

4. Potential of Agritourism in Revitalizing Rural Communities

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Abstract:

Recently, agrotourism has come up as a promising and sustainable enterprise, combining both tourism and agriculture to provide some unique experiences in rural areas. This form of tourism gaining popularity all over the world specially in India. India has both rural and urban population and agrotourism works as a connecting link between them. Agrotourism offers a solution by inviting visitors to experience the charm of rural life, immerse themselves in agricultural activities, and connect with nature.

Tourists can engage in activities such as farm tours, harvesting crops, participating in traditional festivals, and even staying in farm accommodations. This not only generates supplemental income for local farmers but also stimulates the growth of ancillary businesses such as local food markets, handicrafts, and transportation services. Additionally, agrotourism promotes cultural exchange, preserves traditional practices, and provides educational opportunities about food production and sustainability. Agrotourism market has been showing substantial growth potential. In India, states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan and others successfully implementing agrotourism as a business enterprise which not only boosts farmers' income but also provides a road map for cultural exchange, education and sustainable development.

Keywords:

Agrotourism, Enterprise, Income generation, Sustainable development.

4.1 Introduction:

Agro-tourism is a relatively new area of the tourism industry which evolved into an economically viable venture in its own right. Agro-tourism is a method of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas that aims to improve rural communities' living standards, particularly through increased income for agricultural workers.

Agro-tourism combines tourism and agriculture to give us an incredible educational experience, whether it's a celebration, a cheese-making session, or a visit to a plantation or farm. Farmers develop their plantation grounds into tourism hotspots and welcome visitors into their homes, to better inform the public about what they do. Agro-tourism is growing in importance both globally and in practically every Indian state. Agro-tourism provides a one-of-a-kind opportunity for activities such as choosing our own fresh fruit from a garden, trying our hand at calf roping, or taking a farm hayride. There are numerous unusual pastimes simply waiting to be found. Agrotourism is a strategy for sustainable tourism growth and multi-activity in rural areas that seeks to raise the standard of life in these communities, especially through boosting the income of agricultural workers.

Agro-tourism first appeared in the late 20th century. It contains farms engaged in agriculture and tourism. The goal of agrotourism is to improve rural society's standard of living and farmers' incomes. Rural tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) as tourism that provides tourists with a personal encounter, a taste of the natural environment, and, to the greatest extent possible, enables them to engage in the customs, traditions, and way of life of the locals (Aref and Gill, 2009). Rural tourism is defined by the Government of India (GoI) as any type of travel that highlights rural life, art, culture, and heritage in a rural setting, thereby enhancing tourism while also enhancing the local community's economic and social well-being. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stated that "it is tourism that take place in the countryside" (Reichel *et al.*, 2000).

4.2 Agro-Tourism at Global Level:

The market for agro-tourism was estimated to be worth \$42.46 billion globally in 2019 and is anticipated to increase to \$62.98 billion by 2027, rising at a CAGR of 13.4% between 2021 and 2027. Numerous activities and services are offered as part of agro-tourism, which is generally regarded as a low-risk, low-investment industry. Through the multiplier effect and the benefits distributed among various businesses in the community, it can support rural economies. The National Legal Framework for Agro-tourism was adopted by Italy's house and senate in 1985, making agro-tourism a recognised industry in the nation. A farm's entrepreneurial diversification was the core idea behind agro-tourism. Later, this was changed to "Regulations of Agro-tourism," privatising and extending the definition of agro-tourism to include agricultural businesses.

Some nations, like Spain, regulate agro-tourism at the regional level rather than the national level or through a national framework regulation. This is because the local autonomous communities in the region are skilled at managing tourism. Agro-tourism regulations that have been passed by many US states may offer a strong defence against claims of client injury.

A. Agro-Tourism in India:

Agriculture is the backbone of India and that it accounts for a significant portion of our economy. Having said that, agro-tourism is the most recent trend gaining traction in the country. People are becoming more interested in finding their roots and returning to nature

in the face of climate change and pandemics. Agro-tourism encourages visitors to experience rural life, including milking cows, plough fields, take well baths, climb trees, and pick fruit from trees. As a result, it is a novel idea in the Indian tourist industry that usually takes place on farms and offers visitors the chance to experience true, enchanted rural life while also tasting regional cuisine and being familiar with a variety of farming duties. India is an agricultural nation, and since 2004, agrotourism has been carried out under the leadership of Pandurang Taware, who received the National Tourism Award from the President of India for the most inventive tourism product. Agro-Tourism Creation Corporation in India, which has 218 affiliated farmers and operates agro-tourism centres in each of their distinct villages in the state of Maharashtra, was a pioneer in the development and marketing of the agro-tourism concept in India in 2014.

B. Indian Agrotourism Market Size:

Agrotourism offers the chance to experience real rural life, sample regional organic food, and gain knowledge about diverse farming activities. The backbone of the Indian economy is agriculture. 75% of the population works in agriculture either directly or indirectly, and it contributes 26% of India's GDP. 90 million ranchers live in 6.25 need communities, giving food grains to help the country. Farming is more than a profession or a business in India. Adding more pay creating exercises to existing agribusiness would surely increase farming's contribution to the public GDP in the future. Agro-tourism is one such movement that is making genuine efforts in this direction.

The travel sector is referred to be a tool for working people, poverty alleviation, and human development. In 1999-2000, the travel industry provided 15.5 million direct jobs. Furthermore, the travel industry promotes public participation, global cooperation, and local crafted works and social activities. In 2000, there were 26.41 international tourists that came to India. India's share of the global tourism market is only 0.38 percent. The unfamiliar trade obtained with this small proposal is INR 14,475 crores. Turnover in domestic travel is substantially higher than this. Improvement of the foundation, item development and expansion, improvement of eco-experience sports, social introductions, providing affordable convenience, streamlining help procedures at airports, human resource improvement, cultivating public interest and mindfulness, and assistance of private area support are the push areas identified by the Government of India to advance the domestic travel industry. Revenue from agro-tourism is growing at an annual rate of 20 percent.

The tourism industry's fastest-growing segment is thought to be agro-tourism. The idea has been successfully used in states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Gujarat, and Himachal Pradesh. It has developed into a totally new way for farmers in remote areas to make money.

The nation's first state to develop and promote agro-tourism is the state of Maharashtra. Agro-Tourism Development Corporation was established in 2005 and is the owner of the 28-acre pilot agro-tourism project at Palshiwadi, Tal Baramati, Dist. Pune, which is about 70 km from the city of Pune. Operating the agro-tourism facility, encouraging more farmers to engage in Agro-tourism, running training and research programmes are among the key operations. The majority of travel reservations are made on this umbrella platform, after

which travellers are routed to various locations. Farmers can reduce their marketing expenses by doing this. They may accept reservations themselves. All ATDC does is lend a hand. By effectively running its own pilot Agro-tourism project, ATDC, the organisation that oversees the industry, demonstrates what it preaches. 52 farmers were initially chosen in Maharashtra when ATDC initiated training and skill-development programmes with the Maharashtra State Agro- Tourism Vistar Yojana in 2007. In 328 agro-tourism facilities spread across 30 districts in Maharashtra, this agro-tourism model has been adopted, helping to preserve and improve the village life, village arts and handicrafts, customs, and village traditions and culture. The agro-tourism approach provides visitors with unique experiences by highlighting village culture, agriculture, and customs, which has helped create a sustainable secondary income source and created jobs in the area. These agro-tourism destinations in the State saw 17.9 lakh visitors in 2018–20, which helped farmers make 55.79 crore. In addition, it gave young people and women in rural areas 100,000 jobs.

The policy of Karnataka addresses two important issues that are necessary for the growth of agri-tourism in the State: capacity building and public awareness. Additionally, the policy looks to collaborate with various institutions and departments. Agro-tourism initiatives are eligible for incentives, subsidies, and concessions, according to the policy paper.

Kerala has chosen to create the Kerala Agro-tourism Network in order to provide financial gains for the farming community by fusing farming with tourism.

The need for an agro-tourism development strategy was stressed in the committee report on Doubling of Farmers' Income (DFI). The Ministry of Tourism recently released a "Draft National Strategy for Promotion of Rural Homestays - An Initiative towards Atmanirbhar Bharat". With this in mind, agro-tourism has been covered by this.

C. Sustainable Agro-Tourism:

Agrotourism encourages sustainable rural development, boosting the income of agricultural workers and fostering the economic, social, and environmental sustainability that is advantageous to rural communities. Agrotourism is a form of multi-activity and sustainable tourism in rural areas that aims to raise the standard of living for rural residents, especially by boosting the pay of agricultural workers. Agrotourism may help farmers support their families while simultaneously creating novel forms of tourism for tourists, advancing sustainability on the economic, social, and environmental fronts. Farmers' attitudes and proclivities towards farming are influenced by agrotourism in both favourable and unfavourable ways.

Agrotourism contributes to the sustainability of resources since visitors to this type of tourism, both from inside the country and abroad, come to enjoy the nature and greenery. Agrotourism can promote sustained growth in a location. It improves farmers' financial status by giving them extra income at a low cost of investment. It also gives the farmer a chance to be acknowledged for his field of work. Agrotourism encourages environmentally beneficial travel by luring domestic and foreign tourists who value nature and the outdoors, providing eco-friendly activities, giving farmers more money and respect, and fostering the long-term development of rural communities.

E. A Way to Increase Farmer Income:

Agro-tourism gives farmers a chance to potentially boost their revenue. In order to attract tourists, a farmer must develop farm operations. Arrangements for selling farm products as farm fresh as soon as they are harvested, processing food in front of tourists, adding value to the items, and on-farm marketing also provide the farmer with immediate money in addition to garnering attention. Direct sales of farm products create new market segments in that region. Creating opportunities for visitor's interest and participation in farming pursuits, including harvesting farm produce, parks with gardens, food parks, agri-museums, etc. By starting an agri-preneurship and employing farm products as resources, chances for agribusiness and employment are created. As a result, agro-tourism can generate additional revenue in a variety of ways, including

- a. farmers' markets from where tourists can purchase farm products,
- b. picking up own products, where visitors harvest farm produce by their own,
- c. local and regional cuisine, where visitors choose to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with a local flavour,
- d. visitor involvement in a variety of agricultural operations as well as other leisure pursuits like animal rides, bird gazing, etc.
- e. travelling to experience rural life

4.3 Advantages of Agro-Tourism:

The economic landscape of conventional agriculture could shift as a result of agro-tourism. Development of agro-tourism has numerous advantages. The farmers and rural residents would gain much from it, both directly and indirectly:

- Agro-tourism is a way to make urban residents' lives less stressful as they turn away from the busy city and towards nature.
- Opportunities for employment for farmers, especially farm families and young people.
- The capacity of the agriculture sector to accommodate tourism sector expansion.
- Farmers' additional revenue source as a form of protest against income volatility.
- People of all ages can enjoy recreational possibilities where the entire family can take part in rural games, festivals, food, and attire.
- Children in urban areas may become more aware of rural living and educated about agriculture science thanks to agro-tourism. It presents a unique opportunity for education through play, which makes learning effective, straightforward, and entertaining.
- Due to the fact that agro-tourism occurs in a natural setting, the cost of food, lodging, entertainment, and transit is low.
- It is the best alternative for city-based school picnics currently on the market. It offers urban college students the option to work in agriculture in a realistic setting. It serves as a means of educating future farmers. Agricultural and line department personnel could learn and be trained using it. This is a unique opportunity for learning through enjoyment, where learning is fun, effective, and straightforward. Seeing is believing, and doing is learning.
- It encourages farmers to cultivate land that might otherwise be fallow or left fallow.

- The 'hollowing out' effect of rural decline can be addressed by agro-tourism, which can also re-establish farmers' faith in their industry and ecosystem-based services.
- Agro-tourism has the potential to benefit both tourists and farmers in a win-win situation.

4.4 Challenges in Agro-Tourism:

- If farmers' attention and focus shift to agro-tourism and it becomes a more lucrative source of income, they may start to neglect their farming activities.
- One of the challenges to increasing the area's tourism potential has been identified as the language barrier. For interactions with tourists, people often lack the necessary competence in Hindi, English, or even the local dialect.
- A lack of funding could limit the region's tourism potential, which would aid in the preservation of the people's culture, traditions, heritage, art forms, etc.
- Some areas have a lot of potential to become popular agro-tourism destinations. However, another significant roadblock in the way is a lack of business planning expertise.
- In rural communities, the concept of tourism as a whole is extremely ingrained. The local kids have tried to take the initiative, but professionalism is still absent. They lack the necessary training to make projects from a tourism standpoint.
- Agro-tourism businesses are situated in rural areas with limited access to roads, healthcare services, and telecommunications, as well as the occasional fear of theft and wild animals.

4.5 Principles in Agro-Tourism:

Agro-tourism should make sure that some fundamental rules are fulfilled.

- Have something that guests can see:** The best thing provided by agri-tourism is nature, farms, animals, and birds, all of which should be visible. To generate interest in agro-tourism, local culture must be promoted through dress, festivities, and rural games.
- Have something that guests can do:** Visitors should be able to participate in certain activities in addition to the things to see. Activities available for visitors to partake in and enjoy include farming, swimming, riding in a bullock cart, cooking, and playing rural games.
- Have something for guests to buy:** There should be something for visitors to buy, such as processed foods, clothing, farm fresh things, and rural crafts, in order to entice them to visit again.

4.6 Agro-Tourism Opportunities in India:

- The Indian tourist sector is expanding at a rate of 10.1%:** The World Tourism Organisation projects that by 2010, there will be more than one billion tourists visiting to various parts of the world, with the business growing at a rate of 4% yearly. However, the Indian tourist industry is growing 212 times faster than the global average, at a pace

- of 10%. The current growth rate is not only maintained but significantly encouraged by the incorporation of the concept of agro-tourism.
- b. **One of the biggest travel publications in Europe, Conde Nast Traveller, has listed India among the top ten tourist destinations in the world.** India is already well-known as one of the world's most popular tourist destinations. By offering innovative products like agro-tourism, the Indian tourism industry will become more competitive on the international market.
 - c. The geography and culture of India are diverse, which offers a wide range of cultural and geographic opportunities for the expansion of this firm. India offers a variety of agro-climatic conditions, crops, people, and cultures, as well as deserts, mountains, and island-like coastal systems, all of which present prospects for the marketing of year-round, multi-location tourism offerings.
 - d. A growing proportion of visitors prefer non-urban tourist destinations to urban tourist destinations (financial express). There is room for promoting rural tourist destinations in interior communities by setting up Agro-tourism hubs. To promote these centres, however, proper infrastructure and exposure are required.
 - e. The amount allotted for government activities and policies in the Xth five-year plan has increased from 525 crore to 2900 crore. Increased funding demonstrates the government's ongoing dedication. The six-fold increase in funding might be applied to infrastructure development, public relations, and service providers' capacity growth.

4.7 Promotion of Agro-Tourism:

The promotion of agro-tourism requires conceptual alignment with rural tourism, ecotourism, health tourism, adventure tourism, and culinary adventures.

In the context of resolving farmers' concern, this approach will increase agriculture's viability in three ways: first, training must be made available, preferably to farmers with small land holdings; second, agro-tourism centres must be developed using on-site resources with the assistance of locals and artisans; and third, and most crucially, field staff must be educated and equipped with the necessary infrastructure to assist farmers in marketing, running, and operating their businesses. To increase the number of leads for tourists coming from metropolitan areas, a comprehensive tourism marketing programme must be created. For a period of 36 months, once every three months visits from agro-tourism consultants and experts to the farmer running the centre helps the farmer maintain and learn from experts.

ATCs, which are administered by local farm owners and employees and promote their products in the target markets, act as the umbrella body for the required agro-tourism organisations. The initiative provides training and capacity building for farmers, regional tour guides, and communities in the fields of small business setup and tourism product development through topic specialists and experts.

Some of the urban government's policy efforts will undoubtedly aid in the promotion of agrotourism. They are:

- The states support public-private partnerships in the tourism industry.

- The proposed budget for rural tourism is Rs. 50 lakhs per village.
- Xth five-year plan budget increased from Rs 525 to 2900 crores.
- Rs. 60 crore budgets for promoting brand.
- Building brand identity “Incredible India”.

One of the commercial operations is agro-tourism. Therefore, for success, farmers need a commercial mindset and some marketing strategies. Farmer should follow the following instruction for the better success in agro-tourism:

- Promote your tourist destination widely by using media like newspapers and television. Use all available advertising channels.
- Make connections with NGOs, clubs, unions, schools, colleges, and other organisations.
- Teach your family members or employees how to welcome and host agro-tourists.
- Recognise the needs and expectations of your clients, and then cater to those needs.
- Charge the most reasonable rent and fees for the amenities/services on a commercial basis.
- Avoid manipulating local resources to provide entertainment or services to tourists.
- Create and regularly update your website to draw in foreign visitors.
- Consider their suggestions for improvement and further development as well as their comments and feedback on the service.
- Establish a positive relationship with the visitor to increase future sales and chain visibility.

4.8 Entertainment in Agro-Tourism:

While residing in a rural setting, agro-tourism offers the visitor many enjoyable experiences. Agri-tourist participation in activities such as coconut shooting, fishing, tree climbing, bullock cart races, harvesting competitions, edible adventures, buffalo races in wet fields, etc. could bring about a great deal of fun for the least amount of money. There is ample room to charge farmers an entrance fee, offer food and lodging on a fee basis, and allow Agri-tourists to participate in rural games, all of which would bring in money for the farmers.

Through international experiences, one can learn about some productive agri-tourism practises and entertainment farming businesses. Many developed countries have agro-tourism as a viable source of income, which could inspire us to promote it with adjustments that are appropriate for our circumstances. As follows:

- Arts and crafts demonstrations
- Farm store
- Exhibition of farm equipments
- Processing of farm products and sale
- Sheep Shearing
- Horseback riding
- Wool processing
- Farm vacation

- Picnic grounds
- Camping
- Educational tours for school children

Ways to Expand Agro-Tourism:

Increasing tourists at your farm can increase revenue and help market it. With so many alternatives available, it's crucial to assess which kind of activity would be most beneficial for your farm.

Farmers are advised by Cornell Cooperative Extension to determine the clients they wish to draw and then cater to their interests. Each audience that farmers hope to attract will have different needs and expectations; therefore, they must employ particular strategies to appeal to them.

The collaboration and support of the government and financial institutions are necessary for the promotion of agro-tourism. Important steps include lowering setup costs through the use of inexpensive construction materials, providing loans and subsidies, offering advice from agricultural departments and universities, and establishing support networks for service providers. Through extensive study and case studies, low-cost construction materials may be introduced, lowering the initial expenditure to the point where even small and medium-sized farms might consider the project. The availability of loans from PACS/commercial banks under the MUDRA or starting plan will encourage young, motivated farmers to take on this venture. Low-cost agro-tourism agricultural subsidies would benefit the sector as a whole.

4.9 Agro-Tourism Destinations in India:

- a. Vanila County, Kottayam District, Kerala
- b. Dudhsagar Plantation and Farmstay, Goa
- c. Destiny farmstay, Ooty, Tamil Nadu
- d. Green Dreams, Coorg, Karnataka
- e. Prakriti Farms, Rupnagar, Punjab
- f. The Goat Village, Garhwal district, Uttarakhand
- g. The Country Retreat Farmstay, Pali, Rajasthan
- h. Citrus Country, Hoshiarpur, Punjab
- i. Bhavani Retreat, Vadali District Sabarkantha, Gujarat
- j. Mepra: The Hidden Roots, Kuttanad District, Kerala

4.10 Conclusion:

India's rich terrain and cultural heritage offer a wide range of opportunities for the expansion of the agro-tourism industry. India offers a variety of agro-climatic conditions, crops, people, and cultures, as well as deserts, mountains, coastal systems, and islands, all of which offer opportunities for the promotion of year-round, multi-location tourism products. Tourist destinations outside of major cities are becoming more and more popular. There is therefore room to build agro-tourism centres in remote areas.

Agro-tourism is currently expanding significantly. Before it begins to take a sizable chunk of the money made from tourism-related activities, it might take some time. India is a very diverse country, thus there is a lot of room for establishing different Agro-tourism areas there. There will be numerous benefits accruing for both the people and the government as a result of the enterprise, which will assist eco-system sustainability and sustainable development while boosting the agrarian economy.

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