

# Impact of Tourism Development on Economic and Social Status of People of Kutch, Gujarat



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## Abstract

India with vast cultural and religious heritage and varied natural attractions has immense potential of growth in the tourism sector. Tourism is a multidimensional vibrant tertiary activity and a exponentially growing industry in India. To battle against unemployment in rural parts of India, tourism can play a vital role to arrest unemployment at local level and will contribute to social and economic development of people living in that area. Tourism provides employment opportunities to local population by acting as catalyst in the growth of basic infrastructure like Road transport, Railway station, Airport, Health care, Education and local markets. This paper examines the role played by tourism in economic and social development of Kutch with special focus on Rann of Kutch. The field interaction data has been collected to find out the impacts of tourism in on livelihood in Rann of Kutch' and its implication on Employment and Social upliftment of people of this region. Kutch is the largest district of Gujarat and has exemplary potential and this heritage-rich district has been the game changer for the people of Kutch. Nowhere else in the world one finds anything comparable to this amazing sparkling salt desert. It is marshy during the monsoons and turns glorious white during the winters and summers. It is reputed to be the largest salt desert in the world. Banni grasslands on its southern edge is also a home to a wide array of flora and fauna not found elsewhere. Tourism in natural areas of Kutch has vast potential to allow sustainable development of this region and will provide incentives to local population to preserve these areas instead of converting them to other commercial uses for attracting tourist.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Multidimensional, Employment Opportunities, Kutch Tourism, Sustainable Development.

## Introduction

Tourism in India is a rapidly evolving industry that has become increasingly competitive among our States. According to a World Tourism Organization report, tourism has the unique capacity of generating trade and investment directly at the local level, as tourists and entrepreneurs seek new destinations. It can contribute significantly to rural development, community enrichment and social empowerment. The Greater Rann of Kutch spans an area of 7505.22 sq kms while the Little Rann of Kutch occupies 4953 sq kms and is spread out in the districts of Surendra Nagar, Banaskantha, Patan, Kutch and Rajkot. Kutch is well known for its Wild Ass sanctuary and the Flamingo city which is the island and breeding ground for the migratory flamingo birds, located in the flats of the Rann of Kutch. Little Rann of Kutch or Kutch Desert Wildlife Sanctuary has the largest and most popular breeding grounds for the Lesser Flamingos in India. Till about 10-12 years ago, this area was considered among the most backward in Gujarat with very poor road connectivity and negligible civic infrastructure. Two main occupations of the people of this region have been animal husbandry and producing the local handicrafts of Kutch. However, since the connectivity to this region was poor, there was no way to market a perishable commodity like milk.

Village Dhordo on edge of Rann, which is the nerve centre of this region, is having 90 percent Muslim and 10 percent Hindu population. As far as handicrafts were concerned the Muslim women who produced the most elaborate embroideries never gone to outside market for selling their handicraft items due to poor road connectivity and limited access to outside world. Due to very low incomes and paucity of avenues for regular earning, people were abandoning their villages and moving to cities in

search of livelihoods, especially during drought years. The salt desert was seen as a curse because it did not support any vegetation, except the grasslands in the southern region. In fact, the continuing spread of the salt desert kept people terrified that one day their villages would be swallowed by it. The sea change for this region came when State Govt. in 2005 decided to host an annual Rann Utsav (Festival of Rann) and promoted it through a very creative and high profile ad campaign anchored by Sh. Amitabh Bachhan on TV and other media. The very salt desert that was the source of anxiety and fear developed as a major tourist attraction. Even the local people were surprised because none of them ever ventured into the salt desert, and certainly not at night.



### Study Area

Kutch district is a district of Gujarat in Western Kutch it is spread over 45674 sq km area according to which it is not only the largest district of Gujarat but also the largest district of India. The district Kutch is situated in the extreme west of India between 22° 44' 8" and 24° 41' 30" north latitude and 68° 7' 23" and 71° 46' 45" east longitude. It is bounded by the Great Rann on the north and east, Little Rann on the South-East, Gulf of Kutch on the south and the Arabian Sea on the west. Kutch is separated from Pakistan by the Great Rann of Kutch

Kutch literally means something which intermittently becomes wet and dry. Kutch is an ancient land possessed of great antiquity which takes its name from its geographical characteristics and topographical features resembling a tortoise (Kutch). Kutch means "surrounded by water". Centuries ago, the Rann of Kutch was part of the sea until an earthquake turned the exposed sea bed into a sprawling desert. Today, it is a vast expanse of arid land, devoid of habitation, stretching out to the Arabian Sea, which is just 10 kms away. A large part of this district is known as Rann of Kutch, which is shallow wet land which submerges in water during rainy season and becomes dry during other seasons. The word Kutch is also used for tortoise in Sanskrit. Banni grassland which is found in Kutch region also gives ecological importance to the study area.

### Kutch is divided into five distinct regions.

1. The great Rann or Uninhabited wasteland in the North.
2. The Grasslands of Banni
3. Mainland Consisting of Planes, hills and dry river beds
4. The cost line along the Arabian Sea in the South and
5. Creeks and Mangroves in the west.

### Objective of Study

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the role of tourism industry in boosting economic growth of people in Kutch with special reference to Rann of Kutch.
2. To find out role of tourism industry in uplifting social status of people in Kutch district.
3. To search for other major areas where one can look for more opportunities in employment generation through tourism in this Kutch sector.

### Methodology

This paper is based on my personal experiences of Kutch ten years before i.e 2008 and Kutch at present. The study is based on my experiences and the information gathered during the field visit & available secondary sources and literature reviews. The study is totally based on the available qualitative facts due to the non availability of authentic data regarding the number of employed people in tourism Industry in study area. In my study more emphasis will be given to exceptional natural beauty and uniqueness of the area & how it fascinates more and more tourist to join year by years with this Kutch area.

### Tourism in Kutch

Kutch is India's biggest district having a long breadth and width for travelers to explore all the aspects of what Kutch can offer. Tourism in Kutch has lot many things to showcase and nothing can be more fascinating than Rann of Kutch the sparkling salt desert. Kutch has all the constituent to become one of India's leading travel destination- magnificent nature, rich heritage, ancient archeological sites and colorful culture as well. Apart from an extremely rich cultural heritage, Kutch has a lot to offer historically.

Amitabh Bachhan is currently the brand ambassador of Gujarat tourism. The "Khushboo Gujarat Ki" campaign by celebrity Amitabh has given boost to tourism in Gujrat by 14% per annum, which is twice that of National tourism growth rate. Its a proven truth when Mr. Amitabh Bachchan claims that "Kutch Nahi Dekha to Kuch Nahi Dekha!" Let's list few key attractions of Kutch which should not be missed in Kutch tourism circuit, Travelers can also visit various nearby amazing attractions during their stay at Kutch Rann Utsav festival.

### Rann of Kutch

The Greater Rann of Kutch spans an area of 7505.22 sq kms while the Little Rann of Kutch occupies 4953 sq kms and is spread out in the districts of Surendra Nagar, Banaskantha, Patan, Kutch and Rajkot. It is well known for its wild ass sanctuary and flamingos. Nowhere else in the world one finds anything comparable to this amazing geographical tract. It is marshy during the monsoons

and turns glorious white during the winters and summers. In the monsoon months, the flat desert of salty clay and mudflats fills with standing water from the sea. It is reputed to be the largest salt desert in the world spread on both sides of Indo-Pak border. On its southern edge are Banni grasslands. This region is also a home to a wide array of flora and fauna not found elsewhere.

**Sunset in Salt Desert**



**Tent City near Salt Desert**



Rann of Kutch came up as tourist attraction in year 2005 when Gujarat Govt decided to host an annual Rann Utsav (Festival of Rann) and promoted it through a very creative and high profile ad campaign anchored by Amitabh Bachhan on TV and other media. The very salt desert that was the source of anxiety and fear for locals got developed as a major tourist attraction.

**Camel Ride in Salt Desert**



**Cultrural Night in Tent City**



**Black Hill and Kala Dungar Temple**

25 kms north of Khavda, the top of the Black Hills is the highest point in Kutch, at 462 m from sea level. From here, the entire northern horizon vanishes into the Great Rann, the desert and sky often becoming indistinguishable. It is one of the few non-coastal locations where you feel like you are at the edge of the earth, on the brink of incomprehensible vastness that fades off towards infinity.

The hill is also the site of a 400-year-old temple to Dattatreya, the three-headed incarnation of Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva in the same body. Legend says that when Dattatreya walked on the earth, he stopped at the Black Hills and found a band of starving jackals. Being a god, he offered them his body to eat and as they ate, his body continually regenerated itself. Because of this, for the last four centuries, the priest at the temple has prepared a batch of prasad that is fed to the jackals after the evening aarti.



**Banni Grass Land**

The Banni grassland of Gujarat is the largest natural grassland in the Indian subcontinent, and an area that is both socio-culturally unique and ecologically valuable. Banni Grasslands Reserve is a protected forest and one of the last remaining habitats of Cheetah in India. It is essentially a belt of dry grassland with a thriving ecosystem on the edge of the Rann of Kutch. The grasslands are sprawled over more than 3500 sq kms and several wildlife species live here, including chinkara, blackbuck, Indian wolf, desert fox and also the Indian Wild Ass.



**Dholavira**

Dholavira, known locally as Kotada (which means large fort), sprawls over 100 hectares of semi-arid land at the north-west corner of the island of Khadir, one of the islands in the Great Rann of Kutch that remain above the flood-plains in months when the rest of the desert is submerged by the monsoon. Dholavira is the larger of the two most remarkable excavations of the Indus Valley Civilization or

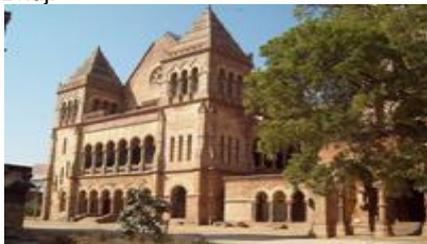
Harappan culture, dating back to 4500 years ago. What this site offers you, in the intense environment that comes with being surrounded by the Great Rann of Kutch, is a unique insight into the pioneering Harappan mind, with one of the world's earliest and best planned water conservation systems and what might be the world's first signboards, written in ancient Indus script.



The site was unearthed by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1967, but has been systematically excavated only since 1990. Artifacts include terracotta pottery, beads, gold and copper ornaments, seals, fish hooks, animal figurines, tools, urns, and some imported vessels that indicate trade links with lands as far away as Mesopotamia.

**Tourist places in Bhuj**  
**Aina Mahal Museum**

Kutch kings are called Maharao. Maharao Lakhpatji's antique palace, constructed in traditional Kutchi style, is created in a small fortified courtyard in the old part of the metropolis. It is a beautifully presented Museum and is one of the highlights of a visit to Bhuj.



**Pragmahal Palace**

Constructed within the 1860's and 1870s in a Venetian-Gothic fashion, Pragmalji's palace has pointed Gothic arches, classical colonnades and European timber roofs. The huge staircases and deep passages are floored with colourful Minton tiles and coated with handrails on classical balusters.



**Sharadbagh Palace**

The last Maharao in 1991 and his palace to the east of the lake has been become a small Museum. A retreat of the Maharao of Kutch, this Museum displays a group of silver caskets, crammed tigers, elephant tusks or even Maharao Madan Sinhji's tennis trophies.



**Kutch Museum**

The Kutch Museum was built up within the year 1877 AD with the aid of the British governor of Mumbai referred to as Sir James Fergusson - a true lover of Gujarat. It became due to the call of its founder that Kutch Museum, Bhuj was first of all named as Fergusson Museum. The Kutch Museum, Bhuj boasts of displaying a huge variety of rare artifacts.



**Swaminarayan Temple**

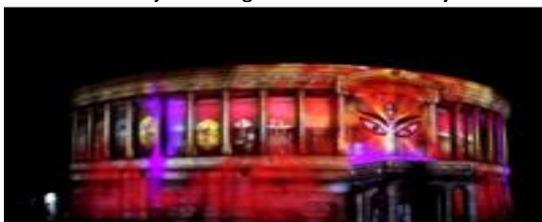
Like most of the Swaminarayan temples, this one has the standard brightly colored wood carvings around the building, broadly speaking depicting Lord Krishna and Radha. Positioned just down the road from the Ramkund Stepwell and the Alfred High School, the temple marks the spot in which Swaminarayan sat with neighborhood holy men when he came via Bhuj. Swaminarayan temple is one of the most famous locations of Bhuj.



**Vande Mataram Memorial**

The Vande Mataram Memorial is the latest and one of Ashapura's most ambitious offerings to the society and to the nation. This is a unique national monument and perhaps the only kind in the world. It seeks to immortalize the most momentous episodes in India's freedom struggle from the revolt of 1857 right up to the country's Independence in 1947. It

offers light and sound show through projections on the structure which is made as replica of parliament. It is located at Bhujodi village 15 km from Bhuj.



#### **Rakshak Vann Park**

It is named after the brave and courageous women of Kutch who rebuilt the airstrip of Bhuj airport in an overnight's time. The story of these women dates back to December 8, 1971; this was the time during Indo-Pak war. When Pakistan dropped 14 napalm bombs on Bhuj region and air strip in Bhuj was completely destroyed. The official took quick decision, that airstrip must be restored by the locals, so the local women of Madhapar village, who were the daily wagers were given the task of restoring the airstrip. They completed this task in less than 72 hours, even in that horrible condition of war. It is located near Rudra Mata Dam site which is 15 km from Bhuj on the way to Rann of Kutch.



#### **Impact of Tourism on Economic Development in Kutch**

"Tourism is a collection of activities, service and industries which deliver a travel experience comprising transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment, business and other hospitality services provided for individual or group traveling away from home" (Macintosh & Goeldner).

Till about 2004, this area was considered among the most backward in Gujarat with very poor road connectivity and negligible civic infrastructure. Dhordo village is the nerve centre of this region. The population here is 90 percent Muslim and 10 percent Hindus of artisanal castes. The main challenge for Kutch economy was to battle against poverty and unemployment in this remote area.

The fate of this region changed dramatically when the Gujarat Government decided to tap the unveiled tourism potential of Rann of Kutch and began to provide world class road connectivity to the entire Kutch region along with 24x7 power and clean water supply to the remotest and farthest village of this desert land. With it came lot of other goodies like mobile phones, internet, schools, health centres, banks ATMs, refrigerated milk collection centres and much else. This all was done to bring the tourist to see the magnificent beauty of Rann of Kutch.

Kutch tourism is the main resource to eliminate rural poverty and also important for economic development of this region. Tourism does not have a in general direct link to reduce poverty and enhance economic development but it mainly depends on the fact that tourism can provide employment opportunities in terms of the services required to develop a tourist spot which includes stay, restaurants, transport, handicraft etc. Tourism act as catalyst for the growth of basic infrastructure – roads, railway station, airport and handicraft market at door step which is eventually giving economic growth to the area at large.

#### **1. Economic Growth**

Two main occupations of the people of this region have been animal husbandry and producing the famed handicrafts of Kutch. However, since the connectivity was poor, there was no way to market a perishable commodity like milk. Despite being an area specialising in animal husbandry, there was not a single veterinary hospital for animals in this area. As far as handicrafts were concerned the Muslim women who produced the most elaborate embroideries never ventured outside their homes due to their social boundations. Due to very low incomes and lack of avenues for regular earning, people were abandoning their villages and moving to nearby cities in search of livelihoods, especially during drought years. The salt desert was seen as a curse because it did not support any vegetation, except the grasslands in the southern region which is known as Banni grassland. Government started focusing on developing tourism in this region and revolutionized the economy of this area by starting the Rann Utsav in 2005. This event has launched this backward most region onto the international tourist map in a big way. Dhordo for instance is a small village with a total population of 500 people but today when someone press D on Google and one of the first entries will be of Dhordo with innumerable hits. This is what tourism has given to this Kutch in last ten years.

#### **2. Local Employment**

Tremendous economic benefits are flowing out of Rann Utsav. Many locals have set up small hotels. The villagers collectively with Govt aid also set up resort 'Gateway of Rann' which has Traditional Bugga style cottages which are beautifully decorated by mud and mirror work, for accommodating tourists is giving employment to village people. The village women who are into handicrafts now find customers come to their doorstep. Today their embroidery and mirror work fetches them good prices sitting at home. In addition it has brought international recognition for the village. The Government also built various handicraft shops in the village. So every household can sell its products at prices determined by the producers themselves. The longer the Rann Utsav lasts -- the more people of Kutch earn. Rann Utsav which started with a 15 day affair but now goes on for three months starting from 15 Nov to 15 Feb every year.

#### **3. Increase in Living Standards of Family**

Tourism in Kutch has improved the living standard of people. Earlier people in village lived in

huts made of dried grass. Now they have built 8-10 pucca restaurants and small hotels -- all due to the effect of Rann Utsav. During the Rann Utsav season, they are able to sell mava (a cooked milk product) worth Rs. 50 lakh per month. In addition they sell tea and other snacks to tourists.

#### **4. Increase in Income of Local People**

Apart from primary activities (agriculture, animal husbandry) a new area of earning i.e. tertiary activities (tourism) is also developed during last decade in Kutch which has increased the monthly as well as annual income of local people. Consequent to the development of tourism, wage rates have also shoot up in the area starting at Rs 400 and going up to Rs 700 per day in 2017. This compares favourably with wage rates in any metro city like Delhi or Mumbai. Several villagers confirmed that incomes in the last 7-10 years have gone up exponentially. People who was earning Rs. 2000 a month is today earning at least Rs. 50,000 every month during Rann Utsav.

#### **5. Decrease in Dependency on Primary Activities i.e Agriculture and Animal Husbandry**

There was a time people of these villages went out in search of low paying menial jobs because of scarcity of local resources like agriculture and animal husbandry. Today, these very villagers have employed a well paid English educated manager from a nearby city to run their resort, handle their website and take bookings from far away countries. But they are determined not to remain dependent on outsiders for such specialized services. Therefore, they are sending their own children for higher education also.

#### **Impact of Tourism on Social Development in Kutch**

##### **1- Fraternit Development**

Rann Utsav attracted both national and international tourists to come and appreciate the beauty of Kutch. This paved the way for fraternity development and making people of Kutch feeling connected to the country and world.

##### **2. Exchange of Cultural and Social Values**

During the Rann Utsav Gujarat Tourism puts up luxury tents to create a whole tent city which comes alive with a whole array of cultural festivities- local dances, music, mimes and a vast handicraft fair to showcase the local art and craft. Villagers are encouraged to provide home stay facilities which give the tourists firsthand experience of traditional lifestyle and culture exchange between locals and tourists.

##### **3- Empowerment of Woman of Kutch**

Kutch women are one who have benefitted the most due to this Kutch festival. Muslim women, unlike Hindu women, cannot go out to do their own marketing. Now with this Rann Utsav customers come to their homes directly where many families have set up little showrooms in their own living rooms. Their crafts are selling faster than they can produce. During season in Dhordo itself, over 25,000 people come to see the village every day -- apart from those who stay over for the night. This opportunity of doing business from home has empowered the women of Kutch.



##### **4- Education**

In recent years Kutch has also witnessed major improvements in education. Today every single girl child of this area is going to school. People of this area has realized that as Rann Utsav grows, it will need professional managers, it will need educated people to run it. Unskilled people with low education won't get good jobs in Rann Utsav which includes restaurants, hotels, tent city, guides and transport services.

##### **5- Gender Discrimination Reduction**

Due to high sale of handmade articles which are mostly made by females the male dominance on society due to earning capability is reduced. Now women are earning equal or more as compared to their male counter parts. This has reduced the gender discrimination in the society.

##### **6- Self Governing Villages**

To develop the Kutch villages Government empowered panchayat to decide the development priorities of the village in Kutch. Their water filter plant works on solar power. Village streets were totally garbage free because the panchayat had made proper arrangements for garbage management so that tourist feels good when visiting these villages. The animal dung is used for producing gobar gas and light with a dedicated plant for this purpose built as part of the animal hostel. It also saves a lot of labour for the women of the household. The animal dung also provides large quantities of organic manure to the village while keeping the animal excreta far away from the living quarters in the village. This ensures that the village is much cleaner and each house doesn't become a fertile ground for breeding flies and mosquitoes.

##### **7- All Round Development of Kutch Villages**

To make it accessible before the start of Rann Utsav, the area got quality roads in each village of this remote region. They got the best possible water supply system with Reverse Osmosis (RO) Plant that runs with a solar panel. The village has solar lighting on the streets. In 2013, 66 KV electric sub- station was setup. There is a Solar powered ATM Booth at Dhordo Village. For dairy farmers, they have introduced a biometric ATM in the village so that they don't have to travel to Bhuj to get their payments from the milk factory. People can get their payment at their doorstep. The village now has a Ring Road all around it. Most important of all, they have enough stored water to last two years because in 2008 they constructed several large water harvesting talaabs (ponds). In order to benefit the local villagers from increased tourist inflow, the Government gave the Dhordo panchayat special funds under the Coastal Area Development Plan to create a special resort called "The Gateway of Rann". The idea was to create employment opportunities in the village plus a stable

source of income for the panchayat. This is a unique Private-Public Partnership (PPP) business model. The first year they made a profit of Rs. 8,00,000; the second year it was Rs. 26,00,000 and in 2012, they earned Rs.50,00,000. Every year the profits are increasing manifold.



### Other Areas of Opportunity for Tourism in Kutch Region

Other areas of opportunity in Kutch region which can be gainfully exploited for attracting and engaging tourist in Kutch are:

#### 1- War Memorial

To develop a good tourist spot State Govt in association with Central Govt Department can create another good quality bridge parallel to India bridge to facilitate visit to the War Memorial which is made in Rann of Kutch. War Memorial created at Dharmshala in year 2013 which is 30 km from Khavda village. It will attract tourist as the scenic beauty of white desert from the war memorial is worth capturing as memory.



#### 2- High Magnetic Field Area on Black Hill

On Black Hill which is the highest hill feature in Rann of Kutch there is a point where natural phenomenon of very high magnetic field is experienced. This spot can be developed by widening the road at that particular site, where the magnetic field pull felt on vehicles can be showcased to tourist. It will be something similar to the Magnetic Hill effect of the Leh. The effect of Magnetic field is very strong and it pulls the turned off vehicles uphill with engines switched off. As of now this spot is known to locals or the one who have heard this from someone. This spot will generate employment in form of restaurants, photography and for tour guides.



#### 3- Tropic of Cancer Crossing Point

Road leading to Rann of Kutch from Bhuj crosses the Tropic of Cancer at 25 km. This point can be developed as tourist point as it is on the way while going to Rann of Kutch. A place to halt in form of

restaurants and photography point can be developed which can generate employment for locals.



### Conclusion

In last ten years Kutch has created its special place in tourist map of India and specially Gujarat. The increase in tourist arrivals can be attributed to the massive government - sponsored promotion campaign. A decade ago no one has imagined that this sparkling salt desert will become the favourite tourist destination for National and International tourist during winter season from Nov to Feb. The Department of Tourism has played a key role by taking a focused approach to develop the minimum essential quality infrastructure i.e roads, health care, education, hygiene and sanitation for Rann villages that to in amalgamation with the rural culture and heritage. They gave importance to the marketing campaign which spread the awareness about beauty of Kutch through the means of digital media which in today's time has the maximum reach. They have also given utmost importance to Human Resource Development activities. Which means that aim was to employ the rural population in maximum activities to generate good employment and social upliftment of population of this remote region i.e Kutch. It is estimated that approx 2500 person found variety of job opportunities during Rann Utsav. Tourism has given great platform for locals for preserving the local art and by giving them market at door step for handicraft items. Dhordo in the Rann of Kutch today has become the face of Gujarat's development and growing pride. Continuous steps in developing tourism in Kutch sector will make more avenues for round the year tourist inflow and regular employment of people.

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