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ROLE OF RURAL TOURISM IN TRANSITION OF TRIBAL ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY OF SEMADOH, MELGHAT TIGER RESERVE, AMRAVATI, MAHARASHTRA

Dr. Udhav Zarekar is an Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of Environmental Studies in Jai Hind College, Autonomous, Churchgate, Mumbai, India.

Abstract: Tribal communities around the world are grappling with major socio-economic change. They are on the cusp of the crisis in sustainable development. Tribal society is marginalized and is therefore easily transformed. Deprivation of land and forests are the oppression that these people experience. Inclusive growth is high-priority. Generation of productive and gainful employment for the tribes is crucial for inclusive growth.

Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Maharashtra are the most marginalized. They have become disadvantaged and vulnerable as a result of invasion of their territories since the era of colonisation. Urbanization and commercialization have threatened the livelihood of the tribal communities. They struggle for survival in remote and inaccessible location.

The issue of tribal work participation and unemployment is related to number of factors. As a result, tribal families regularly migrate in search of work. Tribes therefore are acculturated marginal workers in most of the regions in Maharashtra. Rural tourism has a potential to provide employment opportunities to this marginalized section of the society.

The paper is showcasing the success story of Korkus of Semadoh. The main objective of this paper is to find out the role of rural tourism in providing employment opportunities and its impact on tribal society of Semadoh. Data is been collected from field visit, personal interviews and secondary sources. Main finding and research exploration brings forth that rural tourism could effectuate the issue of unemployment of tribal community.

Index Terms: *Scheduled Tribes, Marginalization, Rural Tourism, Tribal Economy*

1. Introduction:

Rural areas are characterized with their complex, multifunctional capacities with a range of different rural spaces. They are known as multifunctional countryside not only producing food, but also sustaining rural landscapes, protecting biodiversity, generating employment and contributing to the viability of rural areas. Several key components are described as drivers of current rural development -rural tourism, cultural activities, crafts, different forms of rural entrepreneurship etc. To achieve the sustainable rural development we required the people with their skills and ideas, supportive institutions and power structures. Sustainable Rural development depends on interest and involvement of community living in that area.

Most of the tribal communities stay in rural areas. In Maharashtra, concentration of tribes is confined in three traditional regions, i.e. 1) Sahyadri Region, 2) Satpuda region, and 3) Gondwana region. The Sahyadri region consists of Thane, Raigad, Nashik and Pune districts, where Varlis, Kokanas, Thakurs, Mahadeo Kolis, Malhar Kolis, Dhor Kolis, Katkaris, etc. tribal groups are found. The Satpudas region includes Nandurbar, Dhule, Jalgaon, Aurangabad and Amravati districts and particularly, Bhils, Kokanas, Dublas, Dhankas; Korkus are the main tribal groups here. The Gondwana region includes districts like Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Yavatmal and Nagpur and Gonds, Madia Gonds, Korkus, Kolams, Paradhans, Andhs, etc. are the main tribal groups found in this region. This paper will highlight the impact of rural tourism on economic livelihood of Korku tribe of Semadoh village of Amravati district.

2. Objectives of the Study:

- To find out the role of rural tourism in providing employment opportunities and its impact on tribal society of Semadoh
- To find out socio-economic status of Korkus.

3. Methodology: Secondary data was collected from Primary Census abstract along with Special tables on Scheduled Tribes. Semadoh village of Amravati was selected for field study. Selective random sampling technique was adopted for collection of data. The collected data was further analyzed and used to support the research work.

4. Indian Scenario

The development of infrastructure in rural areas having potential for tourism is being supported under the existing scheme of destination development. The objective is to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages, which have core competence in art & craft, handloom, and textiles as also an asset base in the natural environment. The intention is to benefit the local community economically and socially as well as enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. Under this scheme, the thrust is to promote village tourism as the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and its new geographic regions, thereby stopping the exodus from rural to urban areas. The Village Level Council (VLC) is the interactive forum for local community participation in work plan implementation, further supported by other community level institutions. For the visitor, whose expenditure creates revenue for host community service providers; rural tourism adds value through packaged programmes in art & craft imparted by skilled local artisans. Village entertainment groups unveil local history and culture, natural and oral treasures. The visitor thus comes face to face with India's rural traditions. So far, 153 rural tourism projects in 28 States/Union Territories have been sanctioned by the Ministry of Tourism including 36 rural sites where UNDP has supported for capacity building.

4.1 Amravati

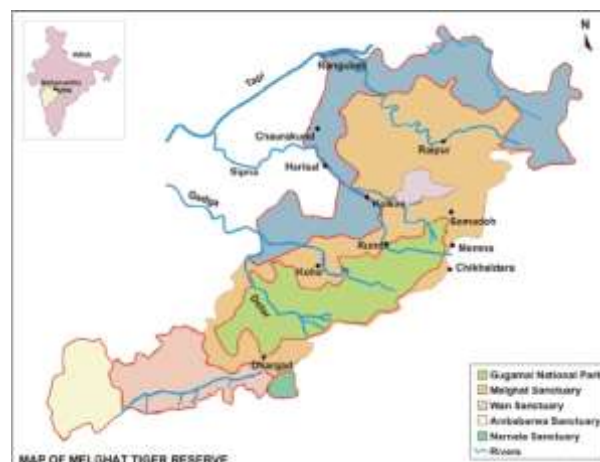
The district is situated between 20°32' and 21°46' north latitudes and 76°37' and 78°27' east longitudes. The district occupies an area of 12,235 km². The district is bounded by Betul District of Madhya Pradesh state to the north, and by the Maharashtra districts of Nagpur to the northeast, Chindwara district of Madhya Pradesh to the northeast Wardha to the east, Yavatmal to the south, Washim to the southwest, and Akola and Buldhana districts to the west.

Dharni and Chikhaldara are well known talukas of Melghat area in Amravati district. Korkus are the main Scheduled Tribe population over here. In the year 2001 their population in the district was 54.90 percent which increased to 59.58 percent in year 2011. Undulating terrain, remote isolated location from mainland with thick forest and absence of plain arable land for cultivation have resulted in less employment opportunities and unemployment in tribal society. From Dharni taluka tribal communities migrate to Madhya Pradesh as sugarcane cutter. Chikhaldara and Semadoh are rural tourist places where Korkus work in service sector jobs like waiters, cleaners, sweepers, helpers/labourers at construction sites or as tourist guides.

4.2 Melghat Tiger Reserve

Melghat Tiger Reserve is located on southern offshoot of the Satpuda hill range in Central India, called Gavilgad hill. The high ridge of Vairat (1178 m. above mean sea level.) forms the southwestern boundary of the Reserve. It is a prime habitat of the tiger. The forest is tropical dry deciduous in nature, dominated by teak *Tectona grandis*. The reserve is a catchment area for five major rivers viz. Khandu, Khapra, Sipna, Gadga and Dolar all are tributaries of the river Tapti. The northeastern boundary of the Reserve is marked by the Tapti River.

Melghat is the prime biodiversity repository of the state. Chikhaldara is located on high sudden plateau at an altitude of 1100m above mean sea level. Nature has offered protection to Melghat in the form of a rugged topography with only a few entry points. The Makhala, Chikhaldara, Chiladari, Patulda and Gugamal are the large plateaux amidst rugged terrain. Contiguity of forests in Satpuda Hill Range guarantees the long-term conservation potential of the area.



4.3 Conservation History:

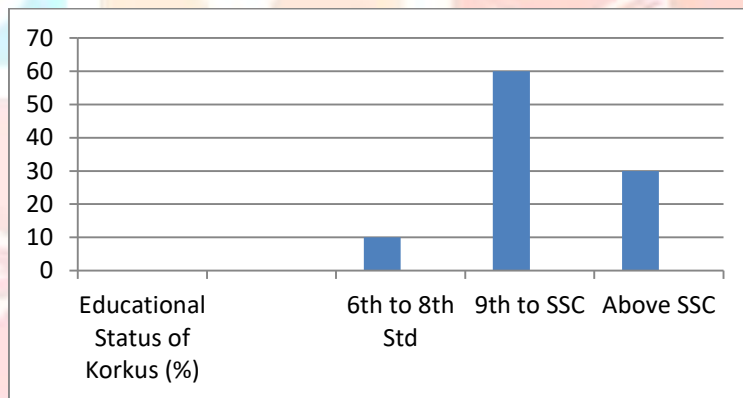
Melghat area was declared a Tiger Reserve in 1974. Presently, the total area of the Reserve is around 1677 sq. km. The core area of the Reserve, the Gugarnal National Park with an area of 361.28 sq. km., and buffer area of the Reserve, the Melghat Tiger Sanctuary with an area of 788.28 sq. km. (of which 21.39 sq. km. is non-forest), were together re-notified by the state government in 1994 as Melghat Sanctuary. The remaining area is managed as a ‘multiple use area’. Previously, Melghat Tiger Sanctuary was created in 1985 with an area of 1597.23 sq. km. Gugarnal National Park was carved out of this Sanctuary in 1987.

Semadoh is a medium size village located in Chikhaldara Taluka of Amravati district, Maharashtra with total 407 families residing. The Semadoh village has population of 1754 of which 892 are males while 862 are females as per Population Census 2011. Semadoh village has lower literacy rate compared to Maharashtra. In 2011, literacy rate of Semadoh village was 80.93 percent compared to 82.34 percent of Maharashtra. In Semadoh Male literacy stands at 89.91 percent while female literacy rate is 71.43 percent. Scheduled Tribe constitutes 65.62 percent while Schedule Caste is 9.29 percent of total population in Semadoh village. Forest on the banks of Sipna River has a presence of wild life like Tigers, Sloth bear, leopards and other animals.

5. General Observations of Korku Tourist Guides

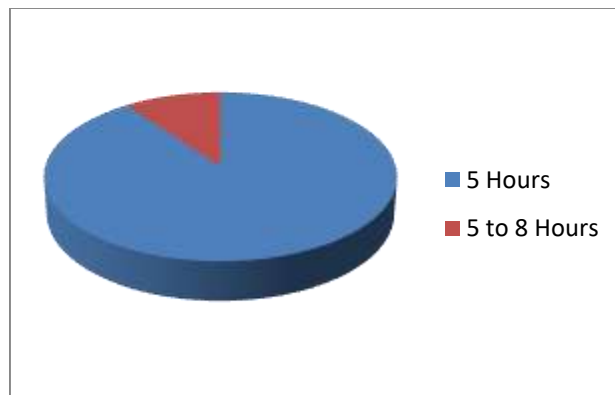
Nearly 10 percent Korku tourist guides are have passed 6th to 8th standard school education, 60 percent have cleared 9 to 10 standard level and remaining 30 percent have passed higher secondary level of education. The general level of literacy of this tribal community is still lower side. This is mainly because the villages where they stay are remote and inaccessible. In most of the villages only primary level schools are available and to get higher level education they have to migrate to nearby taluka place. Due to poverty they avoid going to such places.

As far as agricultural land holding is concerned, 65 percent of the Korku tourist guides have jirayut agricultural land and 35 percent do not have any agricultural land. Income generated from this jirayut land is not sufficient for their survival so they carry out the seasonal job of tourist guides. The nature of their job includes giving information about different places of Melghat, taking the tourist to Jungle safari and showing natural beauty of the forest.



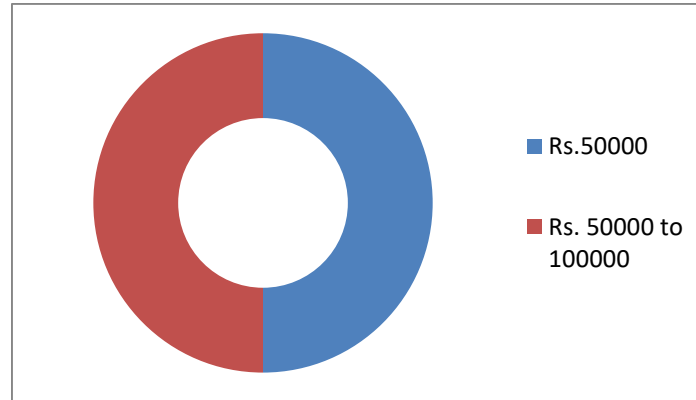
Educational Status of Tourist Guides

They are not doing the job of travel agent. At the same time nor they are not the employees of Maharashtra tourism development corporation (MTDC). But MTDC has allowed them to carry out the job of tourist guides in Melghat tiger reserve. To carry out the job they have learned the Hindi language also.



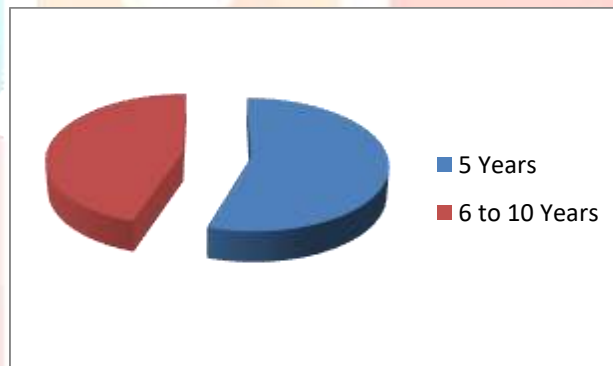
Working Hours of Tourist Guides

During the tourist season 90 percent Korku tourist guides work on an average for 5 hours and remaining guides work for more than 5 hours. Melghat tiger reserve attracts the tourists during post monsoon season. This is the time when jirayut land does not generate any employment or income for this community.



Annual Income of Tourist Guides

Melghat tiger reserve is a famous rural eco-tourism destination of Maharashtra. 50 percent Korku tourist guides earn up to Rs. 50,000 during the season and remaining 50 percent earn up to Rs. 1,00,000. This source of income has attracted Korkus to do tourist guide jobs. This job is seasonal but it has stopped their migration towards nearby urban places. Those who are not in this job have to migrate as long as Madhya Pradesh for doing non-agricultural jobs. Young Korkus are happy with this kind of income and they have understood the real potential of Melghat rural tourism. After the tourist season is over, these guides work in the forest as labour and carry out forest conservation related work. In other words, forest-based eco-tourism of Melghat has made a positive economic impact on the livelihood of Korkus of Semadoh village.



Number of Years as a Tourist Guide

Income source from this tourist spot has attracted local Korkus to be a part of this economic activity. Nearly 55 percent Korku guides are there in this job since last 5 years, and remaining 45 percent are working as long as 6 to 10 years as tourist guides in Semadoh village.

6. Final Note:

Displacement, joblessness, homelessness, and marginalisation are the common characteristics of Scheduled tribe population in Maharashtra. Rural tourism has a potential to assimilate this population in the economic development. People in Semadoh are happy to work in this service sector. There is a need to provide proper support, recognition, and training from the government side to the Korkus to enhance their skills better way. This will help to stop outmigration of Korkus and they will earn their livelihood in their village itself.

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