1997, Prideaux et al., 1997).

vi) Cultural and Social Exchange:

A survey of farm tourism in Victoria showed that 67% of farmers cited “meeting people” as one of the main reasons for starting a tourism venture. (Kidd, 1995). New Zealand farm stay operators found that the social benefits could outweigh the marginal financial rewards through friendships and widening their children’s horizons, but that this was not sustainable in the long term (MAF, 1994).

vii) Rural Tourism Enhances and Revitalises Community Pride:

“A tourism industry which celebrates the historical, constitutional and cultural distinctiveness of very small jurisdictions underscores and reinforces the identity of those small places in McWorld.” (Bartmann and Baum, 1998, 696). Tourism encourages conformity to an ideal image of community solidarity. Thus the basis for community solidarity shifts from shared cultural background to shared image (Huang et al., 1996).

IV. Methodology

The present study consists of several parts. Primary data was collected through interviews and observations method. The respondents are the members of NGOs, villagers of Ballavpur, Mokrapur, Shyambati, Prantik, staffs in the tourism fields and tourists of Ballavpur Danga area. One project managed by Women’s Interlink Foundations in collaboration with district authority, Zillaparishad and Sriniketan Santiniketan Development Authority (SSDA), Birbhum district, which was conducted by Enterprise Development Institute (EDI), Kolkata, supported by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and UNDP at Ballavpur Danga Santiniketan considered for this study. The source of this study is based on the data published by Ministry of Tourism and other information available through internet. On the other hand the secondary data was collected from various Books, Journals, Internet, Newspapers, Reports of Ministry of Tourism and also Parliamentary Committees etc.

V. Results And Discussion

This section in this research paper is discussed on three heads as result and discussion, viz-

- Scope of Rural Tourism in Ballavpur Danga Village Area
- Benefits of Rural Tourism in Ballavpur Danga Village Area
- Challenges in Rural Tourism in Ballavpur Danga village Area

Scope of Rural Tourism in Ballavpur Danga Village Area

Ballavpur Danga is the home to the famous Nobel laureates Rabindranath Tagore, who was a great poet, a philosopher and the great composer. It is also the home of the India’s Nobel Prize winner in economics Amartya Sen. The village is mainly inhabited by the tribal *santal* communities. The old world charisma of

Ballavpur Danga village in the Santhal region can be a genuine experience along with being educative. Bahhabhpur and Kankutiya- the two villages from the Ballavpur Danga area - have an opulent history of craft skills accomplished by a mixed population of Santhal tribal community. The natural environs and the humble lifestyle of the Santhal tribe is a paradigm shift from bustling urban life. Simply to put, Ballavpur Danga is like a tourists' paradise. The section not only offers rustic Bengal beauty but also presents a captivating experience of cultural heritage through its Birbhum music and a strong ancestry of tribal craftsmanship. The artistic bent of mind of the tribal is echoed in the commodities of daily their use. Some of the major scopes are discussed below:

- **Local Culture** - The village is situated in the lateritic area identified as the '*Khowai*'. The contemporary living of the tribal involves daily labour, farming and goldsmith creations. The Santhal community is rich in ethnicities of art and culture. The cultural settings of the adivasis blend with the cultural backdrop of Ballavpur Danga. The tribal inhabitants of Ballavpur Danga are chiefly the Santhals, the ethnic people of this region who have close bonds with forest life. Most of the *adivasi* inhabitants of the area worships *Maranburu*, a local God. *Jahera*, another god of the *adivasis* is worshipped before all festivals and celebrations. They also pay reverence to spirits like *Kal Sing*, *Lakchera*, *Beudarang* etc. They follow the Sarna religion.



Pic: Santal adivasi communities' adorn design on the wall of their home

- **Ballavpur Danga Art and Craft** - Ballavpur Danga Santhali art and craft with designs on the walls, floors and doors of the homes made from red earth and cow dung. The Santhals have fairs like the Srinilketan *Krishi Mela*, Chandi Das *Mela* and *Chabbish Prahar*. In the Ballavpur Danga Village there is a "*Hat*" - a small fair every Saturday which comprises of things of daily use. The village of Ballavpur Danga is known for mainly for the folk dance and handicrafts work made by the local *adivasi* women artisans to earn their livelihood by selling these handicrafts. The tribal communities of the area posses the rich art and craft skills. The local people produce rich artistic handicrafts like broom binding, mat weaving, making musical instruments, batik, baskets, leather work. They also make various types ornaments by using palm leaf, date leaf and bena-grass etc.



Pic: Handicrafts made of jute, paddy, wheat seeds etc.

- **Santhali Dance** – The rural tourists can simply enjoy various types of performance or can be a part of the heart filling and vibrant *adivasi santhal* dance performed by the *Santhali* women by catching hands in chain system and dressed up in the red or blue bordered white saris. The artists paint themselves with the different colours in order to depict the various mythological characters and dance gracefully on the beats of the traditional music using the sticks. The tribal's dance to the rhythmic beats of the *dhamsa* and *madal*, the traditional local musical instrument; under the open sky intoxicating the spectators. The artists paint themselves with the diverse colours in order to represent the numerous mythical character and dance.



Pic: Performing the *Santal Adibashi* Dance

- **Cuisine** - Fish is the staple food of the villagers. They are also fond of rice, pulses and various vegetables grown in their fields. The most famous drink in the village is called *Hariya*, made from the rice grain and a fruit seed called *bakul*. The key diet of the *adivasis* of the area comprises of rice, pulses (daal) and vegetables.
- **Fairs and festivals** - *Karam* is the most important festival celebrated among the *santal* communities in the village. This festival falls in the month of September and October. For such types of special days these communities convey thank their God and Goddess for everything they have and worship to have more. Another festival celebrated among the *santal* communities in the village is called *Chabbish Prahar* (celebrated for 3 days) and *Badna* (celebrated for 5 days). They also observed *Charak Puja* and *Basanta Utsav*. *Jaydev Kenduli mela*, *Sriniketan Krishi mela*, *Pous mela* are some of the major fairs that held every year near the village of Ballavpur Danga. They play great music using *Tirio* (bamboo flute with the seven holes), for their dance, *Dhodro banam* (which consists of belly called *lac* covered with an animal skin on which rests the bridge (*sadam, lit, horse*), an open chest (*korom*), a short neck (*hotok*) and a head (*bohok*), *Phet banam* (a fretless stringed instrument with three or four strings), *Tundak, Tamak, Junko and Singa*.
- **Local People** - The *Santhal adivasi* communities are the indigenous people who have a natural bonding with the Wilds. Farming, daily labour hood makes for the profession of the people of Ballavpur Danga. Some of them have also taken up as Goldsmiths. Their food comprises of rice, pulses and fish. *Sura* is the locally made drink which the ballavpur relish. Here visitors can learn the traditions and culture of the *Santhal adivasi* tribal community. Attractive designs adorn the walls and floors of their homes, with colours made from red earth and cow dung. At night, it is a treat to watch the tribal's dance around the campfire to the rhythmic beats of the *madal*, their traditional musical instrument and listen to *adivasi* myths and history in the form of songs and stories.
- **Taste of Adventure in and Around Ballavpur Danga** - Ballavpur Danga is an ideal destination for tourists looking forward to have an exciting vacation and experience the adventure of living in the midst of a forest with local tribals. It is a Santhal tribal village, framed in the rustic beauty of rural Bengal. There are 119 *Santhal* families residing in the village. The Sonajhuri forest lies to the east and the Ballavpur Avayaranya forest area and bird sanctuary is to its south.
- **Oral Tradition** - It is an integral part of *adivasi* culture and it is inextricably linked to their bygone and historical value. This also comprises the unseen heritage of the *Santhals* in the form of myths and history preserved in their songs and sayings. This divergent feature of the *adivasis* to reserve their identity and birthplace is dissimilar from that of the non-tribal social groups.
- **Sonjuhri Forest** - Ballavpur Danga is situated in the environs of a bird sanctuary presenting large patches of water that are nesting zone for migratory varieties. This small Bird Sanctuary is a perfect place to be in for 2 - 3 days. Sonjuhri Forest, as it is called by the Ballavpur people, is the inhabitation place for migratory birds, deer and the water flowing by takes to the realm of these quiet animals. It is a good place for kids too without any tigers or lions.
- **Museum Gallery** - There is a small museum gallery filled with *Santhali* Paintings and artefacts is another attraction to the tourists of this village.

Benefits of Rural Tourism in Ballavpur Danga Village Area

Tourism development ensures additional income and profits for tourist related business. The greatest potential benefit of rural tourism is its ability to generate additional income that can translate in to various positive economic prospects for natives and their communities. For locals the first advantage of tourism growth is jobs within the tourism segment and even outside it. According to the economic multiplier model if income from tourist expenses can be consumed within local area, a rise in local income and newer job opportunities will definitely result. The following items highlight the potential significance of rural tourism in Ballavpur Danga village area.

- In the recent decades across India rural economy is adversely affected due to the increase in input costs of agriculture and related economic activities which have substantially affected the lives of rural community. Systematic efforts to promote rural tourism of this area as a subsidiary occupation can reverse this trend with ensuring some amount of balanced local area development.
- The concept of rural tourism is definitely helpful and effective for a village like Ballavpur Danga where a sizeable population lives. The village has diverse tourism resources that are scattered in the entire village.
- Rural tourism can substantially check the migration of people in search of jobs in cities like Kolkata. The gradual expansion of cities and increasing urbanisation are leading migration of rural people to urban areas. Rural tourism of this area is an important viable alternative which can provide a solution to this problem.
- A notable advantage of rural tourism as compared to other types of commercial activity for fighting rural poverty is that as the consumer travels to a rural destination. There occurs a prospect for a direct economic linkage amid the tourist and the poor rural people. For instance, over the selling and buying of handicrafts which is perfectly seen the Ballavpur Danga area.
- Small-scale enterprise development aided by micro-finance schemes in this area is likely to augment rural livelihood opportunities.
- This concept has the remarkable potentiality to fascinate the investors in rural areas. Plenty of good hotels are already present here. Also, a tourist complex is coming up next door. Cottages are been building that consists of two single couple huts and two double huts for twelve persons. Tourist can soon experience life in this village from close quarters.
- Charming accommodation in quiet and calm attractive environment in the lapse of the nature to the tourists those who seek like this area.
- Promotion of understanding and harmony by relationship building of tourists and local people.
- Rural tourism accelerates rural area reconstruction and rural development in over all aspects.
- Restoration of art and culture of the local communities.
- Rural tourism always facilitate inter-generational, inter- cultural communication and understanding.
- Environmental preservation of the local areas.
- Community development by getting help from the governments and by earnings from the tourists.
- There is huge scope of preservation and transmission local cultures, traditions, art and craft.
- Protection and development of rural landscapes and natural environments for tourists and local people.

Challenges in Rural Tourism in Ballavpur Danga Village Area

There are various types of challenges in the Ballavpur Danga village area. The local communities felt that the following are the challenges they faced in trying to come up with tourism ventures in the area and needs to be critically addressed:

- Shortage of trained manpower. There is acute shortage of skilled and trained labour to cater to the needs of a service industry like tourism.
- Off let realization of the fact that tourism can also play an important role in developmental process. There is lack of awareness about how the other resources can be a big crowd puller if rural tourism is developed properly.
- Absence of supporting industry. Attracting the ancillary industries in such remote places most of the times becomes a challenge.
- The rural areas remain in the shadow zone from most of the legislative benefits and lack of clear government legislation.
- Insufficient financial support. Though several grants have been approved for development of rural tourism but much more is required for full-fledged development.
- Lack of basic business planning skills. Rural tourism needs a lot of planning from its nascent stage to its marketing, promotion and such others. In most of the scenarios such well-bound planning is missing.
- Lack of linkages between micro, small and medium enterprises which should be kept into consideration.

VI. Conclusion

Rural tourism in Ballavpur Danga area 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. To conclude, the researcher can say rural tourism can be an effective option for developing the rural economy of the Ballavpur Danga area. It can create many employment options for the rural people and can diversify the agricultural activities in the area. The development of rural tourism in this area can ensure lots of benefits to the concerned rural community with proper planning. It might be a revenue-generating and sustainable project for the rural people of our state. The government should promote rural tourism of the area to ensure sustainable rural development and to develop the rural economy. Therefore, to promote rural tourism as primary product and to spread tourism's socio-economic benefits to rural and to new geographic regions, key regions would be identified for the development of rural tourism. Both the short term and the long term planning, implementing and monitoring are very vital in avoiding damage to rural environment including their culture. The environmental management, sound legislation, sustainable marketing, local people participation and viable planning strategies are crucial factors for the development of rural tourism in Ballavpur Danga area. The findings and suggestions of the study would go a long way in the formulation effective tourism policies and plans and relevant programs for sound development of the rural tourism in Ballavpur Danga area.

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