

2. Agri-Tourism in India and Its Potential to Increase Farmer Income

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Abstract:

Agri-tourism refers to an actively participating in a rural lifestyle that combines agricultural activities with tourism for the entertainment and recreation of tourists. Also, agro-tourism is a close connection with nature and the experiencing of direct agricultural activities on farm. It provides the local farmers with a window to generate additional income and a channel for direct marketing to consumers.

This is creating economic pressure on some villages, which in turn causes young people to move towards rural areas and develop their agricultural land in such a way to generate income. There is a segment of the urban population that is interested in visiting the rural areas and understanding the lifestyle. Besides this, it helps to preserve agricultural lands and allows states to develop business enterprises. Currently, agri-tourism is to have a little bit of success on account of its ability to revitalize rural economies, provide employment opportunities to local residents, and educate the masses about agricultural practices.

Agro-tourism is a way of alternative tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the tourist has the opportunity to get experience with agriculture farm to allow a person to view them growing, harvesting and processing locally grown foods, cooking traditional food, agricultural occupations and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural norms, ethics and traditions. Moreover, this activity brings tourist closer to nature and rural activities in which they can participate, be entertained and feel the pleasure of touring. Agro-Tourism is helpful to farmers as well as urban peoples.

It has provided an additional income source to the farmers and employment opportunity to the local people and rural youth. But, there are some problems in the process of the development of such centers. Hence, the government and other related authorities should try to support these activities in India for the rural development and doubling income level of the farmers. The farmers should also try to establish their co-operative society for the development of agro-tourism centers. The agro-tourism may become a cash crop for the farmers in India and also an instrument of the rural employment generation.

Keywords:

Agri- Tourism, Rural Tourism, Rural Economy.

2.1 Introduction:

Agriculture is considered to be the backbone of the Indian economy. Around 85 percent of the India's population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and allied activities and almost 26 percent of India's GDP comes from agriculture. 90 million farmers are dwelling in 0.625 million villages producing more than 20 Metric Tonnes (MT) of food grains feeding the country. More than a profession or a business, agriculture is deeply rooted in the Indian culture. Farmers are now exuberant to try newer methods away from the typical and orthodox patterns to build relations with the consumers directly and earn extra income. Hence, adding on to the agricultural income with some touristic activities is bringing in new hopes and better lives. Serious efforts are now being made in this direction and Agri-Tourism is one such activity that fits the bill.

Agri-tourism as a concept is not very new although its reach is limited to only some places. Agri-tourism with its small steps and the amulet of research can definitely bring changes in the life of farmers and consumers shall also reap the benefits of it. India is a country that possesses an abundance of riches, including wealth, power, and beauty bestowed by nature. It is a place where some regions are considered a paradise on earth. If one were to search the entire world for such a place, India would be the country they should look to.

A country whose geographical journey begins from the snow-covered Himalayan mountains in the northern region, passes through the desert landscapes of Rajasthan, and then crosses the lush forests of Madhya Pradesh, the western upturned rims rising to form the Sahyadri Range and the Konkan coastal strip abutting on the Arabian Sea in Maharashtra. Next, it sails through the extensive backwaters of Kerala before culminating in the crystal-clear waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This journey offers a thrilling experience through high-altitude terrains and peaceful lowlands.

2.2 Concept of Agri-Tourism:

Agro tourism can be defined as a "range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business" (Joshi *et al.*,2001).

Pandurang Taware, Father of Agri-Tourism Concept, India, says "Agro tourism is that agri-business activity, when a native farmers or persons of the area offer tours of their agriculture farms to allow a person to view them growing, harvesting and processing locally grown foods, such as coconuts, pineapple, sugarcane, corn or any agriculture produce the person would not encounter in their city or home country. Often the farmers would provide a home stay opportunity and education"

Che *et al.* (2005) mentioned that "agri-tourism is another consumptive use of farmland and may help preserve farms".

Agri-tourism is where agriculture and tourism meet to provide us with an amazing educational experience, whether it is a tour of a farm or ranch, a festival or cheese-making class. Farmers turn their farm lands into a destination and open their doors to the public in order to teach more about what they do. A growing number of farmers are turning entrepreneurs and earning big bucks from something they offered unique experience to friends and relatives – a healthy and relaxing weekend to unwind in lush green farms, drive a tractor, ride a bullock cart, milk a cow, cooking local foods, transplanting of rice, pluck fresh fruit from orchards and many other operations done by the local people.

The plate is full with offerings like dairy practices, bird watching, wine trails, hay making and local handicrafts to woo the consumers with the simplicity of villagers hooked to it in the background. There are tons of unique activities waiting to be explored. Agri tourism farms in India offer tours to allow a person to view the growing, harvesting and processing of locally grown foods, such as corn, coconuts, sugar cane and pineapple etc. Often the farmers provide a home-stay opportunity and general education on the workings of the farm. It was considered in many locations to be a low-investment, low-risk strategy as farms mainly made use of their existing resources.

Agri Tourism is however not all about staying in a village and enjoying the food, this is an opportunity to be close to where the 75% of Indians live. One of the best things about staying on a farm is that guests can contribute to the place through their involvement. The idea is to make tourists live life like a villager. It gives you the opportunity to experience the pleasant and authentic contact with the rural life, taste the local genuine food and get familiar with the various farming tasks during the visit. It provides people the welcome getaway from the daily hectic life in the peaceful rural environment. It gives the chance to relax and re-energize in the pure natural environment, surrounded by magnificent setting. Explore the real India and have the experience of the lifetime on the farm stay holidays.

2.3 History of ‘Agri-Tourism:

The term ‘agri-tourism’ was initially used in the US, but it originated from an Italian National Legal Framework passed in 1985. This law promotes overnight farm stays to diversify the incomes of Italian farmers and support the landscape of farming operations. The fundamental concept of agri-tourism was entrepreneurial diversification of a farm. This was later amended to ‘Regulations of Agri-tourism’, which privatised and extended the concept of agri-tourism to agricultural firms.

The seeds of agri-tourism in India were first sown by the formation of the Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) located at Baramati in Maharashtra. The ATDC was founded in 2004 by Pandurang Taware, an entrepreneur from the farming community. It is a company that encourages agricultural tourism in Maharashtra and promotes it as a means of diversifying business opportunities and securing a feasible livelihood for farmers.

Following a phase of research and an initial pilot programme in a village of Baramati district in 2005, the ATDC has grown, with some trained farmers and agri-tourism locations across the state of Maharashtra. Since its inception, farmers across the state have gained a 25% growth in their incomes.

Further, it has a policy of employing local youth as agri-tourism guides and specifically contracts women for food preparation services through organised women's self-help groups. The Government of India has come up with a vision of doubling farmers' incomes by 2022. However, economic indicators do not show equitable and egalitarian growth in this. To supplement and enhance farmers' incomes, agri-tourism can be implemented as a secondary sector. But policies and guidelines for this concept are still insufficient in India.

2.4 Need for and Importance of Agro-Tourism in India:

Agri tourism is becoming an increasingly popular industry globally and even in almost every state in India. It is said that agro-tourism is a better way to know about the traditional agricultural farming activities which brings us very close to mother-nature and it is also very essential thing for a sustainable living on this planet. Today, Indian cities are facing the problem of overcrowd and environment pollution. Now, it has become an assumed fact that agro-tourism can give us a relief from the hectic life of urban areas. That is why; agro-tourism, eco-tourism and rural tourism are emerging as key sectors of tourism business in India.

Agro-tourism is an innovative agricultural activity related to agriculture and tourism both. India is one of the major tourist centers and there is great potential to encourage farmers to establish small and viable business such as agro-tourism in rural India. Urban population is increasing day by day in India. Today urban children's world has become limited in the closed-door school, classes, cartoon programs on the television, video games, chocolates, soft drinks, spicy fast food, computer, internet and so on, they see mother nature only on television screen. Now it has become very necessary that children know the traditional way of agricultural farming activities and other businesses dependent on agriculture.

Here children come very close to Mother Nature and learn many new things in life for a sustainable living. As commercialism and mass production become the standards by which we live, agri-tourism has given people who work in the agricultural and horticultural sectors a chance to share their work with the masses. Some agri-tourism experiences allow guests to buy food products grown on the farm or hand-crafted products made by the farmers' families; purchasing these goods helps provide farmers who rely on their land with another source of income. Home and consumer education has given way to technology courses in middle and high schools and many children grow up without ever really knowing what the countryside is or what it's like to interact with live farm animals. Agri tourism, therefore gives parents the opportunity to introduce their children to something other than the city life.

It is eco-friendly which is very essential in the present environmental scenario. It makes tourists familiar with the rural life and roots of early civilization. Provides an affordable and easily accessible family outing that individuals and families can participate in without much planning. It has a vast scope in the present scenario of tourism business in India. It is less expensive gateway of tourism and the cost of accommodation, food, travel and recreation is very less in Agro-Tourism when compared to any other type of tourism. It widens the tourist base by widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness. It has a strong demand in the contemporary world scenario.

It provides all opportunities to all age groups i.e. children, young, middle and old age, female, male, in total to the entire family at a cheaper cost. It makes tourists familiar with rural games, traditional dresses, festivals and food. It brings tourists close to the nature and provides variety of entertainment to them. It is a source of knowledge to get information about plants, animals, raw materials like handicrafts, woods, rural lifestyle and their languages, culture, tradition. Agro-Tourism which generally revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the potential to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population. It is a way for tourists to look towards agro-tourism as a means for searching peace. It provides tourists an opportunity to visit villages and spend time with family. It creates awareness about rural life and agriculture science among urban children and it can effectively be used as educational and training tool to train urban tourists. It provides variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts. These peoples want enjoy rural life but there is problem of such type of facilities. Hence, it is opportunity to the farmers for development of the agro-tourism centers and serves them and creates additional income sources. In the world of climate change and pandemic, people are now more keen towards finding their roots and going back to nature. This is why farmstays are now blossoming in India. These places offer authentic village and farm life by providing interactive experience of rural life. Fresh air is all we seek today and these are places where we can repair our polluted lungs!

2.5 Principles to be followed in Agri Tourism:

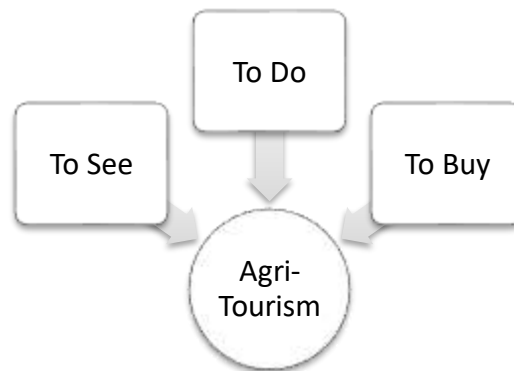


Figure 2.1: Agri Tourism

To see: - Birds, animals, farms and nature are the few things which Agri- tourism could offer to the visitors to see. Apart from these, culture, dress, festivals and rural games could create enough interest among forest in Agri-tourism.

To do: - Participating in agricultural operations and swimming, camel riding, buffalo riding, bullock cart riding, cooking and participating in the rural games are the few activities to quote in which tourist can take part and enjoy.

To buy: -Hand-made crafts, farm gate fresh agriculture products, dress materials, processed foods are the few items which tourist can buy a memory of a place.

Who can start agro-tourism centers?

The individual farmer can start agro-tourism who has minimum two hectares land, farm house, water resource and is interested to entertain the tourists. Apart from the individual farmer, agricultural co-operatives institute, Non-government organizations, Agricultural Universities, and Agricultural Colleges may start their centres. Even *Grampanchayats* can start such centres in their operational areas with the help of villagers and farmers.

2.6 India Agri-Tourism Market Needs:

The widespread adoption of agri-tourism to support farmers' incomes and create novel tourism forms, thereby contributing to the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, is primarily driving the India agri-tourism market. In addition to this, the growing curiosity about rural and farm activities, particularly among the millennial and urban population, is also moving the growth of the market. Furthermore, the popularity of agri-tourism as it provides business opportunities for the local tourism operators or local farmers and offers family-oriented recreation surroundings is creating a positive outlook for the regional market. In line with this, agri-tourism also offers several farm activities, including fishing, horseback riding, harvest festivals, wildlife photography, wagon or sleigh rides, sheep shearing, cooking classes, guided animal tours, historical re-enactments, etc., at a meager cost. This, along with the rising utilization of farms for events, such as weddings, gatherings, and private parties, is acting as a significant growth-inducing factor. Moreover, the expanding health-conscious population, which seeks pro-nature ways to escape the stress of hectic lifestyles, is also stimulating the market growth.

Additionally, numerous favorable initiatives by the Indian government aimed at promoting and developing the agri-tourism sector in the country are further catalyzing the market. For instance, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture has launched the 'Swadesh Darshan Scheme' for the integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits and instituted a national award in the category of 'Best Rural/Agri/Plantation Tourism Projects' to motivate the stakeholders. Apart from this, the emergence of community-based agri-tourism, which emphasizes on sustaining rural livelihoods, protecting traditional agricultural practices, and preserving cultures via sustainable land use planning, is projected to fuel the India agri-tourism market in the upcoming years. It provides the farmers with an opportunity to generate additional income and a channel for direct marketing to consumers. Agri-tourism also offers communities the potential to increase their local tax bases. Besides this, it helps to preserve agricultural lands and allows states to develop business enterprises. Currently, agri-tourism is gaining immense traction across India on account of its ability to revitalize rural economies, provide employment opportunities to local residents, and educates the masses about agricultural practices.

2.7 Agri-tourism Increasingly Significant:

Sustainable Tourism:

For escaping from climate change and tourism induced pollution level and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions have resulted in rising demand for natural and rural destinations as

tourist attractions and that can bring eco-friendly tourism experiences such as agri-tourism into the mainstream business.

Addresses Rural ‘Decline’

India’s agriculture has been under stress due to increased input costs, volatile returns, climatic adversaries, land fragmentation, and so on.

- Although it is a mainstay of the economy, farmers have shifted to other industries in search of alternative livelihoods and income diversification.
- Agri-tourism can address the ‘hollowing out’ effect of rural decline and restore farmers’ confidence in agriculture and ecosystem-based services.

Benefits to Farmers:

Agri-tourism helps in supporting incomes of farmers.

- It also acts as a motivator to changing farmers’ attitudes or preferences to farming.
- to use the land which would be left fallow or uncultivated.
- In contrast, it also prevents a portion of farmland available to a farmer engaged in agri-tourism from cultivation, and instead uses it for tourism activities.

Benefits for Communities: From a community perspective, agri tourism can be a vehicle for:

- generating additional income for local businesses and services from tourists;
- upgrading community facilities for residents tourist,
- increasing protection of rural landscapes and natural environments for tourists and residents;
- helping preserve and to give a new identity to local traditions, art and craft;
- promoting inter-regional, inter-cultural communication and understanding.

Benefits for Tourism Operators:

- diversifying the mix of tourism products and services available to visitors;
- increasing tourism flows into attractive rural regions;
- increasing season length during traditionally off-peak business periods;
- uniquely positioning rural regions in key tourism markets;
- Bringing more non-local currency to local businesses.

Potential to increase farm Income.:

Agri-tourism can fuel rural economies through the multiplier effect and the acquired benefits will be shared amongst different businesses within the community. Rural tourism help in employing local youth as agri-tourism guides and specifically local women for food preparation services through Self-Help Groups (SHG’s). The Government of India had a

vision of doubling farmers' income. To supplement and enhance farmers' incomes, agri-tourism could be implemented as a secondary sector. But policies and guidelines for this concept are still insufficient in India.

Even for smart farmers and small businessmen, there are some barriers due to the lack of familiarity with visitors' expectations and language problem. The transition from traditional agriculture to agri-tourism is quite a challenging job for local people. Further development of agri-tourism provides profitability for agricultural products and services, especially for small farms in distress.

2.8 Major Challenges in Agro- tourism:

- a. Compared to urban populations, rural populations are not only impoverished but also less familiar with the concept of agri-tourism. Additionally, lack knowledge about how to market their cultural, artistic, hand-made ornaments and craft-related services to tourists.
- b. Accommodation facilities or inadequate lodging as per visitors' expectation was not developed. Poor transportation, insufficient infrastructure, further prevent these areas from being recognised as tourist destinations.
- c. In rural areas, the main problem is that most people rely on agriculture or traditional artisanal businesses that do not provide sufficient income to them. This results in migration of the rural youth towards urban areas. As a result, rural to urban migration has become a major issue in India.
- d. One solution to this problem is to develop agri- tourism, which can create new economic activities and increase demand for services., it ultimately increases competition and crime. Therefore, it is important to carefully plan rural tourism development to ensure that local communities benefit and the environment and natural resources are protected.
- e. To achieve this, education and proper understanding of both tourists and local people are essential. There also needs to be a democratic movement that allows people at all levels to participate in tourism development and decision-making. Overall, agri-tourism has the potential to provide economic opportunities for rural communities, but it must be carefully managed to ensure that it benefits everyone involved.
- f. Major challenges faced in Agri-tourism development in India are the lack of digital literacy, marketing, and proper tourism infrastructure. While technology can increase travellers' confidence to travel, the low level of digital literacy in rural areas hinders the adoption of technology-based solutions. Despite having a higher number of internet users in rural areas than urban areas, almost 60 percent of the rural population does not actively use the internet. To address this issue, Indian tourism startups can provide digital literacy and simplified digital solutions to improve the livelihoods of local communities.

2.9 Conclusion:

Agro-tourism has the capability to boost the existing Indian farming and shape emerging farming industry by stimulating the agricultural and general economy, protecting rich environmental heritage, natural wealth and promoting climate resilient and sustainable agriculture. It helps to protect the bond between a people and soil through different products

and services like educational tours, farm tours, special agriculture related events and festivals and other value added farm products. The farmer entrepreneurs, who are only limited by their creativity, can be the torch bearers of twenty-first century Indian agriculture by diversifying their products and services while educating the world a great deal about their strong agricultural heritage. In return, agro-tourism can ensure income and respect to the most valuable citizens of the mother earth.

Hence, the agriculture departments of the India, Agriculture Universities should try to give orientation or training about it and provide some innovative ideas regarding to the Agro-Tourism. The government should try to provide optimum financial aids to the agro-tourism activities by the grants and institutional finance. Policies and subsidies directly targeting agri-tourism are important. Regional development policies and models are equally necessary for the sound utilisation of local resources and creation of essential services to tourists in a specific region to increase agri-tourism income. Thus, farmers can turn their farm lands into a tourist destination and open their doors to the public in order to share more about what they do. Simultaneously, they can gain income and their farm produce may also fetch better value. This highlights the innovative nature of agri-tourism that can attract a young generation of farmers, offer new opportunities for youth development in rural areas and boost rural economy.

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