



Developing Tribal Tourism in Thane District, Maharashtra, India

Dr. Rajendra Suryawanshi

Associate Professor, Department of Geography, MES Abasaheb Garware College, Pune, India

Article Info

Article History

Received on:

14 July 2013

Accepted in Revised Form on:

15 May 2013

Available Online on and from:

17 August 2013

Key Words

Tourism

Development

Tourism Circuit

GIS

Abstract

The present article focuses on Thane district of Maharashtra which has the potential to develop the tourism activity to raise the living standards of local people as well as support them to develop their alternative economic pursuits. It is a tribal-dominated district with more than 90% of the district's tribal population living mainly in the north and north-eastern parts comprising the tribes of Warli, Koli-Mahadeo, Koli-Malhar, Koli-Dhor, Katkari, Kokna, Dubla Kathodi, Kokni, Tokre-koli, Thakur etc. This unexplored terrain, a tourist destination with a difference, can be tapped and promoted only if the tribals become the stake holders themselves. In fact, it would be prudent to state that many communities are looking to cultural heritage and nature based tourism as an important component of their economic development within their communities. Thus to initiate tourism as a source of income and agent of socio-economic transformation it is important to assess the awareness level of the populace vis-à-vis tourism. The information about the places of interests has to be made available for its subsequent use in GIS platform that will help to identify and recommend its different types to be developed in the study area on Govt. or Private or PPP initiatives.

© 2013 ISSS. All Rights Reserved

Introduction

Tourism plays a key role in the socio-economic transformation of a region. Studies all over the world has proved that tourism has improved lifestyles, generated employability and income, improved infrastructural facilities and initiated overall development of many regions. The underdeveloped region of the country can greatly benefit from tourism development. Many (of the) economically backward regions contain areas of high scenic beauty and of cultural identity. These areas, if developed for tourism, can bring about a

higher level of prosperity to the local people. These place can provide employment to hundreds of local people in tourism products and services. As a result, the local people become the recipients of additional income for regional multiplier effect.

Today the benefits of tourism are not only to be judged in terms of economic benefits alone but also in having wider implications which encompasses the social and cultural benefits as well. Tourism, by promoting people to visit areas of new destination allows the exchange of thoughts and provides opportunities to people of different areas

and walks of life to communicate with each other and in this way can promote national integration besides creating employment opportunities for the local people. It gives support to local handicrafts and cultural activities. The home stay facility helps the tourists to learn about the local cultural heritage and traditions.

In a region like Thane, where one finds diversity in physio-cultural landscape, various forms of tourism can be developed. For example, the life style of the communities and the tribes living in the rural Thane can simply be a source of attraction to the urban people. It would be a valuable source of revenue and can stimulate the local economy. It would offer large employment opportunities in many divergent avenues like lodging and boarding, guiding, transport, local handicrafts/souvenirs, food and catering, recreation, traditional herbal medicine, etc. Many of these services are labour intensive and hence create greater scope of job opportunities. Therefore, tourism industry has a positive potential as an ideal alternative for regional development in Thane.

Today, from the global perspective tourism has emerged as the foremost and most promising industry of the 21st century. With globalization and liberalization, tourism has increased all over the world as witnessed in the last few decades. Its success demands for infrastructural development in terms of transportation, communication, recreation and accommodation thereby boosting the regional economy. However, there are serious consequences on the other hand which are reflected both in environment and society. As an industry, it is complex in its form and therefore calls upon to understand the fine tunes of tourism and plan accordingly for its sustainable development.

The Study Area

The study area (9558 km²) comprises the northernmost district of Konkan adjoining the Arabian Sea in the north-western part of the state of Maharashtra (18°42'N - 20°20'N and 72°45'E - 73°48'E). It shares its northern boundary with the Valsad district of Gujarat and of Dadra and Nagar Haveli; the districts of Nasik and Ahmednagar lie to its east, Pune to the south-east, Raigad to the south and Mumbai Metropolitan to the south-west (fig. 1).

Objective

The primary aim of the current research is to identify the nature, potential and pattern of tourism in the Thane district of Maharashtra, India.

Methodology

The data / information has been mainly extracted from the SOI Topographical Sheets (1:50,000) and the SRTM elevation data with 90 m (or 3') ground resolution. The area under forest cover, available from the revenue records was also used to obtain its pattern of distribution. They have been analysed and represented by conventional cartographic methods. Most of the census and revenue data have been analysed for tourism circuits through Arc-GIS 9.1, Auto-Cad Map and Global Mapper.

Tourism— present scenario

In spite of the proximity of Thane district to Mumbai Metropolitan Region and rich tourism resource (natural and cultural), tourist flow has remained very limited in scale and intensity. Basically the tourism potential of the district has remained untapped and a planned tourism strategy would definitely contribute to regional development. The (existing) most popular tourist destinations in the district, existing at present are as follows—

A) Arnala Fort

The fort is located near the mouth of Vaitarna river about 18 km north of Vasai town. It is built on an island by the Portuguese in the 1530s (Gazetteer, 2000) and was the second important strategic point after Goa during Portuguese rules. It is also called as Janjira (i.e., a fort in sea). It was subsequently ruled by Peshavas and was rebuilt in the 1730s. Virar is the nearest railway station on Mumbai- Surat-Ahmedabad railway line. From Virar one can reach the fort via Bolinj - Agashi bus route up to Arnalapada and then by a ferry (Paranjpe, 2004). Other way to reach the fort from north side is by a ferry boat from Dativra via Yedvan in Palghar tahsil. There are temples of Trymbakeshvar, Goddess Bhavani and Lord Ganesha. There is also a tomb of two Musalman saints.

b) Beaches

Though the Thane district has a coastline of nearly 112 km, it has failed to promote beach tourism. This is because geologically, the coastline is dominated

by rocky platforms with very few accessible beaches like Bordi (Dahanu), Shirgaon - Satpati (Palghar) and Kalamb (Vasai). Currently, the only known beach tourist destination is Bordi beach in Dahanu Tahsil, which is clean and safe for swimming and sun bathing. The MT holiday resorts and other hotels are available for accommodation. Bordi is well connected by road to Dahanu Road RS (20 km) (Paranjpe, 2004). The beach attracts mainly the visitors from Mumbai, Thane city and the adjacent areas of Gujarat.

c) Suryamal Hill Station

Away from the bustling urban city lies the forest-clad Suryamal hill station at an altitude of 520 m in the Mokhada Tahsil. The sunrise and sunset points are popular among the visitors. It is also famous for herbal medicine that has the potential to promote health tourism. The only accommodation available is the forest rest house at Suryamal. There is also a P.W.D. rest house at Khodala (10 km) and the nearest railway station is Kasara on the Mumbai-Nasik Road-Manmad central railway route. Due to lack of infrastructure and knowledge, it is visited by only a few tourists.

d) Malshej Ghat

Lying on the border of Thane Pune district along the NH - 222 (Kalyan Ahmednagar), it provides a panoramic view of the Western Ghats, which is beautiful and worth visiting during monsoon when there emerges a large number of waterfalls down the slope. It attracts tourists mainly from Mumbai and Pune, as the only nearest accommodation facility available is MTDC resort which is relatively costly.

e) Vajreshwari

In Bhiwandi tahsil there is yet another tourist destination famous for Hot Springs and the temple of Vajreshwari (Vajarabai). Locations of hot springs are at Akloli (1 km east of Vajreshwari) and Ganeshpuri (4 km west of Vajreshwari). All these springs are located near the Tansa river and on the borders of Vasai, Bhivandi and Vada tahsils. Many believe that a dip in these springs cures skin diseases thereby attracting a large number of tourists from the neighbourhood. Hotel accommodations are available at these locations that are well connected by roads via Bhivandi and Mumbai Ahmedabad road via Shirsad. Other religious tourist destinations like Haji Malang *Dargah* and Ambernath temple in Ambernath are also famous.

However, it may be noted that the destinations (tourist) are scattered in location and undeveloped.

Tourism Attractions in the Study Area

The study area has the distinctive potential to develop the following types of tourism based on regional ambience, personality and uniqueness. Fig. 2 shows different types of tourism in the study area —

(1) Tribal Cultural Tourism

The north eastern part of Thane district is dominated by tribals and this stands unique to promote tribal tourism. The tribal based tourism initiatives are not just to create employability and to promote their local economy but to reinforce traditional culture. For cultural tourism events like '*Bohadaa*' a seven days dance festival is arranged in the months of March /April to attract people. In this programme the participants wear the masks of different gods and goddesses to perform a play on the street. During this festival tribal as well as non-tribal people come together and (also) buy the needful products in the fair. Other events like '*Tarfa*' and '*Dhol naach*' dances are also the major cultural events in the circuits to attract the people (Suryawanshi, 2008, 2011)

During the festive season, tribal people enjoy the locally manufactured alcoholic drink made of *Mahua* flowers. In Jawhar town, also known as a famous hill station, there is the *Jay Vilas Palace* - a residence of the former King Mukane of Jawhar Kingdom. This has been turned into a museum with the belongings of the Kings and the Kingdom. There is also an art gallery exhibiting various tribal articles with bamboo handicrafts in particular. The area is also famous for '*Warli*' paintings, specially Ganjad (Kalambipada) of Dahanu tahsil and the Mokhada town.

Tribal culture and lifestyle stands unique which acts as an added advantage for tourism promotion. The tribals have their own dance form (Dhol), music (Tarfa) and food habits. Using the existing resources, the action plan should also include immediate development of accommodation complexes. Since Bamboo is easily available, accommodations can be built and decorated with typical *Warli art* at various locations /headquarters i.e. Jawhar, Mokhada and Talasari equipped with all the basic amenities like food park, shopping centre,

kaladalan for performing arts etc.

Following the concept of 'Museum of Men' a museum of scheduled tribe initiated by the Government of Orissa (1986), a tribal museum and a tribal Warli painting academy can be set up to display the tribal artefacts and also to train youth in Warli paintings that can earn a good revenue (Panigrahi, 2005). Artefacts, collected from various tribes can then be classified and showcased as hunting weapons, agricultural implements, fishing tools, paintings, musical instruments etc. This would portray the various facets of tribal life. Tourists would find it not only interesting or attractive but also educative. Such attempt can also be a step towards the preservation of cultural traits of the local tribals.

(2) Adventure Tourism

The adventure tourism is mainly confined in the Murbad and Shahapur tahsils of South Thane district. The region is characterized by cliffs, pillar rocks, mountain passes, waterfalls, dykes, caves and remote high altitude forts. All these provide a perfect setting for mountaineering, rock climbing and rappelling. To reach to this destination, Moroshi a village near Malshejghat, along the Kalyan - Ahmednagar road (NH-222) is the stop over point. From this village, the cliffs appears as the continuation of the Ghats that extend for about 12 - 15 km in northeast to southwest direction, providing ideal location for adventure tourism. This range has two historic forts, *i.e.*, Bahirugad (Bairamgad) and Gorakhgad. The Bahirugad fort is created of a 33 m high rock pillar that stands alone with ravines on either side, the top of which joins the outstanding and inaccessible peaks of the Sahyadri in the horizon. There are two springs at about 560 m a.s.l. The nearest village to Bahirugad is Moroshi. Moreover, during monsoon, Malsejghat provides a panoramic view of the Western Ghat carpeted green with vegetation and interspersed with numerous waterfalls (Suryawanshi, 2008, 2011)

Presently, facilities are inadequate for adventure tourism. Although, there are about three government rest houses at Murbad (and) Malshejghat and Moloshi, from the tourist's perspective the Village Moroshi which is about a km from the Kalyan-Ahmednagar Highway must be developed at the base camp. Since the target group

is the student and hikers, budget accommodation in the form of camping tents or dormitory accommodation would be best recommended. Moreover, other facilities like health centre, police outpost, food park, and guides needs to be developed at the earliest.

(3) Nature Tourism

In nature based tourism, natural landforms and landscapes, dams/reservoirs, river confluences, gorges, creeks, dykes *etc.* would be the most popular sites. In Thane district, such natural sites are ample, *e.g.*, the Upper Vaitarna river gorge near Karegaon in Mokhada tahsil, dykes at Tilsa in Vada Tahsil, waterfalls at Arnachapada (7 m), Bopdari (16 m), Dabhos (30 m), Hiradpada, Khadkad (7m) and Pimpalpada (5 m) in Jawhar tahsil and at Aase (Dhamanipada), Gabhadpada (10m) in Mokhada tahsils, springs at Barwadpada, Talasari and near Jhap in Mokhada tahsil, *etc.* These would attract the students to understand the landscape and other tourists as the typical wonders of nature. The lake reservoirs of Vaitarna, Bhatsa, Surya, Tansa dams can be important recreation centres. The Tansa lake is already famous as bird sanctuary. The creeks of Dahanu and Vaitarna can also be places for major attractions, if facilities like boating and rafting, river cruise *etc.* are developed. Beach tourism can be developed easily at Bordi with facilities like motor boats, parasailing and other such activities to attract the tourists. Besides, there are features / objects like, Agashi Church, ancient port at Shurparaka (Sopara) and coastal features like shore platform, sea cliffs, pocket beaches, salt pans *etc.* which would be the additional attractions. Apart from these there are many Hindu religious centres located across the study area (Suryawanshi, 2008, 2011).

Conclusion

Tourism potentials were assessed in detail and accordingly various types of tourism have been identified, *viz.*, cultural, adventure and nature-based. But, all the destinations lack certain facilities to commercially boost tourism and its marketing. Since the whole exercise is to involve and promote local communities, initiatives can be taken at community level through individual business enterprises to promote this activity. The Maharashtra state tourism department should take

interest and draw necessary master plan to immediately develop all necessary infrastructure to redraw the 'tourist map' of the state and tap both domestic and international tourists. It can be easily done in PPP model as well as requesting the potential industrial houses to build resorts in serene natural landscape in order to quickly introduce the area to the outside world.

References

1. *Census of India* (1991): District Census handbook: Thane, Part XII A and B, Series 14, Maharashtra, Government Central Press, Mumbai.
2. *Census of India* (2001): District Census CD-ROM: Thane, Directorate of Census Operation, Govt. of Maharashtra. Mumbai.
3. Gazetteer (2000): Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Thana; Places of Interest, Vol. XIV, Government Central Press, Mumbai
4. NATHPO (2002): Tribal Tourism Toolkit, Lewis & Clark Bicentennial and other Tribal Opportunities, National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers Washington, DC
5. Panigrahi, N (2005): Development of Ecotourism in Tribal Regions of Orissa —potential and recommendations. Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies, Bond University (Australia), Research Paper No.11.
6. Rath, P. K. (1998): Development of Goa — a geographical perspective, *Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis*, University of Mumbai.
7. Suryawanshi, R. S. (2008): Tourism Potentials of Thane District — a geographical enquiry, *Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis*, University of Pune.
8. Suryawanshi, R. S. (2012): Assessment of Potential for Eco-Tourism, Northern Thane District, Maharashtra, LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, GmbH & Co. KG Heinrich-Böcking-Str. 6-866121, Saarbrücken,
9. Suryawanshi, R. S. (2011): Landuse / Landcover and Terrain Analysis for Eco-tourism in Talasari and Dhanu tahsils of Maharashtra., *The Goa Geographers*, Vol.VIII No.1, pp 8—19.

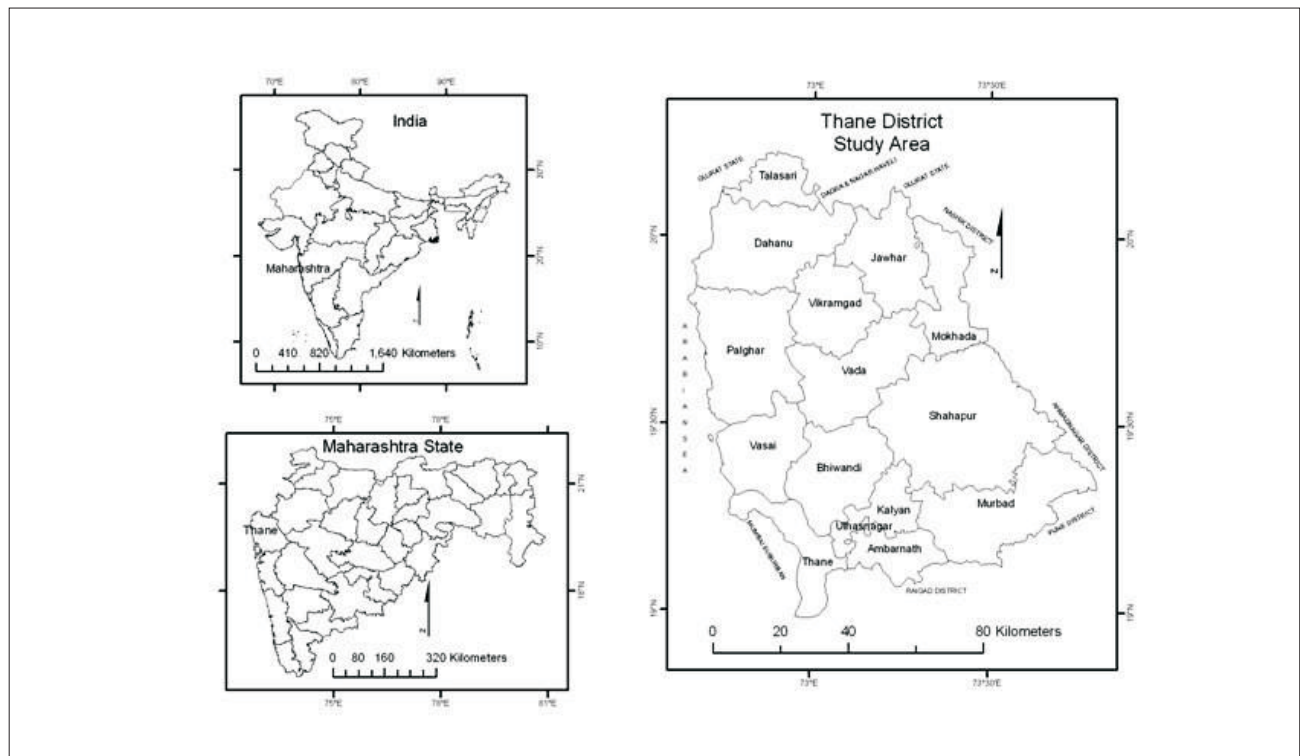


Fig. 1: Location Map of the Study Area

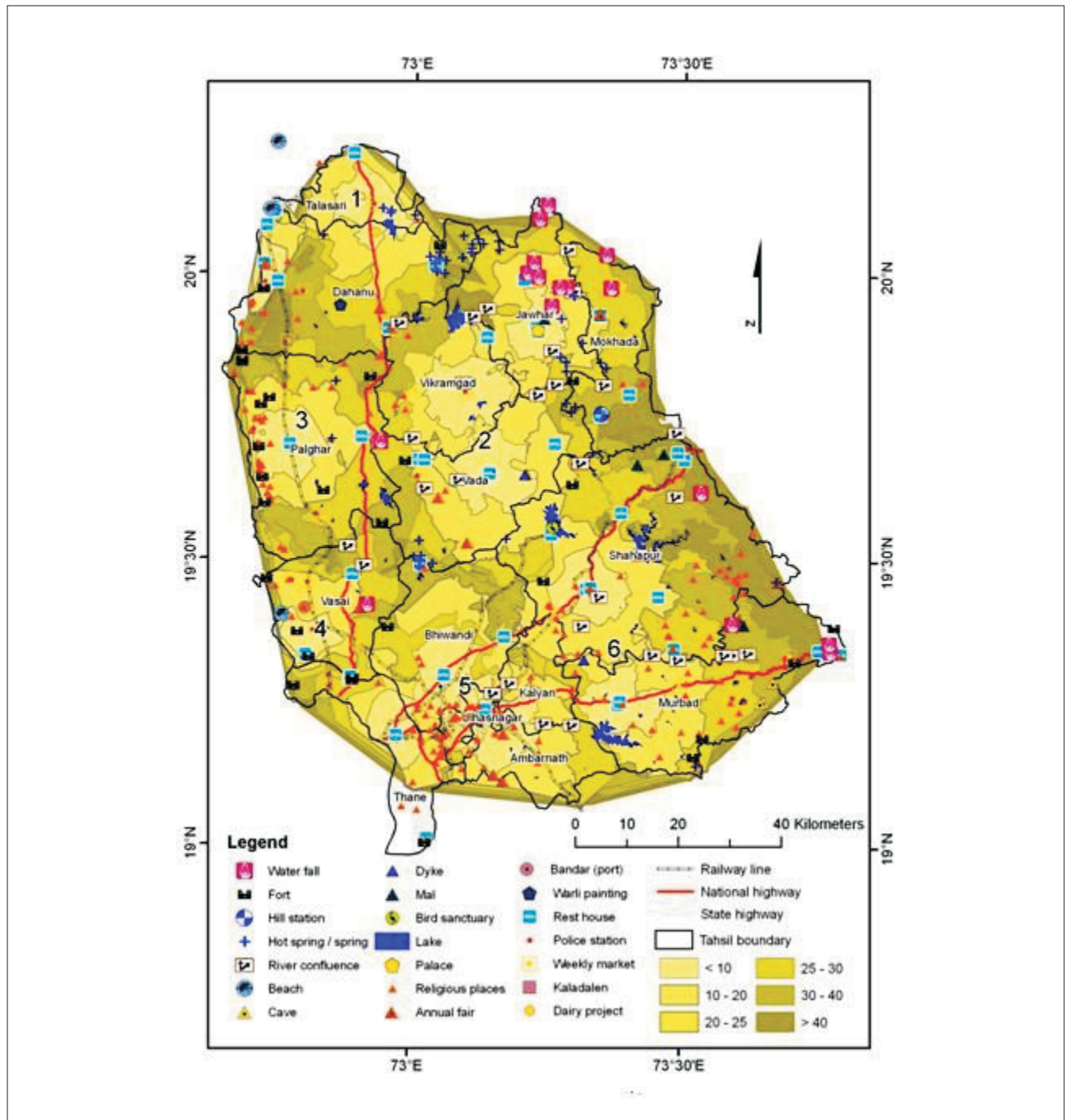


Fig. 2: Tourism Circuits in the Study Areas



Dr. Rajendra Suryawanshi
Associate Professor & Head, Department of Geography,
Abasaheb Garware College, Pune - 411 004, Maharashtra, India.
Email: suryawanshirs22@gmail.com