

A study on Agritourism in India: an inception

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Abstract: Agriculture is the main sector of Indian Economy. Around 67 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent of agriculture. Out of total GDP around 13 percent GDP comes from agriculture sector. Providing additional income generating activities to existing agriculture would certainly increase contribution of agriculture to national GDP. Agri Tourism will serve this purpose. Agri Tourism is the latest concept in the Indian Tourism industry. It gives an opportunity to experience the real enchanting and authentic contact with real life. Promotion of Agri tourism needs conceptual convergence with rural tourism, health tourism and adventure tourism. Tourism is termed as instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. The world tourism organization has estimated that the tourism industry is growing at the rate of 4 percent a year. Whereas Indian tourism industry is growing at 10.1 percent which is 2.5 times more than the world rate. The tourism sector is one of the major foreign exchange earners for country. Agro tourism is one such form of tourism which has recently emerged in Maharashtra. It is a field with potential to develop. Certainly as a newly developing field it has its own share of challenges and management issues to face. The issues like guest host relationship, sustainability, economic feasibility are important for any new tourism development at a destination. It is more so in the case of agro tourism as it has a direct impact on the host culture and rural community as a whole. In today's era of liberalization and globalization travel and tourism is extensively recognized as an important civil industry worldwide which provides major potential for economic growth and development. For many developing countries it is one of the main sources of foreign exchange income and the number one export category, creating much needed employment and opportunities for development. In over 150 countries tourism is one of the five top export earners, and in 60 it is the number one export category. Agritourism industry in India has a lot potential to develop the rural India. This report gives an overall perception of agritourism, its opportunities, challenges and the role of Extension & Advisory services in promoting agritourism in India

I. Introduction:

Concept of Agri-tourism:

Agri tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms. It gives an opportunity to the tourists to experience the real enchanting and authentic contact with the rural life, taste the local genuine food and get familiar with the various farming tasks during the visit. Tourists can relax and revitalize in the pure natural environment. The urban life is becoming more hectic and complex. The corporate world has provided good employment avenues but along with this it has increased the stress level and the complexity. With the experience of Agri tourism the people can get relaxation. Because of the urbanization, many children as well as the adults do not have an idea about the rural life and the agriculture. Agri tourism provides them a chance to experience rural life and see the agricultural activities. Agri tourism includes opening up farms to tourists from urban areas and from abroad, and letting them to take experience of rural life. Apart from telling them about the various crops and how they are sown and harvested, agri tourism exposes tourists to traditional food, handicraft, culture, music and language. Tourists can get an experience of rural activities such as bullock cart rides, milking cows and goats and picking farm fresh fruits and vegetables etc.

Objectives:

1. To study the ongoing Agri-tourism initiatives & existing schemes to promote agro-tourism in the country.
2. Documentation of existing business models in Agro-tourism – suggesting viable model
3. To find out the strategic role of extension and advisory services in sustenance of Agro-Tourism

Methodology:

- The research is will be mainly carried through desk research i.e., secondary sources like maps, photographs, books, internet web sites, dissertations, doctoral level research work, journals, newspaper clippings and conference material etc.,

- Personal interviews with selected agro-tourism entrepreneurs with a questionnaire and discussions with stakeholders in tourism & other related government officials.
- Statistical analysis

Introduction of Agri tourism:

Since, now days the major development in Agritourism is taking place all around the world, different forms of Agritourism are seen. Agritourism gives people the chance to breathe fresh air, learn about rural environment, ride horses, pick fruits, feed animals, milk cows and participate in actual work of farm and buy produce directly from a farm. Agritourism is a form of niche tourism in which farms are used as tour destinations for educational and/or recreational purposes.

Why agri tourism?

Mother nature is an open door school without brick walls, observe carefully , explore the hidden treasures and learn something or the other , moreover India is agriculture country , hence it is expected of us to be well informed about it. Urban population is increasing day by day, today urban children's world is restricted in the closed door school, classes, cartoon programs on the television, video games, chocolates, soft drinks, spicy fast food, computer, internet, and so on, and they see Mother Nature only on television screen. Moreover out of people living in the cities 35 % do not have relatives in villages and 43% never visited or stayed in village. Agriculture as business is becoming more and more expensive and many farmers cannot afford it. To add to this the gradual loss of fertility of the land that is giving diminishing yields. Unless and until the farmers start business of any form to compliment and support to their income from land, they shall be doomed to eke out bare existence below poverty line.

Agri tourism Definitions:

Definitions of Agri tourism approved by all the researchers and organizations in the different regions of world are characterized specially by taking into consideration their own specific characteristics of the area where that selective form of tourist offer has been developing. Worldwide many terms have been used to convey the idea of Agritourism. It is multifaceted and may entail agricultural tourism, agro tourism, farm tourism, farm vacation tourism, wine tourism, agriturismo, as well as some related terms that are used interchangeably with Agritourism or that are complementary to Agritourism include nature tourism, rural tourism, alternative farming, wildlife enterprises, ecotourism, agritainment, heritage tourism, agri education and value added agriculture (Brant and Rhoades, 2007).

The dictionary meaning of Agritourism is tourism in which tourist's board at farms or in rural villages and experience farming at close hand (Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).

Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) define Agritourism as "any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors."

McGehee, Kim, and Jennings (2007) explain Agritourism as "rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component." Marques (2006): "a specific type of rural tourism in which the hosting house must be integrated into an agricultural estate, inhabited by the proprietor, allowing visitors to takepart in agricultural or complementary activities on the property." Sonnino (2004) "activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities."

Sharpley and Sharpley (1997) "tourism products which are directly connected with the agrarian environment, agrarian products or agrarian stays."

SCOPE OF AGRI - TOURISM

Agri-Tourism has great scope in the present context for the following reasons:

1. **An inexpensive gateway** - The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is least in Agri-Tourism. This widens the tourist base. Present concept of travel and tourism is limited to urban and rich class which constitutes only a small portion of the population. However, the concept of Agri-Tourism takes travel and tourism to the larger population, widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness.

2. **Curiosity about the farming industry and life style** - The urban population having roots in villages always have had the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. Agri-Tourism which revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.

3. Strong demand for wholesome family oriented recreational activities -

Villages provide recreational opportunities to all age groups i.e. children young, middle and old age, male, female, in total to the whole family at a cheaper cost. Rural games, festivals, food, dress and the nature provides variety of entertainment to the entire family.

4. Health consciousness of urban population and finding solace with nature friendly means - Modern lifestyle has made life stressful and average life span has come down. Hence, people are in constant search of pro-nature means to make life more peaceful. Ayurveda which is a pro-nature medical approach has roots in villages. Indigenous medical knowledge of villagers is respected. Organic foods are in greater demand in urban areas and foreign countries. In total, health conscious urban population is looking towards pronature villages for solutions.

5. Desire for peace and tranquility - Modern life is a product of diversified thinking and diversified activities. Every individual attempts to work more, in different directions to earn more money to enjoy modern comforts. Hence, peace is always out of his system. Tourism is a means for searching peaceful location. Peace and tranquility are inbuilt in Agri-Tourism as it is away from urban areas and close to nature.

6. Interest in natural environment - Busy urban population is leaning towards nature. Because, natural environment is always away from busy life. Birds, animals, crops, mountains, water bodies, villages provide totally different atmosphere to urban population in which they can forget their busy urban life.

7. Disillusionment with overcrowded resorts and cities - In resorts and cities, overcrowded peace seekers disturb each other's peace. Hence, peace is beyond cities and resorts. Even though efforts are made to create village atmosphere in the sub urban areas through resorts, farm houses, it looks like a distant replica of the original.

8. Nostalgia for their roots on the farm - Cities are growing at the cost of villages. Villagers are migrating to cities in search of jobs and to seek the comforts of modern life. Hence, yesterday's villagers are today's urbanites. Deep in the heart of urbanites lies the love and respect for their ancestors and villages. Hence, visit to villages satisfies their desire. This is also expressed through the hatred of urbanites to flat culture and love for farmhouses located in the outskirts of cities. Any opportunity to visit villages and spend time with family is dream of any urbanite. But, minimum decent facilities are always problem. Agri-Tourism attempts to overcome this problem.

9. Rural recreation - Villages provide variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts. Villagers (farmers) lifestyle, dress, languages, culture / traditions which always add value to the entertainment. Agricultural environment around farmers and the entire production process could create curiosity among urban taught. Places of agricultural importance like highest crop yielding farm, highest animal yielding farm, processing units, farms where innovations tried add attraction to the tourists. Agricultural products like farm gate fresh market, processed foods, organic food could lure the urban tourists. As result of this agri – atmosphere in the villages, there is scope to develop Agri – Tourism products like agri-shopping, culinary tourism, pick and own your tree / plot, bed and breakfast, pick and pay, bullock cart riding, camel riding, boating, fishing, herbal walk, rural games and health (ayurvedic) tourism.

10. Educational value of Agri-Tourism – Agri-Tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban school children. It provides a best alternative for school picnics which are urban based. It provides opportunity for hands on experience for urban college students in agriculture. It is a means for providing training to future farmers. It would be effectively used as educational and training tool to train agriculture and line department officers. This provides unique opportunity for education through recreation where learning is fun effective and easy. Seeing is believing, doing is learning. This experience based concept is the USP of Agri- Tourism.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF AGRI – TOURISM

Agri - Tourism should ensure the following three basic principles.

1. Have something for visitors to see - Animals, birds, farms and nature are few things which Agri-Tourism could offer to the tourist. Apart from these, culture, dress, festivals and rural games could create enough interest among visitors in Agri-Tourism.

2. Have something for visitors to do - Participating in agricultural operations, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, cooking and participating in the rural games are few activities to quote in which tourists can take part and enjoy.

3. Have something for visitors to buy - Rural crafts, dress materials, farm gate fresh agriculture products, processed foods are the few items which tourist can buy as memento for remembrance.

HISTORY OF AGROTOURISM

Agro tourism has been around for a lot longer than anyone might think. In the simple history of agro tourism, our group summarized that development of the history itself related to human development along with the world technologies. Agro tourism also known as agro tourism, and the history of it was discussed by the expert from University of Tennessee Extension Publication by considering it as Agritainment. Agritainment (agro tourism and entertainment farming enterprises), created in 1800s, when families visited farming relatives in order to escape from the city and experience the farming. Mostly they don't really took the holiday as a part of the agro tourism because their main focus is to release tension and get some rest during that time.

Visiting other country become more popular with the widespread use of the automobile in 1920s. The used of car and vehicle make them easier to move and to explore the other place that required them to do some journey. That make the agro tourism become more popular and it increases not only the agro tourism industry but also the economy of the country because of many people have their own transportation. Rural recreation gained interest again in the 1930s

and 1940s by folks that seeking an escape from the stresses of the Great Depression of World War II. These demands for rural recreation lead to widespread interest in horseback riding, farm petting five zoos and farm nostalgia during 1960s and 1970s. Farm vacations, bed and breakfasts, and commercial farm tours were popular in the 1980s and 1990s.

AGRI TOURISM IN INDIA

Emergence of Tourism as an Industry in India:

Leisure travel was associated with the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom. It gave an opportunity to new middle class emerging due to industrial revolution to travel for leisure. The first official travel company 'Cox and Kings' was established in the year 1758. Tourism was identified as a revenue generating sector in western countries. In India the scenario was totally different. Since her independence in 1947, Indian policy makers had traditionally neglected tourism industry as it was considered to be a luxury segment benefiting only few. As then, the Indian economy depended a lot on agriculture, the government policies had always aimed to develop agriculture and other allied areas. Tourism was always viewed as an industry serving the elite instead of being accepted as a means to provide employment with good "multiplier effect". **In 1955, the first Planning Commission of India had placed tourism industry 269th in its priority list.** As a result in 1950's the number of International tourists visiting India was just around 15000. Tourism was considered as an easy way to correct foreign exchange shortage. Consequently hotel rooms, food and beverage, handicrafts and many other services in most of the tourist destinations in India had traditionally been overpriced. Although in 2000, Global tourism industry represented one of the largest industries in the world with revenue of \$595 billion and the number of tourist arrivals globally as high as 698 million; India's share in global tourism remained low.

The Union Budget granted the tourism industry much needed "Infrastructure – Status."

As a result of boosting rural development from tourism point of view and encouragement of tourism infrastructure development in rural areas by state governments, Agri- Tourism Development Corporation was established on 16th May 2004 in Maharashtra. "Its aim is to promote Agro Tourism to help rural youth to earn good respectable living in the village and on the farm itself. First ever International Agri-Tourism day was celebrated on 16th May, 2008 in Pune. The 'Tenth Five Year Plan' opened up following opportunities for agrotourism in India.

Agro Tourism Opportunities in India:

1. Indian tourism industry is growing @10.1%. The World Tourism organization has estimated that the tourism industry is growing at the rate of 4% a year and that by the year 2010 there will be more than one billion tourists visit various parts of the world. But Indian tourism industry is growing at the rate of 10% which is 2½ times more than the growth rate at global level. By introducing Agro-tourism concept, not only present growth rate is sustained but also this value addition contributes to further growth.
2. India has entered amongst the top 10 tourist destinations list (Conde Nast Traveller "A leading European Travel Magazine). India is already established as one of the top tourist destination in the world. Value addition by introducing novel products like Agro-tourism would only strengthen the competitiveness of Indian tourism industry in global market.
3. India has diverse culture and geography which provide ample and unlimited scope for the growth of this business. India has diverse agro-climatic conditions, diverse crops, people, culture, deserts, mountains,

coastal systems and islands which provide scope for promotion of all seasons, multi-location tourism products.

4. Increasing number of tourists preferring non-urban tourist spots. Hence, there is scope for promotion of non-urban tourist spots in interior villages by establishing Agro-tourism centers. But, adequate facilities and publicity are must to promote such centers.
5. Government initiatives and policies in X five year plan allocation has been increased from 525 crores to 2900 crores. Increased financial allocation reaffirms the government commitment. The increased financial allocation by six times could be used for capacity building of service providers, creation of infrastructure and publicity.

Challenges and strategies

Many Indian farmers are currently involved in or are considering the use of agritourism as a means of diversifying their farm operations. How they will accomplish this is the challenge.

II. Conclusion

In today's era of liberalization and globalization travel and tourism is extensively recognized as an important civil industry worldwide which provides major potential for economic growth and development. For many developing countries it is one of the main sources of foreign exchange income and the number one export category, creating much needed employment and opportunities for development. In over 150 countries tourism is one of the five top export earners, and in 60 it is the number one export category. Agritourism industry in India has a lot potential to develop the rural India. This report gives an overall perception of agritourism, its opportunities, challenges and the role of Extension & Advisory services in promoting agritourism in India

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