

**Anthropology of Rural Tourism  
(Case of Study: Masoule Village)**

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**Abstract:** *Demand and willingness for travelling is rapidly increasing as trading, hobby and leisure...in the world. Increasing personal income, leisure times and changing attitude cause to develop tourism. Therefore tourism change to the social fact mean while rural tourism is the most important type of it. Today most of the countries received their per-capita income of rural tourism. Iran has a potential to become a pioneer country in tourism industry because of hospitality and kindness of the people in Iran. In this paper, Masoule village with unique architecture and attractive culture has been chosen in order to understand the effects of tourism from anthropological point of view. The data presented in this paper, have been collected through informal interviews, empirical observations.*

**Keywords:** *culture, anthropology, tourism, rural tourism, Masoule*

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## **Introduction**

Rural tourism qualifies to be related with the other patterns of tourism. The most important characteristic of rural tourism is its confinement and concentration upon rural regions. Rural tourism has been developed as a specialized section in some countries. Many urban residents prefer to escape from the modern and sophisticated environment and take refuge in rural areas, primarily with an aim to have peace of mind. Moreover, the tourists get many beneficial experiences in the process of contact with customs and traditions of other cultures from rural areas. There are a lot of such kinds of excursions in the western countries. During the recent past, rural tourism has been developed in Iran too. Rural areas having villages with natural, scenic beauty; Beautiful historical villages like Masoule and Abyane have become conspicuous attractions. These villages are being regularly visited by many foreign and domestic tourists. Definitely, the ever growing tourism industry in the villages has both positive and negative consequences. Some experts focus on the positive aspects and vice versa. Some experts disagree with the 'development of the rural tourism industry'. This group advocates that the culture in the rural region needs to be preserved and protected. This group believes that rural tourism needs to be discouraged and stopped for the preservation and protection of the culture in rural areas.

The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the aspects of tourism in Masoule village from an anthropological perspective.

## **Tourism and Tourist**

In the early nineteenth century, the circumstances favored the aristocrats to travel around the world to achieve experiences and get familiar with customs and traditions of other cultures. The term 'tourism' has been used for this type of trip since then (Heidari 2011: 9). In the Webster's Dictionary, 'tourism' refers to travel for entertainment and enjoyment in terms of cultural affairs ... (Kazemi 2007: 31).

## **Tourism: other dimensions**

'Tourism' is a multidimensional concept that is related to various factors which include a set of interactions between governments, guest and host. The factors of tourism are: tourism, governments, people, tourist agencies,

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hotels, the economic structure, transportation, communication networks, historical/ cultural aspects, Cultural heritage and tourism attractions (Zahedi, 2011: 17).

### **The significance of tourism**

According to World Bank statistics, in 2000, the tourists increased more than 701 million around the world so to be added more than 475 billion dollars to the economic process (Mirtalebian, 2002:129). In Thailand, in 1988, more than one million of people were employed directly and indirectly by tourism (Barang, 1988: 71). In the United States, during the recession period in the early 1980s, millions of jobs disappeared, but tourism has brought the new jobs. In Kenya, 40 percent of the country's foreign exchange has been contributed by tourism (Law, 1995:127).

Much of Spain's foreign exchange has been earnings from tourism. This country has got the fourth rank in tourism after USA, French and Italy (Gonzalez, 1996: 39). While the positive and attractive aspects of tourism are appreciated, the negative aspects need to be considered seriously.

### **The types of tourism**

Valen Smith has classified 'tourism' into six distinct types -

- **Ethnic tourism:**  
In this type of tourism, the purpose of this travel is observing ethnic activities. The tourists participate in the religious ceremonies performed by the people, in order to get familiar with foreign culture.
- **Arts Tourism:**  
In This type of tourism, tourists are eager to know everything about the ethnic art, crafts, handicraft, music, dance, movies, theater and play of the Nation/ region they visit.
- **Historical tourism:**  
In this type of tourism, the tourists visit museums, mosques, churches, historical and ancient buildings. They are eager to review the important historical events when the visit different countries like -Iran, Egypt, India or Japan.
- **Entertainment and sports tourism:**  
In this type of tourism, the tourists travel to the other place to spend their leisure times. They like to enjoy the sports such as - sun-bathe, skiing, skating, horse racing and other social activities in a pleasant and a comfortable environment.
- **Work tourism :**  
The purpose of this type of journey is part of the profession. Tourists primarily participate in conferences, seminars or scientific and research meeting.
- **Nature tourism:**  
The aim of this tourism is, visiting the natural environment. Tourists like to spend time in the realm of nature (Rezvani, 2009: 53).

Moreover the thrust of this paper is to examine the concepts, factors and features associated with -Rural Tourism and Cultural Tourism.

### **Rural Tourism**

Rural tourism is, travel to the rural areas in order to observe and understand the activities of the people and the quality of life of the people in the region (Saghaei, 2004: 112). This type of tourism includes the different fields of rural activities. The tourists visit rural festivals, sports and various programs of entertainment (Soteriades & Morios, 2002:612). Natural/morphological conditions and climatic elements contribute to make different villages. These factors directly affect the economic, social and cultural structure. Hence, the variations in these domains contribute to different cultural traditions, customs, architect, and ways of livelihood. These differences are more attractive for the tourists (Rezvani, 2006: 105).

### **Cultural Tourism**

Cultural tourism is an enjoyable and informative trip to visit places of historical and cultural attractions. The tourists have an interest of being familiar with the heritage of the communities they visit. Many people are searching for meaning therefore they are looking for it, in the nature and especially in the heritage and culture (Dexter, 1999). Cultural Tourism aims to understand the culture that lies behind the recreational facilities.

### **Cultural Tourism in Iran**

Iran's land is considered to be one of the best places for its Cultural Heritage. Culture constitutes a foundation for civilization. Cultural variations in Iran include folklore, customs, traditional ceremonies and folk music – all of

which are deeply rooted in the history of this land. These factors attract the tourists from different parts of the world. From this perspective, Masoule village is one of the regions having a rich Cultural heritage in Iran. Hence Masoule village has been selected for this case study.

### Research field

Masoule is approximately 60 km south-west of Rasht and 32 km west of Fuman. The village is 1,050 meters above sea level in the Alborz mountain range, near the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. The village presents a difference in elevation of 100 meters.

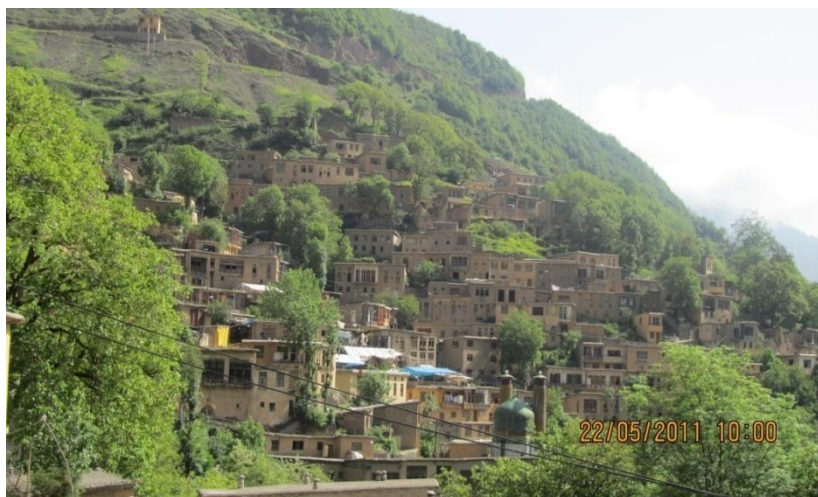


Figure (1): The view of Masoule village

The first village of Masoule was established approximately around 1006 AD, 6 km north-west of the present city. It is called Old-Masoule (KohneMasoule in Persian). People moved from Old-Masoule to the present city because of pestilence and attacks from neighborhood. Some of the families have maintained a written ancestral tree as old as one hundred years. Masoule-Rood-Khan is the river passing through the city with a water fall 200m away from the village. Many other springs are found around Masoule. It is also surrounded by forest from valley to mount. Fog is predominant weather feature of Masoule. Although it has been written that the community was established around 10 AD, the province of Gilan has a long history. Architecture in Masoule is unique. The buildings have been built on the mountain and are inter-connected. Courtyards and roofs both are used as pedestrian areas similar to streets. The spectacular architecture of Masoule is popularly known as - "The yard of the above building is the roof of the below building". Structure of Masoule does not allow any motor vehicles to enter, due to its unique layout. Yellow clay coats the exterior of most buildings in Masoule. This allows for better visibility in the fog. Buildings are multi-stored (1st floor and ground floor) made of adobe, rods and bole. A small living room, big room for guests, winter room, hall, WC and balcony are usually found on the 1st floor. A cold closet, barn and stable are located on the ground floor. The ground floor is connected to the upper floor by several narrow steps inside the building.



Figure (2): The architecture of Masoule village

The region comprises following dominant communities:

- i. 'Maza-var' - (meaning beside the Mosque), at the south
- ii. 'Khana-var' - (beside homes), at the East.
- iii. 'Kasha-sar' - (stretched on top), at the North.
- iv. 'Assa-mahala' -(Assad community), at the West.

Apparently, down town is the Market (Bazaar) area and the main mosque of the village. The name of the mosque is 'O-ne-ben-ne Ali' built in 969 A.D. (Wikipedia).

### Methodology

Conducting Research in tourism industry means, to examine regularly, objectively and logically about travelling and every things related to everything that has been done during the important steps. According to Kazemi(2005: 222), these important steps are:

- i. Before;
- ii. During;
- iii. After;
- iv. Planning - (about the trip and its facilities).

Data were collected by conducting interviews, with the help of an interview guide. Participant- Observations were used to document empirical observations related to the theme of the paper.

### Theoretical framework and experts' tourism anthropologist

This useful discussion is directed to understand the importance of activities of anthropologists, in the domain of anthropology of tourism. Following are some of the most important theorists of tourism anthropology and a summary of views are presented:

- Graburn (1997) believed that tourism is a form of escaping the reality or pleasure principle.
- Nash (1981) stated that tourism is a kind of trip during the leisure time.
- According to Slvyn's (1994) point of view, culture is the main, important and noticeable issue in the tourism.
- Ari (1990) stated that International tourism is a cultural activity during the post-modernism. There is a tendency among the tourists to usually buy unnecessary goods from the local market.
- One of the tourism anthropologists, Dan (1994) believed that in addition to the theories and the research, anthropologists should use and apply their academic knowledge to study the various dimensions related to the industry of tourism. The related theories from tourism anthropology and cultural anthropology must be used in the studies related to tourism (Niazi and the others, 2011: 94).

Dan's theory is used as the theoretical framework for this paper because the authors believe that the lack of attention to cultural theories in the study of tourism may cause some non-recurring events which would influence upon the cultural and social structure.

### **Tourism: Economic, Social, Cultural and Rural Development**

Rural tourism is considered as an avenue for marketing/ business at local level. Hence, there is a potential for regional development (Felisher, 2000: 1010). The result of rural tourism is to be related directly with the demand for tourism. The demand depends on the value of goods, services and facilities. Orientation of rural tourism is variable and depends on the influx of foreign and domestic tourists (GhareNejad, 2006: 74). Estimated demand for rural tourism can be calculated with tourism expenses (Ryan, 1996: 19). In addition to these aspects, the potential of markets and prevalent marketing practices need to be taken into consideration. In comparison with the other aspects of tourism industry, Development of rural tourism should be a top priority. Easy availability, low expenses and low risk are contributing to rural tourism, which in turn leads to the economic growth through - variation and stability; the dynamics of Commerce and Industry; expanded opportunities for growth of multiple activities and create new markets for agricultural products and expand the regional economy (Sharply 2002:332).

### **Cultural considerations in relation to tourism**

According to the research about tourism, it may bring some advantages and disadvantages to the developing countries. The importance of culture to be considered in tourism planning was recognized after United Nations General Assembly convened a special task force committee on 'Tourism' in 1980. In this manifesto, in addition to the consideration of the positive aspects of the cultural and social effects of influx of domestic and international tourists, the governments have been requested to be careful about minimizing the disadvantages and take care of their 'cultural heritage'. The Sixth General Assembly of World Tourism Organization was formed in 1985 in Bulgaria. Musai (2007) has delineated the manifesto of the World Tourism Organization. According to this manifesto, the Governments have been requested as follows:

- The resources like the environmental aspects of tourism, natural, social and cultural heritage of humanity, must be protected for current and future generations.
- They must provide the facilities for domestic and international tourists to travel around and increasing liberalization of travel, to the cultural heritage of the host countries and improve relations between people and the parties.
- Mutual respect between hosts and guests and also respecting to the customs, traditions and religious beliefs should be maintained properly.
- Cultural/ Social differences and conflicts should be avoided both by the host and the guest.
- The host culture should be considered as the universal heritage.

### **Cultural effects of rural tourism from the anthropological perspective**

There is a clear relation between tourism and culture. On one hand the culture is the effective motivation for tourism and on the other hand, tourism is the expansion and development of cultural relations between different countries. The relationship between culture and tourism according to the various arts festivals, cultural exhibitions and conferences have been seen by international tourism organizations. Various communities need to be familiar with the others culture, customs and life styles. The fact that culture has been given promotion by tourism is reflected from familiarization of a particular culture to the other cultures. This also results in removal of the differences between peoples from different cultures. Cultural/ Rural regions have a potential to attract tourists who are religiously curious and eager to know about the language, customs, rituals, ceremonies, belief, art, music, handicraft, of the host culture. The careful behavior of the tourists to regard and respect the rural people certainly results in an atmosphere filled with pleasure and happiness. This pleasant atmosphere certainly has potential for sustaining the local language, customs, rituals and ceremonies for many more years to come. In addition to these observations for Masoule village as a case study, the other cultural effects followed by tourism would include:

- Preservation of historical and traditional customs.
- Preservation of local folklore.
- Strengthening the cultural identity of the village.
- Creation of a flexible and dynamic culture.



Dr. Zahedi wrote in his book - 'Fundamentals, Tourism and Sustainable Eco-system': If tourism development policies are planned and organized, it will be one of the best ways to be familiar with beliefs, traditions and cultures of people who live in other countries. In this process, creating the possibility of cultural exchange and social interaction, causes changing in people's view especially in villages. So prepare some conditions for transferring positive cultural values (2011: 45). While on one hand tourism can be sought for cultural development, on the other hand, it may have destructive and negative impacts. For example, tourists may damage or destroy archaeological sites and historical areas.



Figure (3): The handicraft of Masoule village

In addition, destruction of principles and values, behavioral change, combination of foreign words and phrases with local language. Historical regions like Masoule village have witnessed 'changes' and 'loss' in the domain of traditional handicrafts. There is no doubt that this village has evolved during recent years. The village has done something extraordinary against their traditional interests and towards the economic interest. For example: People of Masoule to draw the tourists' attention of the tourists by using phrases from foreign language indicating that 'they are selling Chinese goods besides their handicraft'.

### Conclusion

Iran has a rich cultural and natural environment. Various regions specially the villages represent a unique and a fantastic area in the world. Iran, with natural resources and valuable historical and cultural monument is suitable for tourism industry especially in rural areas. Rural traditional communities in Iran like Masoule village can be as a fortune in this industry. According to the interest of the people in their cultural heritage, in recent years, the number of the tourists is increasing. Masoule village with the unique nature, rich forest cover on one side, with kind people - having beautiful handicraft, arts; and - following attractive ceremonies and customs - are appropriate for tourism. In fact the accurate planning is necessary for preserving the cultural heritage of Masoule. If the preference moves towards 'economic development', then there is a potential danger of destruction of the valuable cultural heritage and traditional structure. Hence, the planning must be carefully done to ensure that the balance between cultural, economic, social, political, and natural resources is not distorted in a non-sustainable manner. Surely attracting the 'special tourists' in all regions needs to be 'encouraged in a sustainable manner'.

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