



Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Practices Boost Ecotourism in Western Region of Sakri Taluka

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Abstract

Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. It is a form of sustainable tourism focused on environmental conservation, biodiversity, and cultural education for visitors. Baripada Gram Vikas Samitee (BGVS) in Baripada and Forest Conservation and Management Committee (FCMC) in Davanyapada had undertaken forest conservation projects. They conserve forest rich in vegetation and biodiversity. Their work result in 450 hectares and 1100 hectares land develops dense forest in Baripada and Davanyapada respectively. The various projects had undertaken for sustainable development of this region. It has been observed that these regions attract tourists. Sakri taluka is blessed with copious nature. Due to the abundant rains in the western belt, many natural tourist spots have been created. It includes waterfalls, trekking spots, forest, and biodiversity regions.

Keywords: BGVS; FCMC; Baripada; Davanyapada; Biodiversity; Ecotourism

Introduction

Biodiversity is a precious heritage and essence of life on the earth. Biodiversity conservation is basically designed for protection, enhancement and scientific management of the biodiversity. India has long history of the community forest management. In last century Chipko movement which focused entire world attention on the environmental problems in the Himalayan foothills. Chandi Prasad Bhat and Sundarlal Bahuguna started this movement; aim is to prevent cutting trees. Nonviolent Appiko movement was launched by Panduranga Hegde in Sept 1983. This simple movement was popular stateside and people joined this movement spontaneously in many forest areas of the Western Ghats. The aim was giving importance the need to involve the local people in saving the Western Ghats. Since 1970, NGOs have played important role in promoting environmental awareness (Santra, S.C. 2001).

A Governmental Joint Forest Management (JFM) program has received very good response from state government forest development & local communities. In accordance with National Forest Policy, 1988 without participation of rural communities residing near forests we cannot protect the degraded forest or forest management. The JFM program was recognize the need for people participation in the management of forest in 2000, i.e. importance of micro planning, inclusion of Village Resource Development Program (VRDP) in guideline and provision for linking with Panchayats. The program is the protection of degraded forests around villages by people on joint ownership basis. The people decide the plant species to be planted, method of protection of the area, harvesting and distribution of the forest products. The role of Forest Department is to be limited as facilitator in JFMEs & providing technical input (Pratibha Bhatnagar, 2007).

In present study, *Baripada* and *Davanyapada* village in Dhule district, Maharashtra, presents an impressive example of community based conservation. Initiated by a local youths with the support of two NGOs viz., *BGVS* in *Baripada* and *FCMC* in *Davanyapada* the conservation efforts helped in maintaining the receding forest line due to water shortage and indiscriminate tree cutting or deforestation. Chaitram Pawar, a postgraduate youth of the village is

the architect of the change. The community's efforts not only cleared the way for other development activities, but also won accolades at national and international levels.

These two forests and with copious nature, abundant rains in the western belt, many natural tourist spots have been created, which attracts for ecotourism. Ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. Ecotourism is a preserving travel to natural areas to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to disturb the integrity of the ecosystem, while creating economic opportunities that make conservation and protection of natural resources advantageous to the local people (Sanket Kela, 2022). In short, ecotourism can be categorized as tourism program that is 'Nature based, ecologically sustainable, where education and interpretation is a major constituent and where local people are benefited'.

Aim of the study

Role of socio-cultural values to promote eco-tourism in *Baripada* and *Davanyapada*.

Objectives

- To study geography and ecology of *Baripada* and *Davanyapada*.
- To study socio-culture of *Baripada* and *Davanyapada*.
- To study the steps to adopt sustainable practices in these region.
- To study the potential of these region as eco-tourism places.

Scope

Scope of research can be extended to develop community based sustainable eco-tourism in 450-ha dense forest area of *Baripada* and 1100-ha dense forest of *Davanyapada*.

Material and Methods

Study Sites

Location of *Baripada*: *Baripada* is located 20°52'06.8"N 73°59'00.8"E. *Baripada* is a small Village in Sakri Taluka in Dhule District of Maharashtra State, India. It comes under Mapalgaon Panchayath. It belongs to Khandesh and Northern Maharashtra region. It belongs to Nashik Division. It is located 70 KM towards west from Dhule.

Ecology of *Baripada*: The village is surrounded by a 450-ha forest supporting rich vegetation composed of species such as teak or saag, devakhumba, palas, pangara, ain, kumbha, moha or mahua, neem or kadulimb, karwand and others. Wild animals found here are panther, Indian wolf, black-naped hare, fox, monitor lizard, and others.

Location of *Davanyapada*: *Davanyapada* is located 21°03'28.7"N 73°58'55.8"E. *Davanyapada* is a locality situated within the Lavhartodi area of the Dhule district in Maharashtra, India. It is part of the rural, forested, or hilly regions in this district, surrounded by nearby areas like Gartad, Chaupale, and Shivarimal.

Ecology of *Davanyapada*: *Davanyapada* are characterized as tropical dry deciduous forests. The forest is dominated by tree species like *Anogeissus latifolia* (Dhawada), *Acacia catechu* (Khair), *Boswellia serrata* (Salai), and *Hardwickia binata* (Anjan).

The information of *Baripada* village was collected from primary & secondary sources and even from Chaitram Pawar. A short questionnaire was designed to collect the information from villagers. The secondary data was obtained from the Journals, Brochure, Forest, Websites, Forest Department (FD), BGVS, FCMC, regular visit to the village and group discussion was done. Attempt was made to study history, to find the need of local community, sustainable practices in study area, and potentials for ecotourism, and all social & economic benefits from conserved forest.

Results and Discussion

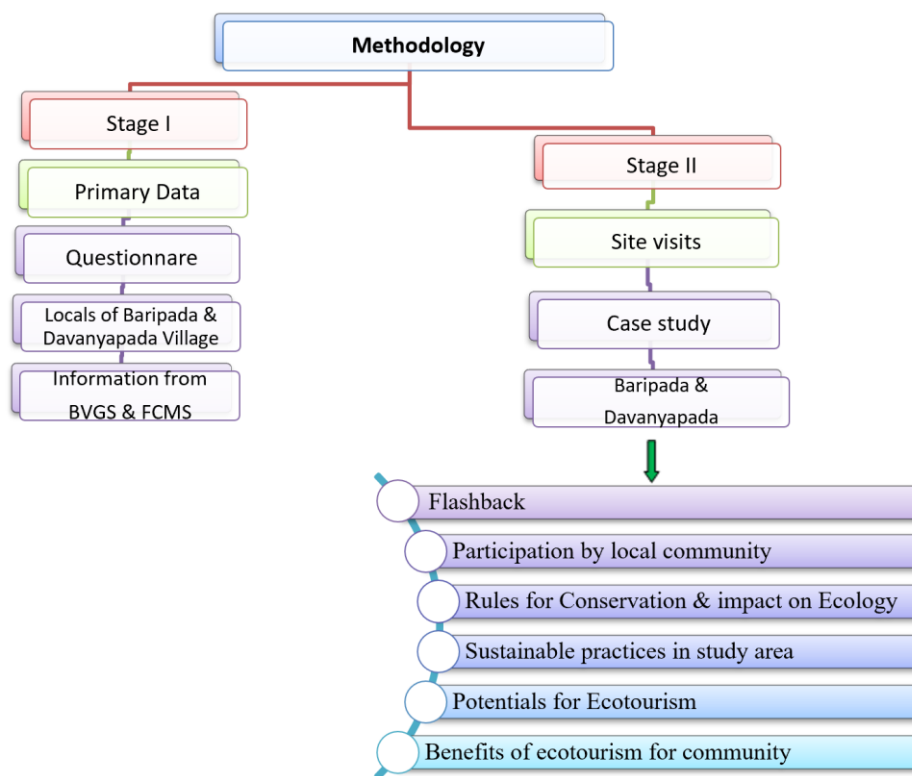
Flashback

In the early 1990s, the illegal cutting of teaks and other plants was done by villagers and outsiders forming barren and dry land. *Baripada's* 35 wells were running dry. Trees were being chopped for firewood and timber by outside loggers. The villagers began noticing the lack of greenery around them and the women of the village had shift liquor production to earn an income options. This caused social disrupt in the village.

Participation by local community

If deforestation continues their access to dry wood, fruits and other minor forest products would get affected. The villagers realize that, if we don't save our forest, nobody will. To overcome this problem, Chaitram Pawar, a youth in the village mobilized the villagers and urged them to take action. The change occurred when; Chaitramji and Dr. Anand Phatak, along with the workers of Kalyan Ashram were able to convince the villagers that the crop of development does not grow on the land of destruction. Once convinced the villagers befriended the forest, and

started working hand in glove with the forest department to save the forest wealth. Similarly, villagers of *Davanyapada* also took a different decision to protect nature. Local villagers lead organizations; *Baripada Gram Vikas Samitee* (BGVS) in *Baripada* and *Forest Conservation and Management Committee* (FCMC) in *Davanyapada*. After some days they got the support from NGO's, Forest Department (FD) & Joint Forest Management (JFM). In 1993 a local Forest Protection Committee (FPC) was set up to protect the forest and to harvest rain water (Sonawane S.T., 2016).



Rules for Conservation & impact on Ecology

Rules were announced in the weekly market and decision was taken to protect forest & water conservation in *Baripada* and *Davanyapada*.

Rules and Regulations		
Sr. No.	Rules for Baripada Forest	Rules for Davanyapada Forest
01	Nobody from Baripada village or outside the village would be allowed to enter the forest with a bullock cart for any reason.	The special feature of this campaign is that 1000 families have taken up the responsibility of protecting the forest through public participation instead of relying only on the government system.
02	Person who found destroying forests or taking any material form forest should be punished form FPC.	Villagers of seven padas of <i>Davanyapada</i> area have come together to form this committee (FCMC).
03	Punishment was given for those who cutting trees & those villagers who took initiatives to protect the forest were awarded.	This FCMC committee has 45 members.
04	Two elderly people in the village would work as watchmen and report to the FPC. The watchmen would be paid Rs 100 per month and would be changed every year.	The committee has appointed five special guards to patrol the forest.
05	Each family would pay Rs 3 in cash or 7 kg of grain to generate funds required to pay the watchmen.	Earlier, these guards were given grain as remuneration, but now Rs. 300 are collected annually from each household and the salary of these guards is paid from it.
06	For cattle grazing in the forest the fine would be Rs 1000. Near forest 50 acres land area was set aside for grazing to the <i>Baripada</i> villagers & their livestock.	The FCMC is working shoulder to shoulder with the Forest Department.

Impact on Ecology

- Illegal extraction of forest has stopped.
- Reduction of thefts from these forests.
- Protection and conservation efforts have helped reduce water run-off and soil erosion.

- For water harvesting, they built 03 percolating tanks, 470 small bunds, 70 small soil bund in *Baripada*.
- The collective efforts by both villagers results into plant and animal life has increased in the forest, both in terms of number and variety.
- Now *Baripada* village is surrounded by 450 hectare while *Davanyapada* is surrounded by 1100 hectors forest, rich vegetation with biodiversity & wild animals.
- More importantly, not only has *Baripada* and *Davanyapada* becomes self-sufficient in terms of meeting its fuel wood and water needs, it can even supply water to surrounding villages.

Sustainable practices in study area

Bachat Gat Yojana: Villagers started 'Bachat Gats' in *Baripada*. There are 5 Bachat gats. The name 'Shabri bachat gat' is the oldest started in 1992. Bachat gats are not taking loan from banks and the money is only used for agricultural capital.

Jaggery production: The villagers have developed is sense of unity due to the common goal of saving their forest. The regeneration of these forests gave the villagers many benefits and the village took up different forms of income like jaggery making and fish farming.

MSKVIB Training: Maharashtra State Khadi and Village Industries Board (MSKVIB) offers training of Apiculture i.e. rearing of honey bees, Lac insects for lac culture for more addition incomes to farmers.

Cultivation of cash crops: Janseva foundation offers recent techniques for cultivating '*Indrayani Rice*' by 'Chatusutri' method, cultivation of Strawberry, Potato Ginger, Haldi, Sugarcane etc. Now villagers are very expert in cultivation of cash crops. As a result, they have got very good economic position.

Waste Management: NGO's have extended help to villagers for building toilets, setting kitchen garden, recycling water etc.

Energy Conservation: In *Baripada* 42 smokeless ecofriendly burners are used for cooking. By using machine, biomass pallets are prepared in the village. Only one & half kg pallets are sufficient to prepare food for 5 to 6 member family. 50 solar cookers, solar heaters, solar panels were installed & very soon *Baripada* will be self-sufficient in electricity.

Mass Wedding: Marriages are organized collectively to save unwanted expenses.

Conflict Resolution Method: The village has developed a more inclusive method of conflict resolution. One person from each family has to participate in resolution of conflicts, irrespective of the nature of the issue.

Sport Activity: Youth of the village and nearby villages are inspired by organizing Kabaddi Competition.

Vanbhaji Mahotsav: Women are inspired by celebrating 'Vanbhaji Mahotsav' (Wild Vegetable Festival) in *Baripada*, is a unique annual event celebrating biodiversity and tribal food traditions. Organized by local communities, it features a cooking competition where women showcase dishes made from nutritious, forgotten forest vegetables, highlighting their medicinal properties. The festival has been a key initiative in *Baripada's* transformation into a model of sustainable, community-driven development.

Potentials for Ecotourism

- In Sakri tehsil, *Baripada* and *Davanyapada* forest are a symbol of biodiversity, showing how development and environmental conservation can work together & are known for its incredible community-led forest conservation and sustainable development.
- The landscape has transformed from a degraded, deforested area into a lush, green, and water-surplus region.
- The hilly, green-covered areas gives picturesque of nature and its beauty support for eco-tourism in western belt of Sakri taluka.
- The copiously rainfall and flowing rivers, waterfalls provide advantageous for eco-tourism.
- Occupants are interested to provide local food and pit cooking (khadda) chicken dishes to tourist.
- Village dwellers are trained in hospitality and tour guide in forest.
- Ecotourism will give employment to unemployed locals in both villages.

Benefits of ecotourism for community

- The tribes nearby the forest area are participated in protection of forest and wildlife.
- Ecotourism gives direct employment to inhabitants of *Baripada* and *Davanyapada*.
- Local families gain additional income from sales of forest products viz., Honey, Mahua flowers (*Madhuca longifolia*), leaves of Palash plants (*Butea monosperma*).
- The local tribes are trained in interpreting the flora, medicinal plants, traditional therapies and healing system.
- The local communities will get an opportunity to interact with people from diverse cultures that helped them to gain a perspective on the varied cultures exist in society (Sanket Kela, 2022).

Conclusion

Baripada and *Davanyapada* villages are surrounded by 450-ha and 1100-ha forest respectively, supporting rich vegetation and providing shelter for many wild animals. These regions have cultural and historical importance. Mangi-Tungia Jain tirthakshetra, Shabaridham and Pampas Sarovara are the sacred places of Shabrimata and Lord

Rama, Salher-Mulher fort is the highest fort in Sahyadri Mountains, Shendwad-Bhavani are in the periphery of 20 to 40 Km from these forest. The ecotourism will generate employment, increase the economy of surrounding villages and will help for creating sustainable environment, provide platform for local arts and crafts. The Tourism Department and Government of Maharashtra require additional measures and promotional strategies to improve the prospects of ecotourism in the area.

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SPK conceived the concept, wrote and approved the manuscript.

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Ethics approval

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