



Agri-tourism: An approach to sustainable rural development

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India happens to be the second most populous country on the earth with more than 17 per cent of the World population. About 61.5 per cent of the 130 crores plus population in India is dependent on agriculture. Indian agriculture is characterized by small farm holdings. The average farm size is only 1.57 hectares. Around 93 per cent of farmers have land holdings smaller than 4 ha and they cultivate nearly 55 per cent of the arable land. On the other hand, only 1.6 per cent of the farmers have operational land holdings above 10 ha and they utilize 17.4 per cent of the total cultivated land. Due to diverse agro-climatic conditions in the country, a large number of agricultural items are produced. India is an agrarian economy, green revolution and smaller plot holdings as witnessed by the Asian countries has led to rapid forward strides being made in the agriculture in the last few years. In spite of this, India faces several challenges arising from socio-economic, demographic and institutional sectors that affect its basic survival. In India 85 per cent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent upon agriculture and a vast majority is based in the rural belt. 90 million farmers are dwelling in 6.25 lakh villages producing more than 200 MT of food grains feeding the country. Considering the topography of India, in the last few years have seen the concept of rural tourism gaining momentum as an allied area of revenue generation. Realizing this government is encouraging active rural tourism in order to increase revenue generations options for the rural segment. Agri-tourism or agro-tourism involves agriculturally-based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. Agri-tourism includes the wide variety of activities, including buying produce direct from a farm stand, navigating a corn maze, slopping hogs, picking fruit, feeding animals, or staying at a bed and breakfast on a farm. Since 2004 Agriculture Tourism is operational, it started in Baramati Agri-Tourism Center.

Agro-eco-tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms. It is the symbiotic association of farming sector, tourism industry and farm business. It is indeed, the economic activity that occurs when people link travel with agricultural products, services or experiences to cater to the needs of mutual

demands. It gives the opportunity 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. It provides you with the escape from the daily hectic life in the peaceful rural environment. Agri-tourism would also provide tourists with an opportunity to be close to where the 75 per cent of Indians live. A concept, agri-eco-tourism entails visiting a working farm or any agriculture, horticulture or agribusiness operation, for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. Agro-eco-tourism is the new value-added agricultural business, for improving the incomes and potential economic viability of small farms and rural communities. Agri-tourism can take many forms like roadside stands or on farm-direct sales, which can offer farm-fresh produce to travellers as well as interaction with growers. Agritourism ends farmer's isolation and offers the opportunities to make new friends and build stronger links to the community. Social skills and a scenic, clean, attractive farm are crucial for success in agri-tourism and can make the farms more ideal location for tourists. Agro-eco-tourism would secure a multifunctional, sustainable and competitive agriculture, maintain the landscape and the countryside, contribute to the vitality of rural communities, respond to consumer concerns and demands regarding food quality and safety, environmental protection, animal welfare, etc. Agro-eco tourism will provide an opportunity to develop tourism in ways that provide agro-based products among the consumers of the nation as well overseas.

The Indian Agriculture and Tourism Industry Scenario

India is known as "Land of villages". More than 11 crore farmers dwelling in 6.25 lakhs of the village and cultivating 40 crore acres of land feeding to more than 125 crores of population. Agriculture contributed about 18.5 per cent of the national income (2006-07) as compared to a high 50 per cent in 1950. Even now 60 per cent population of India depends on Agriculture hence Agriculture is not a mere business, but is still the "True Culture of India".

Looking through the tourism sector, India is poised to

emerge as the 2nd fastest growing (8.8%) tourism economy in the world over 2010-17 according to the World Travel and Tourism Council. India's Travel and Tourism sector ranks 7th in the world in terms of its total contribution to the country's GDP, shows a new report by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). According to the new data, Travel and Tourism generated INR14.1 trillion (USD208.9 billion) in 2016, which is the world's 7th largest in terms of absolute size, the sum is equivalent to 9.6 per cent of India's GDP. Additionally, the sector supported 40.3 million jobs in 2016, which ranks India 2nd in the world in terms of total employment supported by Travel and Tourism. The sector accounts for 9.3 per cent of the country's total jobs. India's Travel and Tourism sector was also the fastest growing amongst the G20 countries, growing by 8.5 per cent in 2016. A further 6.7 per cent growth is forecast for 2017. India's strong Travel and Tourism figures are predominantly generated by domestic travel, which accounts for 88 and of the sector's contribution to GDP in 2016.

Travel and tourism have been going on since time immemorial, and for the 'twentieth-century tourist, the 'world has become one large department store of countryside and cities'. By the 21st century, travel has become a new economy - tourism - available to all with enough money. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly has approved the adoption of the year 2017 as the "International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development". This new tourism phenomenon is not only influenced by economic factors but also by new cultures and a new generation of tourists. India happens to be one of the fastest developing economies of the world, but still, if we look at India, a major part of the population is living in villages. Although being a fast-growing economy, India has been much concerned due to the growing rate of population and increasing demand for basic amenities. Hence there is an urgent need to develop rural India, with a focus on available natural and cultural resources leading to sustainable development. Usually in rural India - varieties of products are available *viz.*, historical, heritage, natural based, medication based, religious based, culture-based and man-made which have got a great potential with respect to the development of tourism.

India exhibits a diverse form of art and culture entrenched through a rich heritage, which makes India a hot global tourist destination. India has a thriving tourism industry, which contributes over 6 per cent to the national GDP and 8 per cent of the total employment. It is thus, capable of offering a wide variety of entertainment for

the discerning tourists and has the capacity to diversify into a new arena of agro-tourism. Agro-tourism offers an opportunity 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. It also provides a welcome escape from the daily hectic life in the peaceful rural environment and to relax and revitalize in the pure natural environment, surrounded by magnificent landscape. Agro-tourism can contribute to a green economy transition through investments leading to energy and water efficiency, waste reduction, biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation and the strengthening of linkages with local communities.

Agri-tourism and its components: Phillip *et al.* (2010) to propose a definition of agritourism through the development of an activity-based taxonomy. Arroyo *et al.* (2013) defined Agri-tourism non-working farm agritourism (NWF) refers to activities where the non-working farm only serves for scenery purposes (e.g., bird-watching on an old mill), Working Farm, Passive Contact agritourism (WFPC) refers to activities that do not require great interaction between the visitor and the working farm site, allowing for farmers to continue their agricultural activities without having interferences (e.g., attending a wedding in a vineyard), Working Farm, Indirect Contact agritourism (WFIC) comprises activities that are more directly related to farm functions, although the contact with the visitor focuses more on the agricultural products rather than the practice of farming itself (e.g., enjoying fresh produce or meals on site), Working Farm, Direct Contact, Staged agritourism (WFDCS) refers to activities through which visitors experience agricultural operations but through staged scenarios and predetermined tours (e.g., touring an operating cider mill) and Working Farm, Direct Contact, Authentic agritourism (WFDA) refers to the direct participation of the visitor in agricultural activities in which often the recreational activity is the farm "profit" obtained in the form of labour in exchange for food and accommodations (e.g., harvesting berries or milking a cow).

Agri-tourism includes: – *Farm-tourism:* Tourism on the farms enables farmers to diversify their activities while enhancing the value of their products and property. Farm tourism also helps to reconcile farming interests and environmental protection through integrated land management in which farmers continue to play a key role. Modern times we have almost forgotten these simple joys of life and above all enjoy homemade food and drinks.

Heritage and cultural tourism: This tourism in rural

areas comes in a wide range of forms most of which are unique to an individual local and a valuable component of the rural tourism product. Heritage and cultural tourism includes temples, rural buildings but may be extended to local features of interest including war remnants, monuments to famous literary, artistic or scientific people, historic remains, archaeological sites, traditional parkland etc.

Eco-tourism: Many tourists visit rural areas for the purpose of bird and animal watching and learning about local flora and fauna.

Unique experiences provided by agro-tourism to urban traveler: Tourists opting for agro-tourism are attracted towards agro-tourism because of a variety of innovative products which they cannot enjoy with traditional tourism. Thus, agro-tourism is getting a very good response from urbanites. The innovative products provided by agro-tourism are:

- Farm stay and farm tours
- Cow milking
- Rural art and craft
- Various farm rides and animal rides like – bullock cart, tractor, horse etc.
- Visiting a dairy, piggery, poultry, sweetwater fishing etc.
- Processing of farm products
- Demonstration of farm activities
- Special events and festivals like music festivals, harvest festivals and other rural festivals (Jatra, Mela etc.).

Positive economic and socio-cultural impacts: Rural tourism can create positive economic impacts in the rural areas by providing employment for rural people and generating income there by bringing societal developments. The rural people can be brought to the mainstream population with financial empowerment, societal and cultural upliftment with the following set of benefits from rural tourism.

- *Income and employment:* Creation of employment opportunities especially for rural youth. Rise in the Income level. Agri-tourism creates employment opportunities for farmer's family members. Diversify and increase income sources of the family.
- *Business and cultural exchange-* Generates foreign exchange. The local small businessman will be benefited. Demand for other goods and services will increase. Cultural understanding through fairs and festivals. Exchange of cultural beneficial for both. Foreign tourist will bring cultural change faster. The market for agro products and handicrafts will develop in rural areas Farmers and artisans will develop a direct contact with

the customers.

- *Other impacts:* Leads to improvement in public services. Generate revenue for the government. Modernization of agriculture and other rural activities. Education and health of the rural community will improve. One of the most rewarding aspects of Agri-tourism for many farmers is the opportunity to provide the public with a better understanding of what agriculture is really about.

Agri-tourism in India – Bottlenecks and challenges Ahead:

Financial and economic bottlenecks: Insufficient financial support from the lending agencies and marginal or small farmers cannot afford to pay out of their limits. Lack of rural investment and insufficient government concern paving way for financial bottlenecks.

Technical bottlenecks: Poor infrastructure and a shortage of trained manpower for business management. Lack of Basic Education to farming community leading to an inferiority complex. Need of special marketing approaches and higher government legislation, including documentation and proper licensing of the venture. Quality and complexity of services to be maintained.

Psychological bottlenecks: Skeptic involvement of the local people due to trust issues and the threat of exploitation by city people. Inferiority complex among rural people. Communication difficulties.

Conclusion: Development of rural and Agri-tourism in Indian rural areas is still in its nascent stage. India has perfect opportunities to enhance its rural and Agri-tourism offer and it also represents one of the few states, which unifies different climates, natural characteristics and socio-cultural entities. Agri-tourism is unravelling various facets of village life. It gives an opportunity to the tourists to experience rural life, taste the traditional food and to live in a peaceful environment. So there is a need to promote the concept to attract the farmers to get involved in the Agri-tourism service industry. Though there have not been many initiatives by the government for rural and Agri-tourism development, it has been successfully initiated through the farmers' efforts.

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