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**Government Initiatives for Development of Rural Tourism in India: A Study**

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**Abstract**

Rural tourism holds immense promise for India. When developed to its fullest potential, it could provide jobs to many young men and women in villages who otherwise are increasingly migrating to cities. In this study the researchers tried to find out various government schemes which are launched by government of India to promote rural tourism. In this study various schemes which are launched to promote rural tourism are discussed and evaluated through various perspectives. The government agencies at national and state level have been doing their bit to promote rural tourism in India. However a holistic approach through the convergence of number of schemes under various ministries like rural development, culture, environment and tribal welfare may be more rewarding. With increased number of tourists visiting the countryside, there will be a boost in the income level of people due to increased level of trade among the people. This will also generate jobs among the youth.

**Keywords-** Rural tourism, Government schemes, Rural destinations, Tourism policy

**Introduction**

A small break in the mundane life always acts as a great mood lifter. Generally, people like to take this break by travelling and exploring new places. However, time and affordability play an important role in selecting the destination. Traditional tourist spots are often quite congested during the peak tourist seasons. Countryside has always been a stress reliever for the urban people. Since majority of the society has now been urbanized, rural tourism is increasingly becoming popular among the urban population.

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More than fifty percent of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66 percent by 20250. According to World Urbanization Prospects by UN DESA's population division, the largest urban growth will take place in India, China and Nigeria. These three countries will account for 37 percent of the projected growth of the world's urban population between 2024 and 2050. By 2050, India is projected to add 404 million urban dwellers, China 292 million and Nigeria 212 million.

### **Concept of Rural Tourism**

In a broad sense it can be defined as 'a state of mind, and technically, according to activities, destinations and other measurable, tangible characteristics' (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). Over time researchers have constantly added to understanding the activities that encompass rural tourism. The list includes interest in farms, nature, adventure, health, education, arts, and heritage (Bramwell and Lane in Jolliffe & MacDonald, 2003) and experiencing living history such as rural customs, folklore, local traditions, beliefs, and common heritage (Pedford in Jolliffe & MacDonald, 2003).

Government of India explains rural tourism as “any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefitting the local community, economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism.” Rural tourism is essentially an activity that takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like-it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is pre-dominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and tradition.

Ministry of Tourism in India has laid a great deal of emphasis on the development of such rural tourism sites which boast of rich art, culture, handloom, heritage and crafts. These villages are affluent in both natural beauty and cultural splendor. Rural tourism is supposed to generate increasing benefits to rural areas in terms of rural productivity, conservation of rural people's involvement and a suitable way of adding traditional beliefs and values to modern times.

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## **Research Methodology**

This paper is based on exploratory research technique and data in this paper were collected by secondary resources like- from journals, annual reports, wide collection of magazine based articles on rural tourism based on the analysis of above mentioned data, collection sources the objective of the study are defined and research design is crafted which is highly descriptive in nature.

## **Objective of Study**

1. To explore the concept of rural tourism in India.
2. To explore progress of various government initiatives which have been taken to promote rural tourism in India.
3. To find out the gap between government initiatives and current need of rural tourist places in India.

## **Major types of Rural tourism in India**

**Agricultural Tourism**-To explore more about the agricultural industry and how farmers work with crops.

**Cultural Tourism**-To allow tourists to be immersed in local culture related activities, like rituals and festivals.

**Nature Tourism**- Responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.

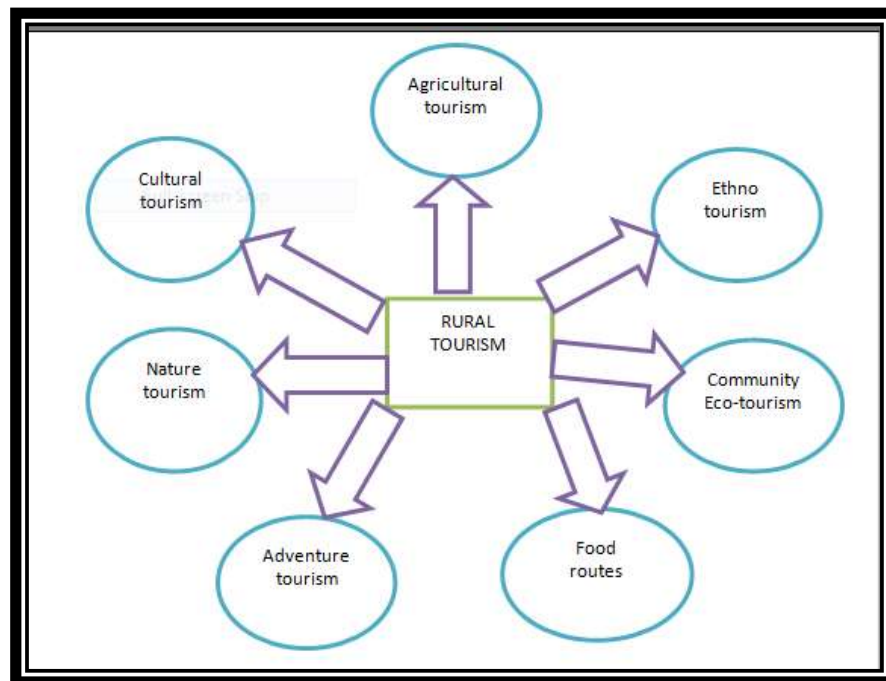
**Adventure Tourism**- Any constructive activity which tests the endurance of both a person and his equipment to its extreme limit is termed as adventure.

**Food Routes**- Where wanderlust meets the variety that persists in our cuisine. This tourism is all about food and knowing more about different staples of different places.

**Community Eco-tourism**-Where tourism is for a purpose. It is a rather responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the well being of local people.

**Ethno-tourism**-To expand the horizons to view different cultures. It is essentially to know more about various ethnic and cultural lifestyles and beliefs.

Rural tourism helps to garner knowledge on agriculture, farming, local governance, etc. Rural tourism helps to remove myths about rural lifestyle that may exist in urban minds like villages are unhygienic, rural life is unsafe, etc. Rural tourism will help a person to explore the vast diversity that breathes in the interiors of India.



(Figure 1- Major types of Rural Tourism)

### **Different Schemes of the Government of India**

Ministry of tourism has identified many spots which are being developed as tourist destinations in rural areas. These sites are still unexplored. To help in the holistic development of such tourist places, the Ministry has introduced certain schemes, which are detailed below-

#### **1. Swadesh Darshan**

India's rich cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage provides a huge potential for development of tourism and job creation in the country. There is a great scope and need to

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develop tourist circuits on specific themes to attract the tourists having special interest in visiting such places. This can be achieved only through an integrated approach by providing engaging experiences for distinct categories of tourists i.e. Domestic and International. Various themes which are unique and specific to the area can include beaches, culture, heritage, wildlife etc. Such theme based tourist circuits should be developed in a manner that supports communities, provides employment and fosters social integration without comprising upon the environmental concerns and provides unique experiences to the tourists.

In due recognition to this the Government of India, Ministry of Tourism (MoT) launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme (Central Sector Scheme)– for integrated development of theme based tourist circuits in the country in 2014-15. This scheme is envisioned to synergise with other Government of India schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill India, Make in India etc. with the idea of positioning the tourism sector as a major engine for job creation, driving force for economic growth, building synergy with various sectors to enable tourism to realise its potential.

### **Scheme Objectives**

- To position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and job creation.
- Develop circuits having tourist potential in a planned and prioritized manner.
- Promote cultural and heritage value of the country to generate livelihoods in the identified regions.
- Enhancing the tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world class infrastructure in the circuit /destinations.
- Follow community based development and pro-poor tourism approach.
- Creating awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increased sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area.
- To create employment through active involvement of local communities.
- Harness tourism potential for its effects in employment generation and economic development.

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- To make full use of the potential and advantages in terms of available infrastructure, national culture and characteristic strong points of each and every region throughout the country by development of theme based circuits.
- Development of tourist facilitation services to enhance visitor experience/satisfaction.

### **Key Features**


- The scheme was completely funded by the central government of India. There are 13 cities that are under consideration of development. These 13 cities are all pilgrimage sites.
- There are 13 tourist circuits that are proposed and started under the scheme. Under these 13 circuits there are many cities and sites are added for the visitors to get down there and enjoy their holiday.
- The scheme is a joint venture by the Central Government and Ministry of Tourism. By launching the scheme both the ministry will be able to develop the heritage cities of the nation and conserve them for the tourists from across the globe.

### **Definition of Tourist Circuit**

- Tourist Circuit is defined as a route having at least three major tourist destinations which are distinct and apart. Circuits should have well defined entry and exit points. A tourist who enters should get motivated to visit most of the places identified in the circuit.
- A Circuit could be confined to a State or could be a regional circuit covering more than one State/Union Territory. These circuits may have one dominant theme and other sub-themes.
- Projects under the scheme shall be under the following identified themes; **Eco-tourism, Wildlife, Buddhist, Desert, Spiritual, Ramayana, Krishna, Coastal, Northeast, Rural, Himalayan, Tribal and Heritage.**

### **Swadesh Darshan Scheme Implementation**

- Swadesh Darshan being a central sector scheme will be implemented under overall control of Mission Director.

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- Experts/Consultants may be engaged by executing agencies for detailed planning and designing/preparing DPR of the works/projects under the scheme.
- The implementing/ executing agency shall be responsible for timely implementation of the project/work with quality assurance of assets created
- The implementing agency shall appoint a Nodal Officer for implementation of project.
- The States/ UT Administration shall appoint a State Level Monitoring Committee for timely implementation of project.
- If there is any escalation/variation from approved DPR. SGs/ UT Administrations must inform Ministry of Tourism and seek its approval for the same before commencing work on the component.
- Implementing Agency shall invite and finalize all tenders within stipulated time to enable Ministry of Tourism to release of installments of the project.
- Work for different phases of the projects shall be completed within the period stipulated in the respective sanction letters & monitoring framework.
- The Implementing agency shall follow all codal formalities while awarding contracts for works/material/equipment procurement and ensure complete transparency in its transactions. E-tendering/ e-procurement will be compulsorily followed for all tenders.

**Funding Pattern**

- The Scheme is 100% centrally funded and efforts are made to achieve convergence with other schemes of Central and State Governments and also to leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and Corporate Sector.
- Suitable Public Private Partnerships to be taken up for improved sustainability of the projects.
- A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) may be created for the purpose, wherever feasible. The undertaking would spell out specific milestone to be achieved indicating the works to be undertaken by them in physical and financial terms including State Government's contribution towards land, rehabilitation package, O&M.



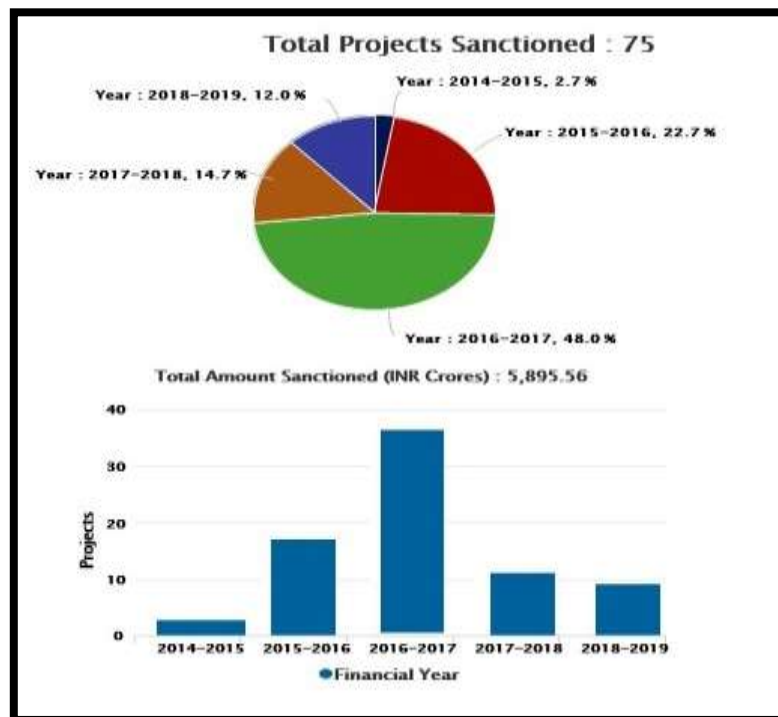
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- The funds would be released to the Implementing Agency, under Swadesh Darshan Scheme. The funds shall be sanctioned strictly in conformity with the GFRs and the directions issued by the Ministry of Finance from time to time. All the proposals will be routed through IFD of Ministry of Tourism.
- Funds would be released only after submission of copy of work orders and good for construction DPR by the implementing agency to the Ministry.

**Statistics of Swadesh Darshan Scheme-** It is described as follows-



### **PRASAD Scheme**

Under the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India launched the PRASAD Scheme in the year 2014-2015. The full form of PRASAD Scheme is **Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spirituality Augmentation Drive**. Like the PRASAD Scheme, there are various other schemes launched by the Government of India in order to address the social and economic welfare of the citizens and the nation.

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The Ministry of Tourism launched the PRASAD scheme that aims at integrated development of pilgrimage destinations in a prioritized, planned, and sustainable manner in order to provide a complete religious tourism experience. The focus of Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spirituality Augmentation Drive- PRASAD is on the development and beautification of the identified pilgrimage destinations under HRIDAY Scheme. Earlier, the scheme identified twelve cities for the development of pilgrimage and heritage destinations. The criterion for the selection of these cities is their rich heritage and cultural history.

**Identified sites under PRASAD Scheme- (25 sites in 16 states)**

Sl.No.	Sites	State
1.	Ajmer	Rajasthan
2.	Amaravati	Andhra Pradesh
3.	Amritsar	Punjab
4.	Ayodhya	Uttar Pradesh
5.	Badrinath	Uttarakhand
6.	Belur	West Bengal
7.	Deoghar	Jharkhand
8.	Dwarka	Gujarat
9.	Gaya	Bihar
10.	Guruvayoor	Kerala
11.	Hazratbal	Jammu & Kashmir
12.	Kamakhya	Assam
13.	Kanchipuram	Tamil Nadu
14.	Katra	Jammu & Kashmir
15.	Kedarnath	Uttarakhand
16.	Mathura	Uttar Pradesh
17.	Omkareshwar	Madhya Pradesh
18.	Patna	Bihar
19.	Puri	Odisha
20.	Somnath	Gujarat
21.	Srisailem	Andhra Pradesh
22.	Tirupati	Andhra Pradesh
23.	Trimbakeshwar	Maharashtra
24.	Varanasi	Uttar Pradesh
25.	Vellankani	Tamil Nadu

## **Objectives of Scheme**

PRASAD Scheme is launched with the following objectives:-

- To enhance tourism attractiveness in a sustainable manner.
- To harness pilgrimage tourism so that it directly affects and multiplies the employment generation and economic development.
- To promote local art and culture, handicraft and cuisines etc.
- To develop world-class infrastructure in religious destinations

The development of infrastructure under PRASAD Scheme includes the development of lighting and illumination with renewable energy sources, eco-friendly modes of transport, first aid centers, drinking water, waiting rooms, toilets, parking, craft bazaars/souvenir shops / haats / cafeteria, rain shelters, telecom facilities, internet connectivity etc. Development of basic tourism facilities like road, rail and water transport, last-mile connectivity, like Information and interpretation centers, Money exchanges and ATMs.

## **Funding of PRASAD Scheme**

To implement the PRASAD scheme a Mission Directorate is set up in the Ministry of Tourism. The Ministry provides Central Financial Assistance to State Governments for the promotion of tourism at identified destinations.

For components within public funding, the Central Government provides 100% funds and for the improvement in the sustainability of the project the scheme seeks to involve Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) as well.

The Budget provision of rupees.15.60 crore was made in revised estimates 2014 – 2015. The first installment of rupees.85.78 lakh was released under this scheme for the development of basic facilities at Vishnupad Temple, Gaya in Bihar.

## **Impact of Rural Tourism**

### **Positive Impact**

The most important impact of increasing rural tourism is the impact on economy. With increased number of tourists visiting the countryside, there will be a boost in the income level of

the people due to increased level of trade among the people. This will also generate jobs among the youths. The traditional handloom and handicrafts of any place is matter of pride for the local people. Through tourism, the visitor can have the benefit of directly buying the finished products from the local people. This in turn will have a positive impact on the overall economy.

Exchange of ideas with the tourists will create a new idea among the villagers. This entails increasing interest in education, preventive health care, modern gadgets, etc. That will help in universal literacy. With more tourists visiting the villages, there will be improvements in the connectivity by means of roads, increase in public transport, etc.

Villages which are close to sanctuaries and reserve parks can teach the ideas of preserving the nature to their counterparts. Living by side of nature for centuries, they will have more knowledge about how to preserve nature. Tourists may develop an interest in the local religion and traditional rituals that act as catalyst for social economy.

### **Negative Impact**

However, rural tourism may have certain negative impacts. To facilitate tourism, there would be an increase in the infrastructure development of the countryside. This may lead to concretization of rural areas and may distort the natural beauty. Besides, influx of tourists may lead to exploitation of natural resources.

Tourism may have an adverse effect on the traditional livelihood of people. The village people may shift from agriculture and other traditional livelihoods to lucrative livelihoods related tourism. This may, in turn have an negative impact on rural tourism.

### **Scope for Improvement**

Every aspects of life has both positive as well as negative views. For sustainable development, it is essential to optimize the positive impacts and minimize the negative impacts. The same is true for popularizing rural tourism also. In order to make tourists feel comfortable while visiting any place, they may be provided detailed information regarding their place of visit in advance. They may also be informed about any particular custom prevalent in that region so that the tourists may prepare themselves accordingly.

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There is a necessity for having good infrastructure and logistic support in villages. Roads connecting to the nearest railway station or highways would improve accessibility to the villages. That would benefit both the tourists as well as the villagers. However, instead of having more hotels or guest houses in rural areas, it is better to encourage homestay. The tourist can have a taste of the traditional practices along with local recopies prevalent in rural India. This would help the tourists to connect to the villagers in less time.

The exotic flora and fauna of rural India can be a huge source of learning for students. Student excursions can be allowed with proper permission from competent authorities. The students will learn to value nature in this way. Language may be an important issue when it comes to tourism. Hence, tourists may be given the option of interpreters in case they face any difficulty. There is a need to have trained and qualified interpreters for this purpose. Most villages of India have a traditional entity that makes them unique. Many such traditional products are recognized by conferring the Geographical Indicators or GI tags. These may be agricultural products, handicrafts, textile products, sweets, natural goods, manufactured goods, holy goods etc. All these GI tagged products are always showcased on national as well as international platforms and have a huge market demand. The Government may takes steps to ensure that tourists get a first-hand experience in seeing how these products are being made, packed and showcased. That may lead to increased interest among the tourists and eventually rise in the number of tourists in these rural regions.

Tourists may be advised well in advance not to get involved into any local issues which may lead to law and order problems. The government may conduct a survey among the tourists and get to know about their feelings regarding the place of their visit. Based on their feedbacks, measures may be adopted to improve tourism.

Many states of India are blessed with medicinal herbs and other ayurvedic products which have strong medicinal values. The Government can develop suitable infrastructure to capture such tourists who can avail medicinal facilities in such villages of India. The role of State Government is very important when it comes to rural tourism. Each state has a different potential to attract tourists. Hence, it is necessary that state Government indentify this potential and work in close coordination with the Union government to promote rural tourism. That will benefit the tourism sector of the country on the whole.

## **Conclusion**

“To other country, I may go as a tourist. But to India, I come as a pilgrim”, the words of Martin Luther King Jr. have their resonance in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “We are inheritors of a rural civilization. The vastnesses of our country, the vastness of population, the situation and the climate of the country have, in my opinion destined it for a rural civilization.” Rural India has a lot to offer to people. It would need concerted effort from both the union Government and state Governments to indentify these areas and explore tourism potential in this sector. That is of utmost importance to promote rural tourism in the country. Then only rural tourism can develop and flourish.

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