

Pro- Poor Tourism as an Approach towards Community Development: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Pro-Poor Tourism is an innovative idea in tourism sector that has been introduced to strengthen economic well being of communities. It emphasizes work participation of poorer people of the society, makes them engaged in employment and self-help sector and establishes a synthesis between development of tourism by upgrading the degree of livelihood status of poor people so that poverty eradication is possible and socio economic status of poor people is improved. Thus, it encourages poor people to participate more effectively in their developmental processes. Active participation in this field includes sincere participation in work for all poor people ranging from different local communities and belonging to below poverty line of an area. Strategies have been developed to implement this sort of tourism in backward but tourism potential areas in several developing countries in order to generate local employment, resource utilization and management in particular. Investment from different level is encouraged to micro level development to pull tourists to enhance economic prosperity and social interaction with communities in this innovative approach. Here, the ultimate objective is to achieve the net benefits that go in favor of poor people. The paper highlights about the tourism potential of *Cooch Behar* district of West Bengal as an area of study and seeks to introduce and develop Pro-poor tourism to improve the living standard of poor communities as well as rejuvenate local economy.

KEYWORDS : *Pro Poor, Community Development, Tourism Potential*

INTRODUCTION

Pro-poor tourism concept is a newly introduced developmental strategy in tourism geography. It is one of the important approaches for the development of backward and poor classes of the society in the underdeveloped and developing countries of the world. It does not only strengthen local economy but also engage people in work participation actively with interest and devotion. This sort of approach from those people is an important indicator in societal and economic development of an area. Pro-poor tourism helps poor people of the society to acquire a new identity of livelihood and survival, and to get proper honor in so called civilized society through active engagement in work and decision making processes.

The introduction of 'Pro-poor tourism' concept is the result of partial failure of nature based tourism regarding development of poor classes of the society. Consequently, human development of poor people comes into consideration as a challenge to developing and third world countries. The district of *Cooch Behar* has a rich and deep historical background. Each and every stone of the district has a story to tell about its past. The past is endowed with untold mysteries, suspense and explored the rare jewels of the district. The rulers of the area contributed a lot in the growth of its rich culture and heritage, which of late has been a source of constant attraction for the visitors. The glamour and elegance of glorious past are

reflected through the palace, temples etc. built by different rulers in space-time lattice. These moments of the vigorous past carry and tell the story of their inception, beauty, grace, love, passion, art and architecture. Pro poor tourism does not only help to know about an area from the very beginning and the splendor that the area once enjoyed simultaneously opens income opportunities to the local poor. That is why; the paper highlights the opportunities generated from this tourism potential district considering community development particularly for poor people to strengthen local and regional economy via tourism promotion.

OBJECTIVE

The main objectives of the paper are the following:-

- 1) To provide brief concept about pro poor tourism.
- 2) To highlight history oriented tourist attractions in the area.
- 3) To show poverty and human development scenario of the study area
- 4) To make access to economic opportunities for community development through introduction of pro-poor tourism in the area.

DATABASE

Primary data have been collected mainly from field survey. In addition secondary data have also been collected from different books and journals, internet websites, tourism department and different Govt. offices.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The name “*Cooch Behar*” is the combination of two words- “*Cooch*” and “*Behar*”. The word “*Cooch*” has been derived from the word “*Cooch Rajbongshi*” – a group of people and “*Behar*” denotes the meaning of travel that means once the area was endowed by *Koch-Rajbongshi* people and they roamed about here. Maharaja *Naranarayan* mainly ruled this area since 16th century and his kingdom named *Kamatapur* around the town of *Koch Behar* was unaffected even after battle of *Plassi* in 1757. Since *Naranarayan* did not have a son, *Raghudev*- nephew of *Naranarayan*, was apparently seen as the heir of him in the historical chain. Although *Naranarayan* got a late child named *Lakshinarayan* and when *Raghudev* realized that *Lakshinarayan* would be the king of Koch Dynasty, he revolted for which *Naranarayan* compelled to divide his dynasty into two part- *Koch Behar* and *Koch Hajo*. *Lakshinarayan* became the king of *Koch Behar* and *Raghudev* became the king of *Koch Hajo*.

Tourism potential of Cooch Behar district: - In this section, a comparative analysis has been made on some selected history oriented tourist places of North Bengal. A few parameters have been chosen for determination of the composite index highlighting the tourist potential of the places under consideration. The general hypothesis is that higher the value of composite index, higher will the tourist potential and vice-versa.. The analysis may vary from person to person based on individual's preference, choice and interest.

LOCATION

Cooch Behar District is located between 25°57' N to 26°32' N and 88°47' E to 89°54' E. It is surrounded by Assam in the east, *Jalpaiguri* and Bangladesh in the west, *Jalpaiguri* in the north and Bangladesh in the south. The entire area of the district is 3387 sq.km.

GEOGRAPHICAL SET-UP

Cooch Behar, being situated nearer to the foothills of eastern Himalaya, experiences monsoonal moderate climatic features followed by heavy rainfall in the rainy season. The average temperature of summer is about 26°C and 15°C during the winter season with more or less 80% of relative humidity throughout the year. The area is characterized by alluvial deposits with foundation of igneous and metamorphic rock in a few places. Geographically the area has been bearing a strategic location with Bangladesh. The floral and faunal

association of this part includes palms, Bamboos, Ferns, Fungi etc. and a number of local and migratory birds respectively. The area is watered by important river like *Tista*, *Torsa*, *Jaldhaka*, *Raidak* etc.

TOURISM ATTRACTIONS OF COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

Cooch Behar Palace: The palace was built in 1887 following classical European style in order to rule Koch dynasty by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan. The interior decoration of it was completed in 1898. The length and width of the palace are 400 feet and 300 feet respectively with a monument of 120 feet height. This magnificent royal structure of marble with its beautiful garden has been bearing the story of its glorious past.

Night View of Cooch Behar Palace Day View of Cooch Behar Palace



Madan Mohan Temple: *Madan Mohan* (kuldevata of the Koch dynasty), *Matara* and *Mabhavani* were established by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan in 1889, based on which the famous *Rashmela* is celebrated. Although the original Madan Mohan has been stolen and a new has been placed instead of the original one. The temple is still an attraction of Hindu tourist and pilgrims.

Madan Mohan Temple



Rajpath Mount: It is located 35 km. away from the town Cooch Behar wherein remnants of a palace protected by ASI (Archaeological Survey of India) can be noticed.

Shiva temple of Baneswar: According to some historians, the Shiva temple of *Baneswar* was set up by *Nilambar* –a king of *Sen Dynasty*. It is located 10 km. away from the Cooch Behar town and it has a *Shivalinga* at 10 feet below the plinth level. The height of the temple is 35 feet and width is 31 feet. In addition, the temple has a pond with a large number of tortoises which is one of the major attractions of the tourists

Shiva Temple of Baneswar



Madhupurdham: *Madhupurdham*, another tourist spot in this district is located 10 km. North-West of Cooch Behar town. The famous saint of *Baishnaba* community, *Shankardeva* expired here and at this place, he translated *Srimatbhagabata*. A temple has been built here to honor to that great saint by Maharaja *Naranarayan*.

MADHUPURDHAM



Kamteswari Temple: About 30 km. away from Cooch Behar town, there is a village named 'Gosanimari'. It has a famous temple named *Kamteswari* which was built by Maharaja Pran Narayanan in 1665 in order to worship *Devi Kamta*. The temple is 45 feet in height and 29 feet in width. Although the main temple was destroyed long time before, the present have been bearing the imprint of Maharaja *Pran Narayanan*.

Rasomati: *Rasomati* is recently developed eco-tourism complex having both residential and migratory birds. It is a picnic spot also having paddle boating facilities for tourist. There is also the arrangement of Jungle safari to attract the tourists.

Rasikbil: It is a well known bird sanctuary, located 42 km. from the Cooch Behar town, protected and managed by Cooch Behar forest division. The area is also eco-tourism spot having a lot of aquatic birds, wetlands, mammals etc.

Kholta : It is a another eco-tourism spot of this district, located 20 km. away from the Cooch Behar town. It has children park, deer park, tea plantation surrounded by *Arai Kumari* rivulet.

Baikuntapur: *Baikuntapur* is located 8 km. north-east from the Cooch Behar town. It was basically the residence of ministers of the Koch Dynasty. They had there own temple of *Sri Krishna and Balaram*. In every year, in the month of March festivals based on *Doljatra* are celebrated here.

Siddheswari Temple: Siddheswari Temple is notable for its exceptional character which is not noticed in another temple of the district. To see the idol of *Shiva-Kali*, one has to enter downstairs in darkness downward. Naturally it demands distinctiveness in comparison to other spots. Apart from the stated spots *Nripendra Narayan Park, Ranir Bagan, Baradevi, Anathnath* Shiva Temple etc. are other remarkable tourist attractions in this district. In this section a comparative analysis has been made on some selected historical tourist places of North Bengal. A few parameters have been chosen for determination of the composite index highlighting the tourist potential of the places. The general hypothesis is that higher the value of composite index, higher is the tourist potential and vice-versa. The analysis may vary from person to person based on individual's preference, choice and interest.

Composite Index of Historical Tourism potential of selected places of North Bengal

Tourist Spots	Historical Attractions	Accessibility	Fooding & Lodging	Marketing	Administrative Facilities	Adventure and Entertainment	Composite index
Cooch behar	2	4	4	3	4	1	18
Baneswar	1	3	2	1	1	1	9
Buxa Fort	1	2	1	1	1	3	9
Jalpesh Mandir	2	2	2	2	1	1	10
Bangarh	2	2	2	1	1	1	9
Gour Malda	2	3	2	1	2	1	11
Adina	2	3	2	1	2	1	11
Pundua	2	3	2	1	2	1	11
Bhupalpur	1	3	2	1	1	1	9
Ramkheli	2	3	2	1	2	1	11

Source: Computed by Authors

POVERTY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

Since the history of mankind, poverty has been playing a constant presence, the causes of which are manifold. The definition of poverty is controversial and has several dimensions but basically it is viewed from the economic dimension by differentiating income-consumption approach person to person and place to place. Two broad concepts of poverty have been recognized—Absolute and Relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the minimum sets of resources a person requires for survival and Relative poverty implies the degree of living standard as compared to others. The measurement of poverty is a complex phenomenon and varies country to country. As stated earlier, poverty is basically economy-based, economic inequality is considered as a measure of poverty as well as backwardness. Despite having a number of dimensions like sociological or psychological, economic aspect of it is always emphasized as all the other dimensions have its own limitations and ultimately that link with economy. As per Indian Rural Development Report, 1999, the state of West Bengal belonged one of the poverty prone state in India. If the spatial variation of poverty in West Bengal is considered, there is again found disparity as per NSS reports where it has been noticed that the poverty ratio is 31% in West Bengal Central Plain, 43% in West Bengal Western Plains, 58.7% in West Bengal Himalayan Parts and 41.7% in West Bengal Eastern Parts. While measuring the poverty in the said district, following indicators have been used to interpret the poverty situation in the district.

- a) *Alarming Population Growth*
- b) *Lower literacy rate*

c) *Regional Inequalities*

d) *Human Development Index and Gender Development Index*

a. Alarming Population Growth

Increasing population growth due to natural increase and illegal immigration for its border side location is one of major causes of poverty in the district. Positive growth of population as indicated in the table-1 has enhanced unemployment, per capita consumption of resource available which ultimately lead to poverty to a significant extent. Interestingly, it is noticed that in 1901, the rural and urban population of the district respectively were 5, 51,056 and 14,060. And in 2001, these become respectively are 2253537 and 225618. Therefore, a tremendous growth of population in the district particularly in the rural areas is keenly identified due to the reasons as stated earlier.

Table 1: Population Growth of Cooch Behar District

Year	Total population	Urban population	Rural population
1901	565116	14060	551056
1911	591012	15794	575218
1921	590599	17261	573338
1931	589053	18030	571023
1941	638703	26821	611882
1951	668949	50180	618769
1961	1019806	71446	948360
1971	1414183	96652	1317531
1981	1771643	122260	1649383
1991	2171145	169497	2001648
2001	2479155	225618	2253537

Source: District Statistical Handbook, 2006

b. Lower literacy rate

Education is considered as the one of the fundamental indicators of well being of people for which nation-based several program have been taken and implemented and it can not be denied that literacy rates have been progressing spatially in the country, but it can not also be denied that a significant portion of people are still away from the holy touch of education despite the nation-wide educational strategies. The study area is not exception from it. Here, the general literacy rate is 66.30% among which male literacy rate is 75.93% and female literacy rate is 56.12% (Table-2). Therefore, Women participation rate in case of acquiring education in the district is significantly lower as compared to men which directly influences the socio-economic status and unemployment of them. In addition question always arises regarding the quality of education and it is true every where as it does not only bring income opportunities, simultaneously helps to derive personality which determines the status of an individual. The study area has been suffering both from qualitative and quantitative educational infrastructure.

Table 2: Status of Literacy in Cooch Behar District

Total literate	1,386,965	Literacy rate	66.30
Male	816,196	Male	75.93
Female	570,769	Female	56.12

Census of India, 2001

c. Regional Inequalities

Regional imbalance in terms of basic needs of human being is a common feature of Indian society and in the study area, this disparity is prominent, often it is found that development

has been taking place within the city-region, but basic services to the rural poor are often neglected. Therefore, the degree of poverty has been growing steadily in rural areas.

d. Human Development Index and Gender Development Index

In addition, Human Development Report, West Bengal also presents a picture of disparity (Table -3). Being one of the districts with low income index, it also reflects low work force participation of women which indicates broader restriction to women's economic participation as well as empowerment of them. Thus, the district has been facing degrading gender development (Table-3).

Table 3: Human and Gender Development Indices of Districts of West Bengal

	Health Index	Income Index	Education Index	HDI	HDI Rank	GDI	Rank
Darjeeling	0.73	0.49	0.72	0.65	4	0.600	2
Jalpaiguri	0.61	0.38	0.6	0.53	10	0.492	11
Cooch Behar	0.5	0.41	0.65	0.52	11	0.471	13
Dinajpur	0.62	0.39	0.53	0.51	13	0.478	12
Malda	0.49	0.36	0.48	0.44	17	0.416	17
Murshidabad	0.57	0.29	0.52	0.46	15	0.423	16
Birbhum	0.53	0.27	0.61	0.47	14	0.435	14
Bardhaman	0.74	0.47	0.71	0.64	5	0.560	7
Nadia	0.65	0.41	0.66	0.57	9	0.506	9
North 24 Parganas	0.72	0.49	0.76	0.66	3	0.564	6
Hugli	0.77	0.46	0.67	0.63	6	0.581	3
Bankura	0.67	0.26	0.62	0.52	11	0.494	10
Purulia	0.61	0.18	0.55	0.45	16	0.424	15
Medinipur	0.68	0.45	0.74	0.62	7	0.578	4
Haora	0.77	0.53	0.75	0.68	2	0.570	5
Kolkata	0.82	0.73	0.8	0.78	1	0.642	1
South 24 Parganas	0.71	0.4	0.68	0.6	8	0.521	8
West Bengal	0.7	0.43	0.69	0.61		0.549	

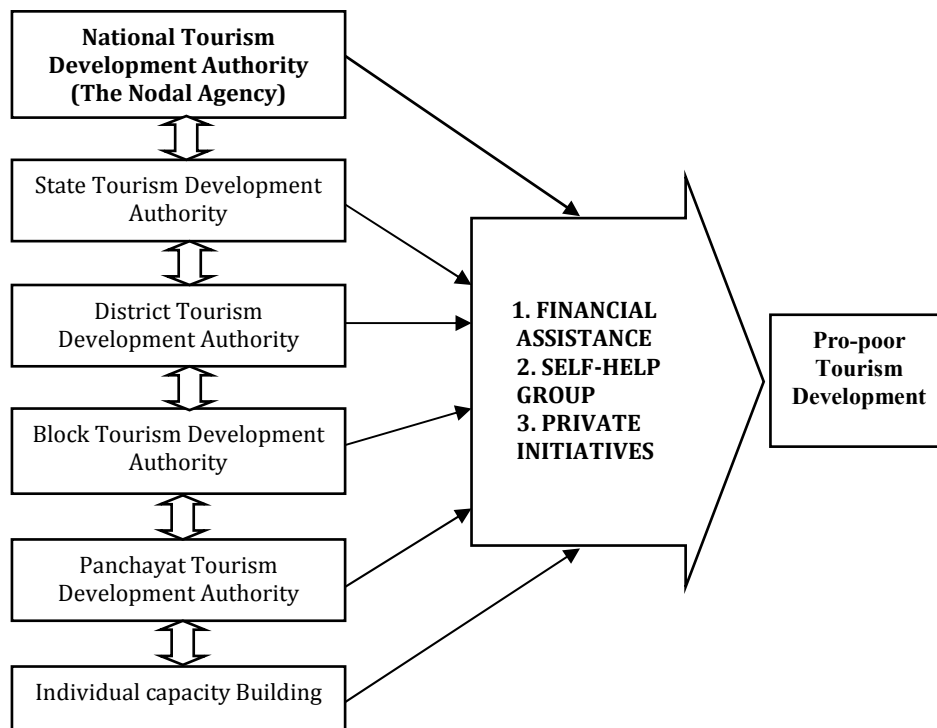
Source : West Bengal Human Development Report, 2004

The above table of HDI and GDI indicates that the district of Cooch Behar ranks 11th and 13th in case of Human Development and Gender Development respectively out of 17 districts in the state. In case of Rural Employment, the district has been suffering a lot since partition as population growth has been steadily rising in the district due to its border side location. Thus, the immigrants coming in the district causes problems to the local deprived groups. Farming has been the main source of livelihood of the rural population of Cooch Behar district. Poor sections of the rural society are basically involved in transport, agriculture, small shops and labor in construction. Being located nearer to the international border, a significant population of it is semi permanent in nature that brings temporal revenue to the total economy. As per WBHDR 2004, it has been found that there is spatial disparity in the field of rural poverty and human development over the state. Even, within the district, picture is not uniform one. Inter-village disparities due to low level economic progress and human development has resulted increasing number of deprived residents of a few district and Cooch Behar is one of them. Analyzing the entire dimension of poverty and human development through increasing population growth with retreating HDI and GDI of the district, it is clear and evident that the people particularly who are residing in the rural areas need development. This community development may lead to the reduction in the intra

district regional imbalance and poverty. But what should be the strategy to achieve this? Already NREGA and several rural developmental activities are going on but the ultimate and real development is hardly possible. Therefore, an innovative idea through tourism development by identifying potential areas for its development with participation of rural people only in this sector has been highlighted. This concept of tourism does not only emphasize the participation of rural people, but also provide income opportunities by building their individual capacity via a few efforts.

INTRODUCTION OF PRO-POOR TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The following diagram analyses how can a chain interaction from Central to Panchayat level help to mobilize local people in tourism activity by building their capacity in this work providing financial assistance both from Government and Private level and also suggest for its implementation. Apart from this, this schematic diagram also indicates native people may be responsible to keep the local environment attractive to the tourists.



While analyzing this diagram, it should be mentioned that different Governmental enterprises may take responsibility by providing financial support to introduce self-help program like sale of local industrial product, handicrafts, income generation by native cultural program by women, setting up hotels and restaurants by native poor people , tour operation by local youth etc. Similar activities may be performed by the people of tourism potential areas without the assistance as stated earlier .In this case they have to be educated and sincere applying their work force for earning. In addition, Private enterprises, NGOs may help the poor people by introducing the same for multi-tier benefits that go in favor of both investors as well as economically weaker people to improve the rural economy.

SUMMARY

The entire discussion relates tourism development for betterment of living standard of poor rural people which may be achieved through sets of network with effective, sincere and transparent participation of rural work force for development of tourism potential areas. This leads to know a place since its beginning ,seeks to utilize resource base of a place sustainably, provides income opportunities, builds individual capacity and ultimately reduces regional backwardness and brings rural development keeping in mind that the rural parts of the country are enough potential for generating Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country , if properly utilized.

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