

“A Study on Challenges and Opportunities of the Human Resource for the Sustainable Rural Tourism Development in Anand District of Gujarat”

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Abstract:-

This research paper is based and intensive more on the current discussion about human resource development and the challenges related to the sustainability practices at the rural destinations which are necessary to be addressed at all levels. Many studies have been conducted on the human resource challenges for the urban hotels and resorts however very few or no studies have been carried out on the rural areas especially for the Anand district of Gujarat. This paper highlights and examines the relationship between human resource development, the need for skill training, and the level of awareness about sustainability and different practices followed at the grass-root level. For this study, a Qualitative research method has been used, with the help of in-depth – semi-structured interviews of the hotel owners, employees, local community members, and tourists. The findings of the current study and in-depth discussion with the tourism stakeholders have unfolded many real-time challenges, difficulties, operational issues, manpower challenges, and even the newer possibilities and scope for the development of sustainability-based rural tourism products and services.

Keywords: - Human Resource Challenges, Sustainability, Rural Tourism, Skill Development

1) Introduction:-

Tourism development has always been viewed as a major tool and a substance for the development of any destination. The course of tourism development involves the local community, local resources, the destination, different attractions, human resources, and even the infrastructure which are some of the major components of tourism development. The availability of human resources, participation of the local community, the optimum utilization of local resources, and the sustainable development of

tourist's destination plays a major role in the development of rural destination having said that there are many major challenges and difficulties also being faced by the stakeholders and the business owners. The villages and rural areas in India hold a unique place when it comes to the social, economic, and environmental spheres. The rural development phenomenon and the growth of rural tourism is becoming more and more complex despite the technological advancement, increased facilities, and limited availability of resources especially after the post - independence period. Rural tourism development and growth has a long history in India however the researcher believes that many approaches, philosophies and the policies still needs to be examined to understand the rural tourism development in India and especially in the Anand district of Gujarat.

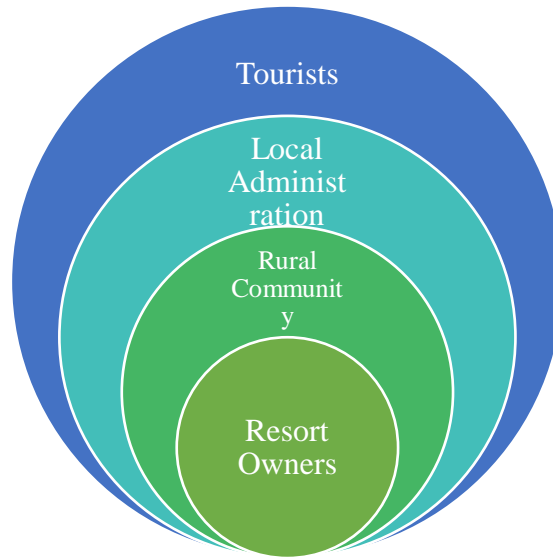
The objective of this paper is to highlight the different HR challenges being faced by the rural hotel owners, tourism stakeholders and also to understand the scope and opportunities for sustainable rural tourism development in the Anand district of Gujarat. However, the paper has also tried to highlight the current sustainable practices being followed by some of the stakeholders and the level of awareness in the tourists and the stakeholders who are directly or indirectly associated with the rural tourism in Anand district.

2) ***Rural Tourism: - The Niche Market***

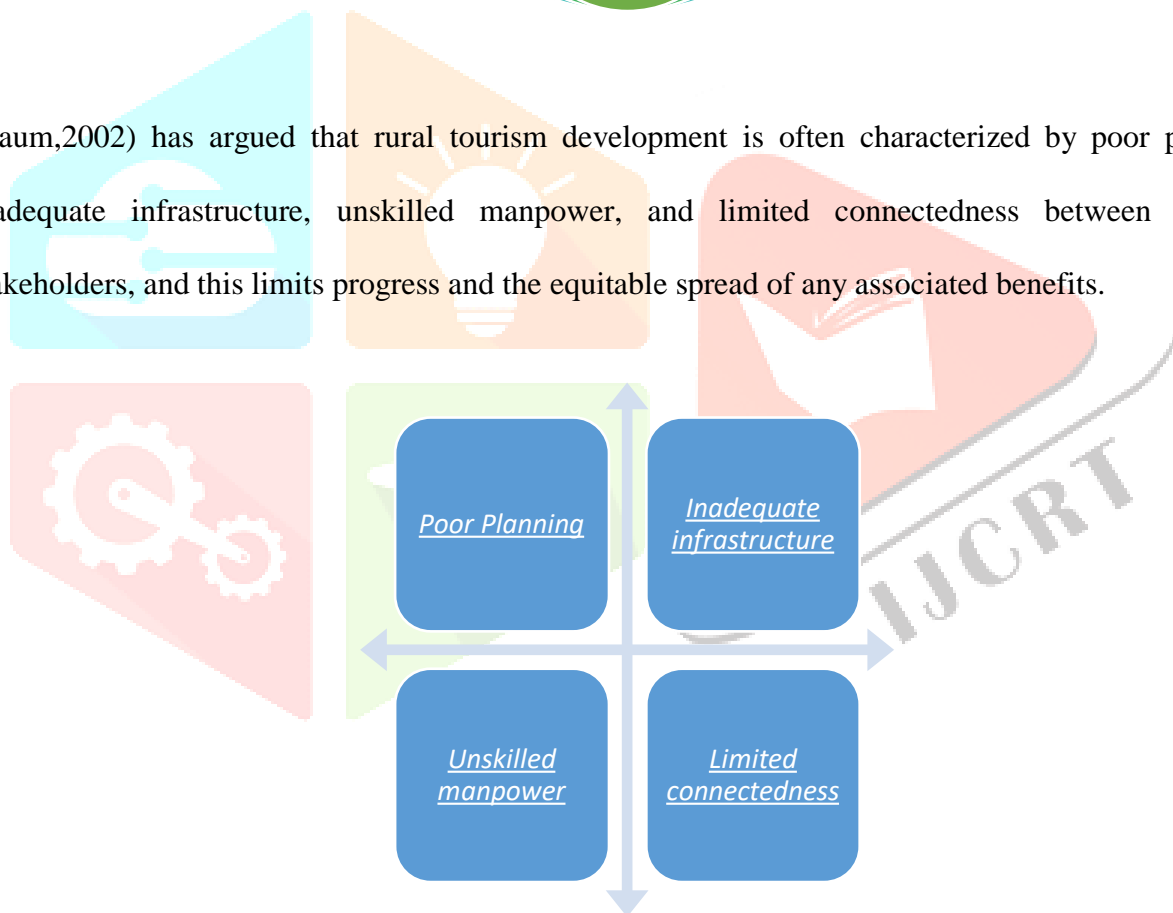
India as a country is rich in culture, heritage, and traditions, and when it comes to rural destinations it has many more to offer which is unique, basic, and authentic. Rural India is full of colors, greenery, fresh air, people with warmth even a wide range of rural art, handicraft, folk songs, folk dances, local sports activities, local recreational facilities, yoga practices, traditional and old health care system, organic food production and consumption, basic lifestyle and unique customs and cultures (Upadhye, 2015 & Pagdhare, 2011). Aurangabad being the tourism capital of Maharashtra is witnessing a sharp increase in the demand for rural tourism and a trend of urban tourists visiting the rural farm quite often has been on a sudden rise. According to the owner of Hiranaya Rural resort, in the last few years, the number of domestic tourists and their repeat visits have increased, there is also a change in the trends and demand pattern of the tourists visiting the rural resorts.

(Cawley & Gillmor, 2008 & Argent , 2011) highlighted that in the rural areas there are multiple stakeholders such as tourists, resort owners, host community, CSO's and even government

organizations and in most of the cases achieving common ground between the rural stakeholders are highly difficult which results in poor developmet and uneven growth pattern.



(Baum,2002) has argued that rural tourism development is often characterized by poor planning, inadequate infrastructure, unskilled manpower, and limited connectedness between different stakeholders, and this limits progress and the equitable spread of any associated benefits.



(Source: - Baum, 2002)

Rural tourism has always proved itself to be a growing phenomenon and Anand being rich in rural and tourism attraction adopted the local & Gujarati theme for attracting and showcasing the rural life and culture of Gujarat, Kathiavadi etc. since these tourism concepts and initiatives are resulting in a varying degree of success at the same time it also encounters many problems and issues related to human resource and sustainability.

2.1) Human Resource & Skill Development:-

No doubt the tourism industry especially when it comes to employment has a poor reputation for hiring permanent employees, offering low-grade salaries, no work-life balance, absence of career graph, and limited opportunities for career growth and development (Wood, 1995 & Baum, 2002). As the industry is growing and the demand for skilled manpower is also increasing, every tourism and hospitality firm needs to have proper mapping and recruitment methods, training programs, and a detailed career progression plan should be ready for each employee (Barron, 2008). Even the NGOs, skill development agencies, NSDC, and government-owned training centers will have a pivotal role to play to offer skilled and qualified professionals to the industry and to minimize the HR challenges being faced by the rural hotels, resorts (Swain, 2006). This paper aims to highlight the HR issues and challenges, current sustainability measures, and the level of awareness about the eco-friendly behavior in the resort owners, employees, and even the tourists visiting the rural areas of Anand.

2.2) Anand – The Milk City of India, Educational HUB of State & also Hub for Sustainable Development:-

Tourism in Anand offers a wide range and variety of tourism themes such as heritage, leisure, , pilgrimage, eco-tourism, rural tourism, and even medical tourism. In the last few years, there has been an increase in the awareness and positive response for the acceptability of sustainability in the Anand region especially in the rural areas of Bochasan(Dham), Khambhat, Vadtal (Dham), Karamsad, Borsad, Vidyanagar, etc and in the parts of rural attraction sites. The concept of sustainable development has always been viewed as an approach by which efforts are made to balance the benefits or outputs of the industry to ensure that the industry can continue to exist without depleting or destroying the resources base on which it depends (Keller, 2017). However, when we talk about sustainable rural tourism, the rural and the host community play a bigger role. Here the critical approach is the one which is in low impact, small in scale careful in development, and lower in negative impact towards the rural setup and the destination (Connor, 2013). These activities eventually result in higher local involvement, participation of the host communities in decision making, and sustainable development of the destination. Human resource and lack of skilled manpower is another

major challenge which is faced by the rural resort owners, where the absence of training and lack of professionalism can be seen in the employees working at the rural hotel & resort.

3) Research Methodology:-

The current research is based on the research questions and purpose of the study, the research has been designed to acquire information from tourism stakeholders such as rural resort owners, rural communities, and tourists regarding their views on two major aspects of this research i.e. 'challenges related to the human resource development and the scope' and 'opportunities for the growth of sustainable rural tourism development in the rural areas of Anand'. The study has also tried to examine the views of the stakeholders about the contribution of skill development for the growth of rural youths, employment generation, and awareness about sustainability and the different sustainability practices followed at the rural resorts. The research sample included the following major groups for the current study.

3.1) Hotel Owners/ Senior Managers:-

The main purpose of selecting the rural hotel owners of Anand was to understand the nature of their product, use of local theme for their hotel, resort, service type, quality, and the different facilities which are offered by them to the tourists. The study carried out a structured discussion with 12 rural employees and the senior managers who have been working with the rural farms over the last 7 years to understand their level of participation in the hotel or resort operations and the significance of achieving a higher level of guest satisfaction.

3.2) Local Residents/Rural communities:-

Local community members play a significant role in the growth and development of rural tourism in the rural areas of Anand. Local villagers of Anand are somehow directly or indirectly connected or dependent on rural tourism for employment or economic benefits. A separate interview guide was also prepared to understand the views of local people and their contribution to the overall development of sustainable rural tourism, the Sarpanch of the gram panchayat, and few villagers around 7 of them were interviewed.

3.3) Domestic/International tourists:-

Tourists and the guests who stay at the rural resorts or have availed of your services are the best assessors and they are the ones who can give authentic feedback about your product. To collect and understand their valuable feedback, experiences, and suggestions the researcher had interviewed around 5 domestic tourists from Anand city, as many of the tourists especially the ladies refused to participate.

3.4) Research approach:-

The parameters which were used for the assessments of the respondents focussed mainly on the motivation of the rural youths and the employees of the hotel, it also focussed on the nature and the content of the skill development program, as the training program which is offered by Hunar Se Rojgar, B.Voc. course in Hospitality / Tourism, Private Craft course etc is in English and many rural youths face a huge problem in understanding and learning. However in order to understand the sustainability in detail, an interview guide was used with a set of around 11 questions focussing on the sustainability practices, eco-friendly behavior, eco-friendly products used at the hotels, and the level of awareness and support they get from the tourist and the local community. The current study is mostly exploratory and endorses the qualitative research approach of primary research methodology (Malhotra, 2008 & Dworkin, 2012).

Looking at the required quality of information through the interview and discussion, a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The narrated interview data has been recorded and interpreted based on the research objective. The researcher assured all the respondents who contributed for the study that their identity and personal informations will not be revealed and a higher level of confidentiality would be maintained.

3.5) Research Question:-

How human resource development and enhancement of skills of rural youths would contribute to sustainable rural tourism development in the rural areas of Anand?

3.6) Objectives of the Study:-

- 1) *To examine and highlight the major human resource challenges & skill-related issues faced by the rural hotels / resorts in Anand.*
- 2) *To analyze the different sustainability practices and eco-friendly measures followed at the rural hotels.*

4) Results & Discussion:-

The study presents the different strategies for rural tourism and sustainability practices, some of the major findings of the study suggest and recommend the necessary actions and the possibilities for the breakthrough.

- Many respondents from all the hotels agreed that currently, the tourism industry needs skilled and competent people. It was also found that many resorts did not have specific recruitment policies and training modules for their employees.
- Many employees at the operational level pointed out the poor salary structure, and the employees also felt that there should a structured career growth plan and guidance must be provided by the HR or Owners of the resort.
- There should be a professional outlook and system in place to address some of the major issues such as lower salaries, long working hours, improper career path, poor training and development modules, and work-life balance issues etc.
- Many tourists and local community members highlighted that the local administration and resort owners must encourage local tourism development for supporting the small business at the rural level and promote the local culture, traditions, and heritage of Anand, Vidyanagar, Karamsad, Bakrol etc.
- Many local tourists also felt that the use of digital media platforms and proper advertisement of rural products can make a bigger difference in the overall growth and development of rural tourism products.
- The rural community, local administration, and the hotel owners must consider conservation and rural tourism management as the priority, and proper guided steps and mechanisms must be followed for sustainable planning and development.

- Many hotels are following the different sustainable practices such as rainwater harvesting, composite pit, plastic-free zone, solar energy, and aggressive plantation drive however few resorts are also using gobar gas plant and separate sewage treatment plant (STP plant).
- Major parts of Rural Anand are very strong in their ecosystem, which are also rich in flora, fauna and has many ponds, which can be developed as alternative walking routes, even the bicycle tourism, and camping sites can be developed near by areas.
- There is also a need to develop a structured training manual for the hotels which will enable the owners and the senior managers to conduct a structured skill-based training at their respective places.

5) Conclusion:-

The present study has attempted to highlight the significance of rural tourism for the growth of rural development through empowered rural youths and their contribution to the sustainable growth of the local area. No doubt rural tourism is developing as a new vertical of the tourism sector especially in the parts of Gujarat where Anand has seen a breakthrough over the last decade. No doubt with the strong growth in the tourism sector, the present challenges related to the skilled human resources, and quality manpower especially at the assistant level and supervisor level remain a major roadblock for the tourism and hospitality industry. It is high time, where the local administration, hotel owners, or any other NGO training institutes must come forward to develop combined and effective measures for training the youths and creating awareness about the sustainability practices at the resort and village level. The hotel owners can even think about newer additions, innovative products, sustainable and eco-friendly practices, eco-friendly products, and the constant support of the local rural community for the conservation of local heritage and the development of tourism in the rural areas of Anand, which is having potential for enormous growth.

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