Chapter - XI

ECOLOGICAL BALANCE OF DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE ECO TOURISM
11.1 INTRODUCTION

Balancing growth and development and ecological conservation has literally become a jigsaw that refuses to be solved by the most known experts in ecology. There is an increasing tugging and hauling to limit growth in a natural rural surrounding and sustain growth. The buzz word is sustainable tourism, sustainable understood as maintenance or prolong or maintain the life of in the twentieth century dictionary. The word has become fashionable but obfuscated as it is unclear or mystifying. But it has come to stay and act as a control system to uncontrolled or unplanned growth.

Krishna Kamra in his book on ‘Managing Destination Development Discusses at Length on Sustainable Tourism’. He emphasizes the conflict between the tourist the developers, the service providers and the local resident community. The basic problem in sustaining a destination and its natural environment are the economical interests both of local residents as well as developers generally from outside. And that sets the pace of development to an unprecedented growth with little consideration for ecology or environment.
Tourist needs once very simple are growing extensively and getting more complicated. The earlier simple requirements of clean place to stay, good food and simple connectivity have been replaced by massive needs for all kinds of facilities and services. Connectivity by all modes of transport be it air, rail and road. Narrow roads are out and four lane and six lane eight lane roads are the present demand for extensive traffic movement. Accommodation also has to be of different types. Star category, budget hotels, forest guest houses, apartments, dormitories and other types of accommodation catering to different categories of society. For the travelers, traveling by road facilities for parking, gasoline stations, petrol pumps are a must. Again eat outs, again with customers demanding different types of food due to different food habits makes it altogether a difficult job at sustaining the intrinsic beauty and natural landscapes of any natural destination.

11.2 RURAL GOVERNMENT POLICY FOR TOURISM

Presently the thrust in India is rural tourism development as the government policy is also moving in the same direction. With its initial step towards rural development a pro poor government policy which was initiated with ‘Incredible India’ campaign in 2004, when the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) kick started the Rural Tourism Campaign and called the project as Endogenous Tourism with a plan for enhancing the living standards of the rural community. Twenty states were identified and thirty one rural sites selected for development. The plan was to generate employment and
promote sustainable livelihoods in India. The project directed at encouraging local crafts by reviving it, showcasing existing arts, crafts, historical monuments, culture by financially supporting its conservation, creating hygiene awareness by building toilets. The scheme was successful in some states like Orissa and Andhra Pradesh but failed in some states like Maharashtra where nothing remains of the rural scheme of self employment despite genuine efforts by the collectorate offices and NGO’s as well as cultural bodies like INTACH.

Not to be disappointed or discouraged by such failures the government lately has come out with scheme like National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) that aims to provide job guarantee to rural people though not directly under tourism scheme, guarantees hundred days work for a marginal farmer, scheduled castes and tribes to dig earth for water tanks and bunds. It has though come under a lot of criticism. However all these schemes do reflect on the sincere efforts of the present government to support and assist the rural folks financially and raise their standard of living.

However the present push at rural areas has also driven many farmers to push into agri farm tourism for economical benefits. Though agri farm tourism was a concept more popular in states like Haryana, Punjab and Kerala presently Maharashtra state to have entered into farm tourism in a big way. More so as natural calamities like famine and drought have reduced the once well to do farmers to poverty and they need to seek alternative economic livelihood.
This farm business is out to offer the city folk living in congested, polluted city environment, with routine hassles of traffic, office pressures, tensions, a natural environment that has abundant landscape aesthetically beautiful, unsophisticated beauty. The picture of rural beauty is romanticized in all literature, as ideal purity, rural community simplicity, friendliness and hospitality. But questions of sustainable rural tourism raise their ugly head.

11.3 SUSTAINABLE ECO – TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT

Dangers of over publicizing rural tourism can result into unmanageable conditions in which the increase in large masses will be quickly followed by providing more services, more facilities and services meaning adding to the existing infrastructure. This can create tension between conservation and rural developmental interests.

11.4 UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CONCEPT

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Another concept is all forms of tourism development management and activity which maintains the environmental, social and economic integrity and well being of natural, built and cultural resource in perpetuity. It is also understood as maintaining balance between the negative and positive impacts of tourism through planning restrictions and through education of the people for conservation and development. Eco tourism is an environment friendly activity that inculcates environmental values and ethics. Rural
tourism will contribute to the sustainable development of rural India if it includes social, cultural, economic and ecological sustainability. The concept of sustainable tourism development as developed by WTO in contact of the United Nations Sustainable Development Process refers to tourist activities leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes biological diversity and life support systems, limit of growth is sustainable development.

11.5 PROBLEMS IN BALANCING ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL TOURISM

If the planners of rural tourism fail to consider or include sustainable development they let loose and stir up a horns nest of bees, leading to endangering the very natural beauty landscapes, green paces to ugly cement concrete jungle.

The most common problems of development for tourism and sustainable development are:-

01 **Accessibility** : For accessibility to rural areas ordinarily the rustic people make do with crude pathways, narrow roads, untarred roads. But as soon as tourism development is planned proper roads to manage traffic that will include bigger vehicles like buses, trucks and regular cars, tractors need to be constructed. The roadways might sometimes need to pass through farmland to points of scenic beauty or a historical
monument or a religious space or a craft village. The pollution level due to noise and smoke will rise.

02 **Competition for Labour by the Tourist Industry:** Development of agricultural or farm land for tourism requires huge manpower. Creating accommodation, even simply supplying of food and drinks, cooking spaces and cooks, labour for developing sericulture, farming, apiculture, fishing, growing of medicinal plantations requires manpower both skilled and unskilled. This will definitely create a major shortage to other farmers for daily labour resulting in problems for poor farmers.

03 **Land Acquirement by Private and Public Developers:** Any large scale growth also requires acquiring bigger land encroaching on farmlands of smaller farmers who might sell space for short term gains but in the long run end up in poverty. On one hand the claims of farm or rural tourism is pro poor enterprise. But the dispossession of land from poor farmers will create tensions amongst the local community.

04 **Unpredictable Tourist Behaviors:** To expect a uniform behavior from visitors and tourists is a gross misunderstanding of human nature or to expect a military like behavior from a common man. While many tourists might be willing to behave responsibly and also an inherant love of nature and a strong conservation attitude, many tourist misbehave with nature. Several visitors
have a tendency to challenge rules and regulations. When instructions are displayed for the tourist to avoid plucking flowers, they will instinctively pluck flowers.

05 **Noisy Tourists** : are other major problematic human behavioral tendency of creating noise, raising the volume of transistors or raising the starting machine in their cars or shouting etc.

06 **Illegal Hunting Fishing** : In many farm areas there are animals and birds that are preserved for viewing of tourists like deers, antelopes, wild cat, peacocks, ostrich etc but tourist at times will illegally hunt these animals. Fishing areas too are exploited by the cross possible visitor behavior.

07 **Increased Erosion** : of farmland by overusing paths and trails is common.

08 **Damage by Fire** : Irresponsible use of match boxes for smoking or cooking can create havoc as jungles spread fire very fast and damage huge areas of crops.

09 **Decrease of Agricultural Land** : As the advantages and economic benefits of tourism become more popular amongst farmers more and more farmers will opt for developing their farms for tourism rather than produce crops for the market. This will lead to decrease in land for agriculture and crop produce required for the masses for their daily needs.
Social Tensions and Distortion of Rural Lifestyles:
There is a definite threat of social impacts as the existing
traction, culture, moral values as well as the simple
lifestyles are exposed to the outsiders who come in with
modern lifestyles, little moral values and little
understanding of culture and heritage.

Community life, Family ties are under threat:
As a consistent exposure to foregoers, outsiders is countered
the host community tends to get more influenced by the
attraction and lure of materialistic products, a more
luxurious life and there is more mobility of youth to other
places or mostly urban areas. Movement from rural to
urban areas for a better life, better education lures youth
to a different society and compels him to leave behind his
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Women more independent:
Tourism is one industry
that offers employment as well as business opportunities
to women who are much in demand in hotels, craft shops,
entertainment business. Petty jobs for poorer women are
easily available like cooking, washing cloths and utensils
in hotels and restaurants or selling fruits, cold drinks is
common place. Working in handloom and handicraft
industries or establishing their own small craft production
is also an opportunity for women in rural areas making
them more independent and at the same time disrupting
the age old tradition in village life of earnings only by males making family relations strained.

However sustainable eco tourism balance can be maintained of certain strategies of planned sustainable development are carried out that could lead to responsible management of rural areas or farm tourism without disturbing the ecological balance the ecology can be sustained. Some of the strategies for planned sustainable development of eco – agri – rural tourism could be as follows;

01 The most important strategy is ecological and environmental education from primary level i.e. in schools, colleges and university. Education to respect, protect and conserve nature should be so strongly imbibed from school level that for the future protection of nature and restricting ecological imbalances it will go a long way.

02 Environmental and ecological studies should be made a fundamental component of National Environmental Policy.

03 Public awareness through media of environment and ecological protection should be created through both print and visual media.

04 Hoardings near traffic signals, on buses, at railway stations will go a long way in creating awareness amongst the common public.

05 Posters, neon signs at hotels, at restaurants, theaters can create mass awareness.
Organizing tours to natural rural sites and teaching students in these areas on the way to conserve ecology can assist in a better way by direct student participation.

The local people in rural area should be taught by NGO’s to learn to respect and conserve nature and protect their aesthetic beauty for sustainable tourism.

Different sectors in tourism have to opt for a more environment friendly behavior. Hotels, travel agencies as well as tour operators should conduct ten minute lectures on environment protection and conservation, responsibility to keep surroundings clean and regular garbage disposal.

Produce special documentaries for rural public and relate any environmental protection lessons with mythological myths and legends.

Promote environment friendly lifestyles amongst all classes of society.

Every house in urban areas should be encouraged to plant eco friendly trees and plants by offering prizes for the best eco-environment friendly gardens by the Municipal Corporation.

Local communities of all destination or tourist site should be involved in decision making and participate in the actual environmental problems, sustainable development and assure that all development in their area is sustainable.
Land or plots should not be sold to outsiders as that would cause leakages, outsiders to settle and take advantage of tourism development in the destination.

Any filling of trees or unplanned development by any section of society should be declared punishable and a threat of either imprisonment or fine of at least Rs. 10,000/-.

Restrictions should be put on construction above one floor. Two floors and more should be banned.

Any local planned development should focus on tourist facilities like hotels, restaurants all of which jell with the natural surroundings of the destination and are aesthetically pleasing to the eyes.

Hotels or any facilities should mostly be developed horizontally and not vertically.

A local association of eco-environment conservation of the tourist destination should be formed. Members from neighboring urban cities involved in similar associations should also be included, and this association should act as a strong deterrent to unplanned growth in and around the destination. This should be a powerful body that can approach the Hon’ble High Court or even the Hon’ble Supreme Court to stop any illegal activities, construction or development.

The rural farms should target mostly class tourist and not mass tourist.
11.6 DISCUSSIONS

Rural areas, especially eco – agri farms are dependent largely on natural surroundings, that accentuate its beauty and are able to attract large number of tourists. Minus nature the farms are irrelevant. According to the Manila Declaration of World Tourism Organization (WTO) held in 1980 that emphasized natural and cultural resources of tourism and the need for conservation of these resources for the benefit of the local residents states, “The protection, enhancement and improvement of the various components of man’s environment are among the fundamental conditions for the harmonious development of tourism”. In any eco-agri farm tourism the major criteria should be the carrying capacity. Farms have an area it could be expansive farms like 100 to 200 acres in which the carrying capacity is bigger. However even a farm of this areas have a limited capacity due to availability of water, energy, garbage disposal plants, carrying capacity however is not limited to the environmental or ecological carrying capacity but also cultural and social carrying capacity.

Though the impact of these on eco, culture and social is a gradual phenomenon, the impacts however leave a permanent mark on the site and revival of the farm is near to impossible.

Cultural Impacts too are at different levels. Local cultures that have been conserved for ages and with which the local people have strong emotional links need to be protected for posterity. Tourism also becomes more significant when the culture of a destination is attractive and interesting. Many local inhabitants have carried for generations the tradition of typical folk or tribal dances, music, songs
that would act as a powerful source of added value for the tourists. Destruction of this tradition would also result into minimizing the attraction for the site. Colourful costumes, local in character makes the rural farms more interesting.

**Social Impacts** Another important fabric of a society is its social fabric based on family ties, community organization. In most of the rural cultures family ties are very close limited and community functions, gatherings, meetings are regular. The village elders are the ones who make decisions on any issues, problems, disputes and it is basically accepted by the entire community. Various rites, rituals, ceremonies are all conducted unitedly. But tourism if encouraged in mass scale can break these age based ties cherished by the community since generations together.

Both cultural and social traditions are definitely impacted by too much exposure to tourism. The physical contact and countering of tourist who arrive with their 21st century costumes, modern and trendily, carrying latest gadgets like camera, mobile phones, laptops are bound to create a strong desire amongst the locals for their possession. For the purpose the younger generation which is more influenced is even prepared to migrate to foreign land, for education or job, to possess or limitate the tourists. Probably it is no wonder that most of the urban areas and cities are to-day crowded with rural youths and sometimes even entire families. Migrations are happening in a big way.
Another bigger issue of eco-agri tourism promotion is the economical benefits of tourism. The local inhabitants who have little awareness about ecological sustainability or planned development are more interested in economic benefits. Rampant, unplanned development is the bane of many rural sites once they are caught into the cobweb of economics. The result will be commercialization of local features and traditions. For development the local resources like land with less trees will be felled and commercially profitable shops, restaurants, hotels will be opened. More outsiders will settle here as hospitals, schools, colleges too will be built.

With information technology spreading its wings like wildfire many rural areas are wired with the latest technology with the arrival of computers technology the villagers will be exposed to a horde of information once they achieve computer literacy. It is difficult to keep in check further development.

Unless the villagers as a community realize that unplanned development will include high risks of destroying the very base of farm tourism and they decide to act responsibly. Responsible tourism for sustainable eco social, cultural conservation is the modern theme for many conference and seminar. The second International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations was held in Kerala in March 2008, when the conference delegates came up with Kerala Declaration. Taking cue from these conferences whether the destination local communities will really act responsibly is a million dollar question. However in Maharashtra the Agro – Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) that is also granting financial aid
to farmers in trying to inculcate in farmers a strong sensitivity towards sustainable development. They are also creating awareness amongst the farmers about protecting farm environment and ecology that will guarantee them long run economical benefits.

With the eco agri rural tourism and its far scale development it could be a major advantage on the economic growth of any state. It could work towards the national progress of a country through upgradation of farmers, infrastructural development, employment generation.
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