1. RURAL TOURISM- A CATALYST TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

Overview

In 2019, the sector contributed around 10.4 % to global GDP, generated 330 million employees worldwide, and accounted for 27.4 % of global services exports. However, the sector now contributes only 4.7 % to GDP, 7.3 % to total employment, and 2.5 % to total exports. The fact that the Services sector contributes 55 % to the Indian economy, makes the tourism industry even more crucial for the country's overall economic growth.

India holds only a 1.2 % share of the international tourism market (2019) as against Spain (5.7 %), the USA (5.4 %), China (4.5 %), the UK (2.7 %) and Thailand (2.7 %). Countries like the UK and USA have only 34 and 24 World Heritage sites, respectively, but their foreign exchange earnings from Tourism are much higher than India, which has 40 World Heritage sites.

Spectrum of Tourism Policy

- In 1963, the *Ad hoc committee on tourism* in its elaborate report acknowledged the need to understand and foreground the folklore of the land and the names of many sites of prominence.

- Government of India (GoI) announced its first tourism policy in November 1982 to promote sustainable tourism as a means of economic growth and social integration, as well as to portray India overseas as a country with a rich heritage, a dynamic present, and a promising future. This coincided with the sixth five-year plan launched in 1980.

- A National Action Plan for Tourism was launched in 1992. The action plan pledged that tourism would be developed in a manner that preserves the cultural expression and heritage of India in all its manifestations, including support for arts and culture.

  o A proposal was made to convert a large number of *Havelis* into hotels that would render assistance in the preservation of the national heritage, and this was done by retaining their original identity.

  o Following the success of the Surajkund Crafts Fair, Faridabad and Shilpgram, Udaipur, it was further recommended to identify similar sites where traditional art and crafts in the region could be preserved and promoted. Traditional fairs like Pushkar Mela, Sonepur Cattle Mela, and Alleppey Boat Race were given liberal financial assistance for further development.

- The National Tourism Policy of 2002 coincided with the commencement of the 10th five-year plan. *Rural tourism as a concept was launched in 2002*. In the tenth five-year plan (2002-07), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) launched a pilot initiative to develop rural tourism in India through the Planning Commission.

  o Under the policy, seven key areas were identified: *Swagat (welcome), Suchana (information), Suvidha (facilitation), Suraksha (safety), Sahyog (cooperation), Samrachana (infrastructure development), and Safai (cleanliness)*. It called for the expansion of cultural tourism and the active promotion of rural tourism.

  o A national register of key cultural sites was to be maintained.

  o The phrase "Incredible India" was adopted under this policy to create an international brand position for India.

- The Ministry of Tourism launched an initiative *Atithi Devo Bhava*, taken from Shikshavalli of the Taittiriya Upanishad, which translates to "Guests are like God" in 2008 to teach the local populace about appropriate behavior and etiquette when dealing with foreign visitors. The objectives are twofold:

- o to ensure that the rural citizenry are all well informed and educated of the need to preserve India's priceless heritage and culture, and maintain cleanliness at home while extending hospitality and a warm welcome to visitors and tourists.
  - o and more crucial objective is to stall negative and unfriendly practices in existence; like the display of resentment towards tourists and the unchecked and endless looting of visitors (especially those from abroad).

- Prior to the launch of the Swadesh Darshan scheme, Product Infrastructure Development for Destinations and Circuits (PIDDC) was the major tourist infrastructure development scheme of the GoI. The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Development Component, which is part of the PIDDC specifically focused on the development of rural tourism in India. It undertook activities like improvement of the surroundings of the village which includes activities like landscaping, development of parks, lighting in the village, improvement in solid waste and sewerage management, and procurement of equipment directly related to tourism, like Water Sports, Adventure Sports, etc.

- The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme (Central Sector Scheme)- for the integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits in the country in 2014-15. This scheme is envisioned to synergise with other GoI schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill India, Make in India, etc. with the idea of positioning the tourism sector as a major engine for job creation and economic growth.

- Under the revamped Swadesh Darshan Scheme, the Ministry of Tourism is developing 15 thematic circuits in the country, namely, North-East Circuit, Buddhist Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Desert Circuit, Tribal Circuit, Eco Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Heritage Circuit, Sufi Circuit, and Tirthankara Circuit.

- Ministry of Tourism, GoI launched the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) scheme in the year 2014-2015. It focuses on developing and identifying pilgrimage sites across India and integrate them in a prioritised, planned and sustainable manner for a complete religious tourism experience. Pilgrimage and Rural tourism are inter-linked owing to the presence of major pilgrimage centres in close vicinity to rural areas leading to employment generation and development of peripheral infrastructure, thus, benefitting both tourists and locals alike.

- It has also launched the "Adopt a Heritage-Apni Dharohar Apni Pehchan" project, aiming to improve and maintain visitor facilities at heritage sites, monuments, and other tourist attractions.

- In 2017, the Ministry of Culture launched the National Mission on Cultural Mapping. Under this scheme, the cultural mapping of India is done via a running nationwide cultural awareness program called *Hamari Sanskriti Hamari Pehchan Abhiyan* for the development of all art forms and artists.

- In 2020, the GoI launched Dekho Apna Desh, a scheme that encourages Indians to travel across the length and breadth of India and various promotional activities like webinars, online pledges, and quizzes are undertaken to generate awareness among the public about tourism destinations, local art, and cuisines in the country. To encourage this scheme, a *Paryatan Parv* was launched with the added intent of spreading the message of "*Tourism for All*".

- Another significant milestone was the provision of e-Visas for nationals of 170 countries in five subcategories i.e. Tourist visas, Business visas, Medical visas, e-Medical Attendant visas, and Conference visas.

- NITI Aayog has taken up the holistic development of a few identified islands in the country. This includes four islands in Andaman and Nicobar (A&N), namely Smith, Ross, Long, and Aves Islands; and five islands in Lakshadweep, namely Minicoy, Bangaram, Thinnakara, Cheriyam, and Suheli Islands. Tourism-based projects have been identified in Long, Aves, Smith, and Neil Islands of A&N and Minicoy, Kadamat, and Suheli Islands

of Lakshadweep. Development of Coastal Circuit (Long Island-Ross Smith Island- Neil Island- Havelock Island-Baratang Island-Port Blair) in A&N under the Coastal thematic circuit of Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

- Various initiatives, such as undersea optical fiber connectivity, airport expansion, infrastructure upgrading, and a plan to build water villas on (Taj Mahal) several islands, are examples of commendable efforts. Large-scale seaweed cultivation attempts to modernise the fisheries sector, and steps to increase production of organic coconut oil and coir are also being pursued.

- The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) launched Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission on 21 February 2016 to make the selected rural areas in form of the cluster, socially, economically, and physically sustainable regions by providing economic, social, and infrastructure amenities, thus leading to sustainable and balanced regional development in the country. Three Hundred urban Clusters with thematic economic growth points were proposed to be developed across the country under this innovative Mission. _Twenty-one components including Tourism have been suggested as desirable for the Cluster development_.

- Similarly, under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, a skill development programme of the GoI, training is provided in Tourism and Hospitality. Here, rural youth is trained for job roles such as guide, driver, cook, housekeeping, and other hospitality staff.

Focus on Rural Tourism - _The form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enable interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism._ Rural tourism is multi-faceted and entails agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure and ecotourism, which are all closely aligned. The rural economy accounts for 46% of India's national income, 68% of the total population, 64% of total expenditure, and 33% of savings.

- To make "Incredible India" an attractive tourist destination globally, new tourism segments such as business tourism, health tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, pilgrimage tourism, adventure tourism, and sustainable tourism are being developed.

- The promotions are undertaken through Ministry's official website _www.incredibleindia.org_ and various social media platforms including two social media handles of the Ministry to have a conversation with travellers and build a bond beyond pure marketing of the destination in both domestic and overseas markets.

- The Ministry of Tourism has designated the Rural Circuit as one of the 15 thematic circuits under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme. The details of the projects sanctioned are development of Gandhi Circuit: Bhitiharwa-Chandrahia-Turkaulia (Bihar) and development of Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism Project (Kerala).

- The developed world, particularly millennials who are fascinated by traditional ways of life, arts, and crafts will be drawn to visit rural India. The Ministry has developed a The National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India - as one of the Niche Tourism initiative towards Aatma Nirbhar Bharat - which focuses on developing and promoting local products through tourism thereby generating employment in rural areas and empowering local communities, youth, and women. It focuses on the following key pillars:
  - ✓ _Model policies and best practices for rural Tourism_
  - ✓ _Digital technologies and platforms for rural tourism_
  - ✓ _Developing clusters for rural tourism_
  - ✓ _Marketing support for rural tourism_
  - ✓ _Capacity building of stakeholders_
  - ✓ _Governance and institutional framework_

The Strategy suggests identifying clusters of villages called "Rurban clusters" having high potential for tourism development in different parts of the country. The themes for rural tourism can include local crafts and cuisines, folk music, shows, dramas, agri-tourism, organic farming, yoga and meditation centres, lakes, wetlands and eco-zones, rural sports, cultural events, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and unique tribal culture proximity to existing tourism circuits. The draft acknowledges the local community as a key stakeholder and aims at involving them with the help of other stakeholders, including NGOs, which can play a critical role in forging community linkages.

- In November 2021, the Draft National Tourism Policy 2021 was released. The policy talks about various ministries to identify areas of cooperation and collaboration. This will encourage promotion and preservation of our cultural heritage. This will also lead to Edu-Tourism. It mentions "Unique Village Life Experience" packages that will help revive traditional activities in rural India. According to the draft National Tourism Policy 2021, creating experiences around our heritage sites and monuments with interpretation facilities, souvenir shops, restaurants, and other amenities will enhance the entire experience of any tourist. It recognises that rural tourism should be given special attention.

- This year, the National Tourism Day (NTD), on 25 January 2022 was celebrated on the theme of Rural and Community Centric Tourism due to *the recent recognition of Pochampally Village from Telangana by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as the Best Tourism Village*. The *Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO initiative* was launched to advance the role of tourism in safeguarding rural villages, along with their landscapes, natural and cultural diversity, and their local values and activities, including local gastronomy. Pochampally is often referred to as the *'Silk City of India'* for the exquisite sarees that are woven through a unique style called '*Ikat*'. This style, Pochampally Ikat, received a Geographical Indicator Status. (In the year 2021, Ministry of Tourism recommended three villages - Kongthong in Meghalaya, Ladhpura Khas in Madhya Pradesh, and Pochampally in Telangana for the UNWTO Best Tourism Village entry from India.)

Steps To Be Taken: Development of tourism, including tourism in rural areas and the setting up of Rural Tourism Parks, is the primary responsibility of the State Governments/UT Administrations. The government needs to focus on handholding with states based on a few significant parameters in rural India for tourism development:

- Air/Rail/Road Connectivity-For last-mile connectivity

- Infrastructure development-modern buses and stations at reliable frequency, taxi/ shared mobility - App-based integration of guides, parking/charging/refuelling, sign Boards and Information Kiosks

- Identifying and linking heritage spots in the given destinations

- Facilities like signage in English and other foreign languages

- Tax issues-One India, one tax system for tourist vehicles protects the tourists from facing multiple taxations

- Promotion of homestays and high ended branded hotel rooms in resorts to fulfil the interest of staycations and workcations

- Connectivity to promote local tourism products, arts, and crafts to a national and global audience

- Focus on digital media (social media platforms, social messaging) for promotional activities

The National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India is a positive step in this regard.

Rural Tourism in India: Benefits

- Rural tourism stimulates the rural economy, creates job opportunities, and promotes infrastructure development in related areas.

- Furthermore, it has the potential to revitalise local arts and crafts while preventing viable traditional occupations from being displaced.

- Rural tourism will create the space for various support activities like the formation of digital platforms, marketing agencies, tour operators, etc, and hence generate immense entrepreneurial opportunities for the local population.

- Employment and income generation through tourism can also help to dissuade the youth of rural towns from migrating to metropolitan areas.

- Rural tourism will also act as a sustainable source of living for the rural population mitigating the seasonal nature of predominantly agriculture-based income.

- It will also act as a buffer for the potential environmental hazards which occur due to increased footfall of the tourists. This type of tourism is nature-based and thus requires the maintenance of natural habitat by both tourists and service providers. In this way, tourists will be paying to enjoy the natural surrounding as well as for its protection.

Issues in Rural Tourism

- Rural markets are often characterised by the poor and less literate population.

- Long-distance from nearby towns, absence of proper mode of surface transportation, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate lodging - fooding, amusement facilities, inconsistent electricity, telecommunication problem, etc. are some of the issues.

- Another major problem of rural tourism projects is marketing. The travellers or tourists have no information about these rural tourism projects.

- These projects also face some other problems like lack of trained manpower, insufficient financial support to start the new facility or business, lack of involvement of the local community, and maintenance of the project over the time.

- Lack of perception, a lack of opportunities to draw investments, obsolete management practices, and poor infrastructure, including connectivity and communication.

- A set of preconceived notions, backed by fear of intrusion into socially constructed barriers that once protected rural lives from cultural erosion, and the clash between the "host culture" and the "visitor culture" add fuel to the flame.

Recommendations To Encourage Rural Tourism

- Before investing in the rural tourism project, viability study of the destination should be conducted, indicating the possibility of success of the rural tourism project.

- Instead of creating many rural tourist destinations for development, handful of projects can be picked which have a popular theme (handicrafts, folk music, dance, puppet shows, theatre/street dramas, organic farming, herbal, yoga, and meditation centers, ecozones within or around the village, and/or any unique feature such as the Kila Raipur Sports Festival, Punjab) and could be a special attraction for tourists.

- Connectivity to the rural tourism destination is a major problem and should be the primary focus of the implementing agency.

- Extensive advertisement through all forms of media (more specifically social media) should be an integral part of the rural tourism development programme. It is also necessary to introduce segment-based advertising where each and every segment (like millennials) should be treated as the different target group.

- The rural tourism projects should be in the vicinity of famous tourist spots so that it can attract more and more tourists.

- The destinations should be developed as whole instead of just creating partial infrastructure and providing a few pieces of training to the artisans/ beneficiaries. Focus should be on creating an experience for the tourists instead of building monuments and hotels which cannot connect to the local vibe of the destination.

- The Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model for developing rural tourism destinations may be considered as an enabler for both the developers and investors for boosting tourism in rural areas and also in the development of these areas.

- Rural Tourism is in the gambit of many ministries like rural development, culture, environment, and tribal welfare and hence the convergence of schemes must be considered for a holistic approach.

- For the successful implementation of rural tourism projects, the participation of local village Panchayat and local stakeholders is crucial.

2. TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

International Tourist Arrivals (ITA) is a prominent global tourism indicator. United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) estimates that internationally there were just 25 million tourist arrivals in 1950, ITA stood at a whopping 1.4 billion in 2019. From 1950 till date, barring few dip events; namely, September 2001 Terrorist attacks, SARS epidemic 2003, global economic crisis 2008, COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdown 2020, ITA has seen a consistent upsurge.

Evolution of Tourism

In 16th century, the concept of 'Grand Tour' emerged in Europe, especially for educational purposes, where young aristocrats travelled along a well-designed circuit that touched famous centres of culture and philosophy accompanied by a tutor. A Grand Tour lasted for up to 3 years. As a concept it got faded in 19th century. Prominent theme is that only a 'class' was able to afford travel/tourism.

From 1960s world witnessed a rapid growth of international mass tourism and its after-effects. This phenomenon was fuelled by major geopolitical changes like industrial revolution, end of world war, increased mobility, better communication, availability of tour packages (Thomas Cook invented the concept), etc. The aforesaid changes permitted even 'masses' to travel.

The transformative journey is known as the emergence of mass tourism, a process that is described by Tourism Scholar John Urry, as the *'democratisation' of tourism*.

Pilgrimages were the first forms of tourism mobility to emerge thousands of years ago relevant even today. Soon, economic and cultural factors joined hands with religious factors to convert pilgrimage tourism into a prototype of what we see today as tourism. Thus, temples became breeding grounds for art and culture.

Platform of Tourism

Jafar Jafari, a leading academic of Tourism Studies, identifies certain stages, or platforms, upon which the study of tourism has been based:

a) **The Advocacy Platform:** International mass tourism began to increase rapidly from the early 1960s. At this time, tourism was seen primarily as an economic phenomenon, an expanding international business areas.

b) **The Cautionary Platform:** As international tourism grew in both scale and scope, so too did awareness of its negative consequences. As a result, academic attention turned increasingly towards the study of the social, cultural and environmental impacts of travel and tourism.

c) **The Adaptancy Platform:** During the 1980s, as attention continued to focus on the negative impacts of mass tourism, a principal theme to emerge in the study of travel and tourism was that of Alternative Tourism, preparing the emergence of the topic- Sustainable Tourism. Alternative tourism was concerned with finding, literally, alternatives to mass tourism development that had been so roundly criticised from the 1970s onwards. Alternative tourism is an umbrella concept consisting of a variety of approaches: eco-tourism, agro-tourism, community tourism, ethical tourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, etc.

Tourism Infrastructure Development-3 'A' Approach

'A'ttraction- refers to those features that pull or attract tourists to a destination. There is no easy way to enumerate or analyse attraction that a place offers.

In order to simplify, rural resources/attractions can be sub-divided into three categories:

i.   Resources by virtue of geographical and climatic characteristics of the region, flora and fauna, rivers, landscape, scenic beauty, etc.

ii. Aspects of the rural culture like village folklore, handicrafts, textile products, social bonds, etc.

iii. Farm produce and practices like sowing, harvesting, etc.

'A'ccessibility- refers to how the tourist destination can be reached, mainly in terms of transportation (different modes).

Road Transport Infrastructure Initiatives:

▪ Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana is a project launched in 2000 (still active, undertaken by the Ministry of Rural Development) to provide good all-weather road connectivity to all villages in India.

▪ Bharatmala is a road infrastructure project (launched in 2015-active as of now) undertaken by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

▪ Some of the most well-known completed expressway projects are: Agra-Lucknow Expressway, Yamuna Expressway, Mumbai-Nashik Expressway, Eastern Peripheral Expressway. Ganga Expressway project, in Uttar Pradesh connecting Meerut and Prayagraj will be the longest expressway of India on completion. India has the lowest density of expressways in the world.

Water Transport Infrastructure Initiatives:

▪ India is a land of rivers. It has a coastline of 7500 km and more than 15,000 km of navigable waterways.

▪ In 1986, the GoI created the Inland Waterways Authority of India which is a statutory body responsible for the waterways in India. The National Waterways Act, 2016 was enacted to realise the potential of inland water as

a highly economical mode of transport. In India, the National Waterways include Inland waterways and sea routes for trade purposes. Navigable waterways include rivers, backwaters, canals, creeks, and so on.

- Under the Sagarmala Project (launched in 2015, still active, undertaken by the Ministry of Shipping), high quality roads will be constructed in the coastal areas, areas adjoining ports, ensuring development of coastal economic zones, inland waterways. This project will also boost exports and employment.

Air Transport Infrastructure Initiatives:

- Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) was launched as a Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) under the Ministry of Civil Aviation in 2016, to develop the regional aviation market and to provide affordable, economically viable and profitable air travel on regional routes to the common man even in small towns.

- The scheme envisages providing connectivity to unserved and underserved airports of the country through the revival of existing air-strips and airports.

- The scheme is operational for a period of 10 years.

- UDAN 4.1 focuses on connecting smaller airports, along with special helicopter and seaplane routes.

Multi-modal Connectivity:

- Gati Shakti National Master Plan for Multi-modal Connectivity was launched in October 2021. It is aimed at the coordinated planning and execution of infrastructure projects in India to reduce logistics costs. Gati Shakti is a digital platform that will bring 16 ministries and departments of the GoI together. It is Rs 100 lakh crore project for developing 'holistic infrastructure'. The existing infrastructure schemes under various ministries will be incorporated into this plan, including Sagarmala, Bharatmala, UDAN scheme, inland waterways, etc.

'A'ccommodation includes boarding and lodging facilities for tourists to stay at the destination. Role of district administration, Panchayati Raj Institutions, NGO's is crucial regarding the development of accommodation infrastructure. E.g.,

- Rural tourism accommodation infrastructure was developed in Rann of Kutch, Gujarat, under Endogenous Tourism Project, as a concerted effort of Ministry of Tourism and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) during 2003-07 as Sham-e-Sarhad, Hodka village resort. It is owned and operated by the local Village Tourism Committee.

- Purushwadi is a tribal village, situated in Western Ghats, in the Akole district of Maharashtra. It has been adopted by an NGO dedicated towards promoting eco-friendly tourism in villages and providing livelihood to the villagers.

3. CULTURAL TOURISM FACTS – NORTH-EASTERN INDIA AND J&K

Assam:

i. Hajo is a village of five religious shrines; four Hindu temples, and a Sufi shrine.

- The Hayagriva-Madhava temple atop the Manikut hill is a Vishnu shrine built in the 10th century, with the Kalika Purana providing a great glorification of it. The present structure was built during the reign of Koch king Raghudeva Narayana of Kamarupa in 1583 A.D. after the older temple was destroyed by Kalapahar, a Muslim

invader from Bengal in 1564 AD. The relief works in the architectural ruins of Hayagriva-Madhava temple has a number of dancing female figures. These suggest that the Devadasi dance form had once thrived in the Hajo temples. Originally believed to be of Tibet, the Devadasi tradition had travelled to other temples of India from Assam after Vasistha muni had brought it to the temples of Kamarupa. Buddhist pilgrims who visit Hajo consider the deity inside Hayagriva-Madhava temple as Mahamuni.

- Other Hindu temples in Hajo are the Kedar and Kamaleswar temples atop the Madanachal hill, and the Kameswar temple atop the Gokarna Hill, the deity in all three being Shiva.

- Hajo also happens to be a centre of attraction for Buddhists. A section of the Lamas of Bhutan and Tibet believe that Lord Buddha had attained maha-parinirvana at Hajo. But the stronger likelihood is of Padma-Sambhava, great founder of Lamaism, breathing his last atop the Manikut hill.

- On the Garudachal hill, there is Poa-Mecca, a Muslim shrine established by a group of Auliyas (saints) led by Ghiasuddin Auliya in the 16th century. While Ghiasuddin died here and the shrine was developed around his dargah, it is believed that Ghiasuddin had brought with him a poa (one-fourth of a seer in weight) of earth from Mecca to set up the shrine, from which the name Poa-Mecca was derived.

ii. Near Hajo is Sualkuchi, a village referred to as the _Manchester of the East_ where fabrics in muga - the exclusive golden silk-varn available only in Assam, and pat silk. While sericulture is said to have flourished here as early as in the 4 century BC in the place then known as Swarnakuchi (Golden Zone), it was around 1650 AD that Momai Tamuli Barbara, an influential officer of the Ahom kingdom, had developed Sualkuchi into a vibrant silk industry village.

iii. Also close to Guwahati, due east is Mayong- four temples around the place - Kechaikhaiti temple at Burha Mayong, Ganesh temple at Hatimuria, Narasimha temple at Hiloikhunda, and Shiva temple at Kachashila.

iv. Jatinga is a village near Haflong, which is about 300 km from Guwahati. Inhabited by the matrilineal Jaintia tribe, Jatinga is famous for the bird suicide mystery. Every year a large number of birds are found dead at this place during the foggy and cloudy weather at the end of the monsoon months.

Meghalaya: Mawlynnong inhabited by the Khasi tribe, has earned global fame as being one of the cleanest villages of the world and locally referred to as "God's Own Garden". Plastic, polythene and smoking are strictly prohibited here. Every Mawlynnong household also practises rainwater harvesting. Visitors can also have a bird's eye view of Bangladesh from the village perched on the southern edge of the Shillong plateau.

Arunachal Pradesh: Ziro Valley is also a bird-watchers' paradise. Moreover, visitors are also amazed with how inhabitants of Apatani village _rear fish in their paddy fields_, a rare farming practice in the world. There are also two ancient temples nearby - the Meghna Cave Temple and Sidheshwar Nath Shivalinga. _Ziro also figures in India's Tentative List for UNESCO's World Heritage Site, seeking global recognition for the distinct Apatani civilization with systematic land use practices and rich traditional ecological knowledge of natural resources management and conservation, acquired over the centuries through informal experimentation_. Vibrant traditional village councils called Bulyan have made Ziro Valley an interesting example of a living cultural landscape. The best time to visit Ziro is when the Apatanis observe the Murung rituals, or when they celebrate the Dree Festival.

Manipur: Andro -Nongmaiching hills - Local lore says that Andro is home to Manipur's first settlers, and that the name is derived from 'handro' - meaning "village of the people who came back." The village deity at Mei Mutaba, an ancient temple which has a sacred fire that is believed to have been burning since time immemorial.

Nagaland: Khonoma, a 400-year old village, was the scene of a series of fierce resistances against the British. Memories of two major battles in 1850 and 1879 respectively - in which scores of brave Angami men had laid down their lives to protect their land - continue to remain popular, The village has traditional forts called Khuda meaning "place of defense" - built of stones preserved with care. The typical forts had provision for rolling down rocks and boulders through openings in the walls to resist the enemy. Another interesting feature of Khonoma is the kharu - traditional gates leading the localities inhabited by the different khel (clans).

Often described as Asia's first green village, the people of Khonoma had in 1998 declared 96 sq km of the village forest as a sacred sanctuary to protect all wildlife in general and the Blythe's Tragopan, an endangered pheasant and the State Bird of Nagaland.

Mizoram: Thenzawl is located near Aizawl, the Mizoram capital. The Tropic of Cancer runs through this picturesque village, which is an important centre of traditional Mizo handloom industry. Thenzawl also has a deer park, which particularly conserves the highly endangered Sambar Deer. Chawngchilhi cave in the village cave is the original location of a Mizo folk story in which a lady falls in love with a snake.

Tripura: Matabari - Tripura Sundari Temple is one of the 51 holy shaktipeeths (shrine of the goddess of Shakti) in India. According to Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu had cut off the body of Mata Sati, after her death, with a Sudarshan Chakra. Fifty-one different pieces of her body fell at different places throughout the country which came to be known as Shaktipeeths. At Matabari in Tripura fell the right foot of Mata Sati. Here goddess Kali is worshipped in her Shoroshi - 16-year-old girl - incarnation, while a smaller idol of Maa Kali or Chotto Maa stands beside the presiding deity. Constructed in 1501 AD by the then Tripura Maharaja Dhana Manikya, it has the beautiful Kalyan Sagar lake.

Jammu & Kashmir (J&K):

- Dal lake is one of the most famous lakes globally and the second-largest in J&K.
- Shri Mata Vaishno Devi is a well-known pilgrimage site located at the height of 1,600m in the Trikuta Mountains of the Shivalik Range in the Reasi District of Jammu and is a 12 km hike through expansive woods and snow-capped mountains from the Katra base camp.
- Ragunath Temple is another pilgrimage site. Maharaja Gulab Singh began construction on the temple in 1835 A.D. His son, Maharaja Ranbir Singh, finished it in 1850 A.D. Three sides of the inner walls of the main temple are covered with gold sheets. Dedicated to Lord Rama, this temple complex is unique, unusual and the largest in northern India.
- Shahdra Sharief, near Jammu, is one of the region's most revered shrines established in the 19th century on a hilltop in the Rajouri district. Since a Hindu ruler built it to honour a Muslim saint, it is a beautiful emblem of religious peace in the country's history.
- Chingus Sarai is another historical place. The Persian word "chingus" means "intestine." On November 8, 1627, Jehangir died here en route to Delhi. Noor Jehan had Jehangir's innards buried in the Chingus Sarai to avoid the corpse's decomposition. The corpse was subsequently embalmed and sent to Lahore for burial.
- Bufliaz is a lovely hill located near Poonch. Alexander the Great invaded the Poonch region in 326 B.C. to defeat Porus and capture the wealthy Poonch State. Bucephalus was the name of Alexander's horse, which died and was buried along the river bank at this location; since then, the area has been known as Bufliaz.
- Gulmarg (Meadow of Flowers), is located near Srinagar. During the winter, Gulmarg is renowned for its skiing, in which national and international athletes compete annually. Gulmarg has been made the hub of winter

sports to promote winter sports, focusing on the winter Olympics. Also, a National Centre of Excellence has been announced to come up at Gulmarg to groom the players in skiing and other winter sports.

- Gurez Valley situated near Bandipora at the height of 2,500m is home to the *snow leopard, hangul, musk deer,* and *markhor* and has abundant natural beauty. *It was once the start of the famous Silk Road from Europe to Kashgar, China*. It also is a base camp for some fantastic trekking expeditions. The Kishenganga river flows through Gurez, making it suitable for white-water rafting, kayaking, canoeing, and fishing.

- Tulail Valley, one of the most beautiful valleys is home to the oldest tribe of Kashmir.

- The Lolab Valley is located near Kupwara town, Kalaroos is one of the smaller valleys in Lolab. The caverns at Kalaroos are renowned, and the legend goes that they lead to Russia.

- Near Anantnag lies Pahalgam, on the banks of the Lidder river, a starting point of the annual pilgrimage - Amarnath Yatra. The picturesque Tullian Lake is a pleasant sight at an elevation of 3,400m. The hike begins in Pahalgam and ascends to the mountains via the Baisaran path, a vast meadow in the centre of a coniferous forest surrounded by mountain peaks.

- Sonamarg 'Golden Meadow' is an alpine valley located at the height of 2,740m above sea level on the banks of Sindh Nallah. It is located near Srinagar between Ladakh and the Holy Amarnath Cave and has served as the road to this pilgrimage destinations.

- Srinagar's Tulip Garden has the most incredible tulips collection in Asia at over one million.

The Government of J&K has recently come up with a New Film Policy to increase both tourism and investment in the union territory. The goal is to build and offer J&K a destination for shootings. It ensures administrative help to simplify the process of filmmaking in the UT by establishing a Single Window Cell to issue a licence for shooting films as quickly as possible.

4. REVIVAL OF TOURISM POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A study by Pandey et al. (2021) recommends a RESPOND approach - an acronym for Restart Travel, Establish Protocols, Stimulate Demand, Promote Coordination, Operationalise the New Normal, Nurturing New Options, and Develop Digital Solutions - to combat and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and take concrete steps towards sustainable recovery.

Steps Taken By The Government

- An Emergency Credit-Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) was extended up to March 2023 for COVID-19 affected sectors which will not only accelerate the revival of the tourism sector but also create new jobs.

- Ministry of Tourism announced that visas would be given for free to the first five lakh tourists. Additionally, the Ministry also extended e-visa facilities for travellers from 156 countries.

- The Ministry of Tourism has launched 'Dekho Apna Desh' – ref Page 3.

- In order to enhance the trust and confidence of travellers, the Ministry of Tourism and the Quality Council of India designed an innovative programme called System for Assessment, Awareness and Training for Hospitality Industry (SAATHI) in 2020 to implement policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the safe operation of restaurants, hotels, and other such establishments.

- The Ministry founded a National Tourism Task Force for the revival of the tourism and hospitality sector and released a National Tourism Policy to support tourism.

- The Ministry launched a 24/7 toll-free tourist information helpline in 12 international languages to assist domestic and international tourists. The Ministry had extended the recognition of tour operators, travel agents, and tourist transport operators by six months and also, further simplified the process for stakeholders.

- To explore the tourism potential of scenic Western Ghats, the Ministry of Railways has also allocated vista dome coaches in several trains enabling passengers to enjoy spectacular views from all directions.

- In an effort to promote religious tourism, IRCTC started Sri Ramayana Yatra special trains in 2021. Other innovative religious tourism packages are also being introduced such as 'Ramayana Trails', 'Buddhist circle', and 'Royal Rajasthan tours'. Travel integrator companies such as Thomas Cook and SOTC Tours are collaborating with various hospitality brands in India to create innovative workstations, wellness breaks, and affordable luxury holidays.

- In collaboration with Google, interactive content featuring personalised stories is being developed for the Incredible India website and mobile application.

- Additionally, walk-throughs 360-degree are being curated for major World Heritage sites in India.

- Post-pandemic, some luxury hotels in India, such as ITC and Taj, are moving towards keyless rooms, digital menus, and robot services. An industry-led initiative coordinated by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Digi Yatra, was launched to facilitate entry and exit based on facial recognition technology at various airport checkpoints for ease of travel of passengers.

- Product/Infrastructure Development for Destinations and Circuits (PIDDC) scheme – ref Page 2

- India based social enterprises and Non-Governmental Organisations respectively have developed an inclusive community-based tourism programme in backwaters and rural regions. DHAN Foundation, a professional development organisation, initiated the 'Endogenous Tourism for Rural Livelihoods' project in Karaikudi and Kazhugumalai in Tamil Nadu with the support of UNDP and the GoI.

- Indian travel start-ups have utilised this opportunity to promote travel for wellness which has gained popularity in the last few years. Ayush is also an important part of the 'Heal in India' campaign for promoting medical value tourism to India. The ministry has also extended its Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme to wellness tourism service providers including accredited wellness centres.

- Furthermore, a MoU has been signed between the Ministry of tourism, United Nations Environment programme (UNEP) and Responsible Tourism Society of India (RTSOI) with an aim to undertake measures to promote and support 'sustainability initiatives' in the tourism sector of each other and work in a collaborative manner wherever possible.