

Tourism and Culture: Pioneers of Development Local Rural Resort, Hodka Village (Bhuj)

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Abstract

Village or rural tourism showcases the rural culture and brings economic benefits to the communities, received a major thrust under India's 10th Five Year Plan and was accorded priority. Primary focus is given on the infrastructural and economic growth of Kutch Region in Gujarat, India that grew as a result of boom in tourism sector under Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP), a joint venture between Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT, GoI) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In this paper, Local Rural Resort, situated in Hodka Village in the state of Gujarat, is mentioned as a case study to examine the relationship between tourism service quality and destination loyalty. Various parameters such as planning & construction of the resort and its management are discussed.

Keyword- Rural Tourism, Culture, Infrastructural Growth, Local Rural Resort

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of infrastructure in rural areas having the 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 the local population for a mutually enriching experience. Under this scheme of rural tourism, 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.

Kutch, located in the State of Gujarat, is blessed with one of the most ecologically and culturally abundant landforms. The brimming profusion of nature's beauty, culture, and tradition, a superfluity of colours and celebration, a cornucopia of joy and beauty, all together reflect the magnificence of the kaleidoscopic Kutch. Particularly, the spectacular sight of the boundless white desert under the moonlight presents the stunning creation of nature, unique to this world.

II. NEED OF STUDY

Kutch region consists of many areas and villages that are not under any revenue record of Government of India. There are still 19 Gram Panchayats in India that have not been surveyed till date from independence. Hodka Village Gram Panchayat near the White Desert is one among them. Kutch celebrates Rann Utsav due to which there is a high intake of tourists increasing the economy of the Kutch region. This festival has impacted many surrounding villages in various ways. There is a shift of family business of these communities. Also, these villages have a vivid cultural heritage, so there is a need to understand the effect of Rann Utsav on the socio-economic and cultural lives of these surrounding villages.

III. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- To understand the economic and tourism growth due to Rann Utsav in Banni area of Kutch.
- To understand the planning of local rural resorts which are promoting the traditional construction techniques of Kutch.

IV. TOURISM OF KUTCH, GUJARAT

In 2005, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat visited Rann of Kutch and he saw the potential in the area to attract tourism. So he came up with the idea of Rann Utsav and today Rann of Kutch works as a major magnet for tourism in the entire state of Gujarat. The main motto was to develop the infrastructure of Kutch keeping in mind the natural surroundings and culture of the area.

Under Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP), a joint venture between the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT, GoI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), special thrust was imparted to rural tourism, where sizeable assets of our

culture and natural wealth exist. Also, the Incredible India marketing campaign launched in 2002 by the MoT, GoI had successfully catapulted India into the global tourism market.

Villages surrounding Rann has 6-8 resorts, few home stays, shops etc. for tourism attraction. The infrastructure of these villages glorifies its deep histories and skill commencements, unconventional type of living of different communities.

V. INFRASTRUCTURAL AND ECONOMICAL GROWTH OF KUTCH

Before 2005, Kutch was a backward region with inadequate roads, water and electricity facilities. Today, there is the use of solar energy for electricity, reverse osmosis for water and government has developed world-class road facilities connecting every nook and corner of that region.

Due to Rann Utsav, many local craftsmen, artisans, carpenters, weavers, potters, handicraft worker have got great employment opportunities to showcase their talent and skills. The villages also have started their own businesses in terms of hospitality and handicraft and handloom shops. It also attracts foreign tourists and thus adding to the economy of the country. Gujarat's tourism inflow grew from 38.3 million in FY16 to 44.8 million in FY17.

Facilities like high schools, ATMs, better transport connectivity, milk booth, petrol pumps have also developed in the past decade. The 'Khushboo Gujarat Ki' campaign by celebrity Amitabh Bachchan has increased tourism in Gujarat by 14 percent per annum.

<i>TOURIST ARRIVAL Financial Year 17</i>		
	<i>Tourist (Million)</i>	<i>Year-on-year growth %</i>
<i>Within Gujarat</i>	<i>32.4</i>	<i>14.98</i>
<i>Other Indian States</i>	<i>11.4</i>	<i>22.1</i>
<i>Total Domestic (A)</i>	<i>43.8</i>	<i>16.76</i>
<i>NRI</i>	<i>0.52</i>	<i>22.58</i>
<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>0.41</i>	<i>31.03</i>
<i>Total NRI/Foreigners (B)</i>	<i>0.92</i>	<i>26.14</i>
<i>Overall (A+B)</i>	<i>44.8</i>	<i>16.94</i>

Table 1: Growth in Tourism
(Source: www.business-standard.com)

VI. THE BANNI REGION

Banni, the largest and finest stretch of grassland in India (2617 sq. km) and the second largest in Asia, is located on the northern border of Bhuj taluka of Kachchh district at the westernmost end of Gujarat State (GUIDE 2011). Banni means made-up in Kachchhi language, as the name suggests this area is made by the sedimentation of alluvial soil brought by rivers, centuries ago it was also a part of great rann.

Banni has a rich flora and fauna, once upon a time, it had more than 40 species of grass which has now reduced to 15-16 species. Also over 273 species of birds have been reported from Banni, out of which 107 are migratory species (GIDE 2002). The dominant residents of this area are the Maldharis (cattle breeders) or Baniyaras who all practice Islam. There are 15-20 Maldhari Muslim casts in Banni and it is believed that they have migrated from Iran side. The main livelihood of these people is on dairy products. But after the start of Raan Utsav new opportunities have opened up for this community.

VII. THE HODKA VILLAGE

Hodka is a village positioned in Bhuj Block of Kutch district in Gujarat. It is one of 149 villages in Bhuj and it is situated in the Banni region of Bhuj. According to Census 2011, Hodka's population is 2132 with 399 homes. This village has majorly influenced the presence of Raan Utsav. People in this village along with other nearby villages to Raan Utsav have got an alternate profession in the hospitality business.

Hodka represents the heart of Banni and showcases the art, architecture, culture, and lifestyle of the region. The Hodka Jheel has six hamlets (also called vandhs). The typical architecture of this region is represented by the local structures called bhungas which are circular mud structures with thatch roofs and are said to be the most appropriate for the harsh conditions that this region presents.

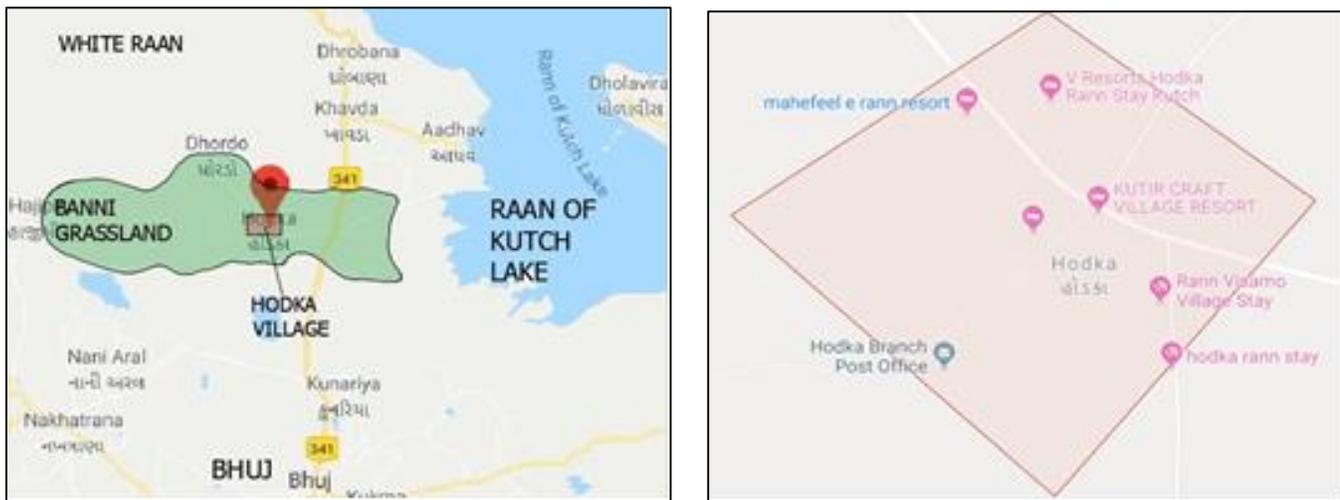


Fig. 1: Location of Banni Region and Hodka Village

VIII. INITIATION OF DEVELOPMENT IN HODKA

In 2004, Hodka was shortlisted by the then District Collector, to be considered under the UNDP's ETP. Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) was considered as the nodal agency for the same project, with support from Sahjeevan, an NGO that had been working in this region since 1991, earlier as the Janvikas Ecology Cell. Sahjeevan works closely with KMVS. Both organizations were very clear that the idea could be implemented only if the local community was agreeable to it. Thus emerged the idea of establishing a community-managed tourism initiative.

At the very outset, when this initiative was proposed, the two organizations held a meeting with the Gram Panchayat. The original idea was to support community-based homestays in Hodka. Initially, this idea was not that appreciated by the villagers because they have a tradition to keep their guests in *baithak* (sitout) outside their homes. But the villagers showed their faith in this new idea and hence the development of homestays, resorts, shops etc. came into the picture.

IX. RURAL RESORTS OF HODKA

Since 2005 many traditionally crafted rural resort have been constructed from Hodka village. Offering to stay in traditional huts with grass thatch roof, locally called *Bhunga*. Hodka is surrounded by an area of impressive natural beauty and it makes this Village an ideal location from which one can discover the captivating lands of Kutch.

A. Locational Aspects

Local rural resorts are situated in Hodka Village located in the district of Kutch in the state of Gujarat in India, it is about 20 Km far from Tent City of Kutch. It lies at the distance of 63 km from Bhuj, 20 km from White Rann, 40 km from Chhardhand and 50 km from Black Hill. The village is slowly becoming as hot as the rural tourism destination.

B. Planning

The planning of these local resorts are done in such a way that it provides an essence of local village culture. These resorts have traditional *bhungas* and tents planned in a cluster form having common sit-out spaces to give essence of villages. This resorts have designated spaces given for cultural activities, such as traditional dance and music performances. Some resorts also have shops and restaurants to attract passing by tourists.



Fig. 2: Cluster of Bhunga

C. Construction of Bhungas

Bhungas was a local circular hut which was being constructed in Kutch region from time immemorial. Ever since the Raan Utsav started these traditional structures came into limelight and are very popular amongst tourist.

Bhungas & Tents are meticulously constructed in the traditional way. At first stone wall is constructed then on that 5-6mm mud and cow dung plaster is done after that wooden frame is constructed for roofing over which thatch is kept to cover the roof. It takes about 25-27 days to construct a bhunga and its cost around three lakhs per bhunga including labour, material and construction cost.



Fig. 3: Front View of Bhunga

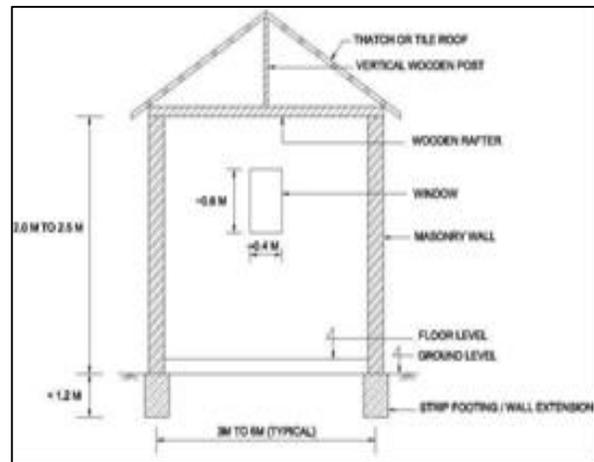


Fig. 4: Section of Bhunga

D. Materials

The materials used in the resort are mud plaster, Perdi stone, paint colors, precast pillars etc. The mud plaster at walls is called Lipan while at floors is called Lipi. It is made in ratio of one part cow dung to one part mud. The plaster thickness is 5-6 mm and this is very effective in stopping heat transfer. Heat transfer in mud takes 12-13 hours, hence the temperature of Bhungas remains cold during day time and warm during night. The stone used in walls is bought from Mandvi and Precast columns are delivered from Bhuj. All the bhungas are traditionally crafted with interior mud work and decorated with traditional cloth patch works and local paintings and mirror work on the wall, beautifully decorated feature en-suite bathroom facilities.



Fig. 5: Wooden roof with vibrant colors



Fig. 6: Mirror work on walls

E. Services

For water supply, resort owners use water from government channels only. For garbage disposal government does not provide door to door picking so they have created a pit in their own site where they dispose of degradable waste and they occasionally burn non-degradable waste. They use drainage and electricity supply provided by government.

F. Maintenance

Generally resort management have a team of 8-9 permanent employees from the nearby villages, which helps them in maintaining the resort. The period for tourism is the winter season starting from October to March end. During summer the salt desert melts and hence no tourist come. This is a time when maintenance work of generally done for bhungas.

After rainy season repair of the thatch roof is done along with lipan (plastering) done on mud walls. Even during peak time of the season some repair of mud flooring is required.



Fig. 7: Students of SVNIT, Surat conversing with public representatives of Hodka village

G. Revenue

The cost of one bhunga and tent per night ranges around 3000 to 5000 rupees including food. There are generally 12-15 bhungas and tents in a resort and the maximum capacity is 30-32 persons and if it's a group like a college or school group then about 50-60 person can be accommodated. The business for rural resorts runs for 6 months out of which approximately for 2 months the resorts are on its full-fledged capacity.

Also the maintenance cost is high for these traditional style bhungas. The overall cost of maintenance is divided into 5 years because few things need yearly maintenance and a few monthly. After the removing all the overhead cost, maintenance, and staff salary, the profit on an average in one season is about 6-7 lakh rupees. In the off-season, cattle farming and dairy business are adopted for livelihood. It takes around 60-65 lakhs in constructing one Resort. The hospitality business is quite profitable for rural villagers of Kutch it also involves youth and women of the families.

X. CONCLUSION

Community-based tourism opens the door for the rural public to get into tourism business, it not only involves them but also encourages their cultural heritage. They become more aware of their own culture and how they can preserve it for future generation. At the same time, their heritage becomes a revenue-generating source.

The encouraging flow of tourist plays a major role in economic and infrastructural development. In Kutch region decision of doing Raan Utsav have not only promoted white Raan and its vivid culture but also created new opportunities for the nearby surrounding villages. This festival has created many jobs and alternative business option for the rural public. There was of 49% increase of foreign tourist from 2002 to 2014(GITCO Annual report 2014-15), and the flow have only increased till date.

Local rural resorts are a result of constant initiatives taken by the government and increased tourist flow in this deserted place. Such resorts and homestays create self-employment for many other villages. Indeed flow of tourism becomes pioneers for new development.

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