



Agri-tourism –A Key to Boost the Economy of Rural Hill Regions

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Abstract

According to contemporary trends in rural development the advancement of rural cultural and naturalistic heritage, along with the rational and organised use of agricultural resources, are the best ways to assure sustainable growth. Agri-tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry. It gives an opportunity to experience real enchanting and authentic contact with real life. Promotion of Agri-tourism needs conceptual convergence with rural tourism, health tourism and adventure tourism. Agriculture is the main sector of Indian Economy. Around 65 per cent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. Out of total GDP around 13 per cent comes from the agriculture sector. In addition tourism is termed as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. The world tourism organization has estimated that the tourism industry is growing at a rate of 4 per cent a year. Whereas the Indian tourism industry is growing at 10.1 per cent which is 2.5 times more than the world rate. This article considers an overall perception of agri-tourism, its opportunities, challenges for promoting agri-tourism in India.

Keywords- Agriculture, Tourism, Industry, Economy, Organization

Introduction

Agri-tourism was officially initiated and recognised by Italy in 1985. 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. Agri-tourism or agro-tourism involves any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. Revenue from agri-tourism is growing at an annual rate of 20 per cent in India. Maharashtra is the first State to formulate an agri-tourism policy, which aims at rural development. In 2018-20, 17.9 lakh tourists visited these agri-tourism centres in the State, helping farmers earn ₹55.79 crore. It also generated one lakh jobs for rural women and youth. The importance of agricultural tourism growth is stipulated by Poor socio-economic growth rate in rural areas, The withdrawal of people from the village, Lack of opportunities to participate in another form of operation for small and medium sized businesses that are not able to modernize or collaborate, Remoteness of rural inland areas from large centres, Low level of unified domestic development of tourism, Market for cheap holidays.

Important points to boost Agri-tourism in India

Agri-tourism is growing at an annual rate of 20 per cent in India. Maharashtra is the first State to formulate an agri-tourism policy, which aims at rural development. In 2018-20, 17.9 lakh tourists visited these agri-tourism centres in the State, helping farmers earn ₹55.79 crore.

It also generated one lakh jobs for rural women and youth. Some of the measures that must be considered while implementing agri-tourism in different states are:

- **State** governments must form a separate committee for formulating guidelines for agri-tourism. The guidelines may include not serving prohibited materials and providing for utmost safety of the customers.
- **State** tourism departments must provide a separate licence under agri-tourism to be eligible for getting loans and tax benefits. Co-operative societies may be included in providing loan facilities to develop agri-tourism.
- **Local administrations** such as village panchayats can help in the coordination and facilitation of agri-tourism because panchayats have a strong influence on local communities and their support is important to the success of agri-tourism.
- **State** tourism departments must organise seasonal festivals along with agri-tourism farms for a wider reach.
- **Rural youth** may be trained for agri-tourism by offering diploma/certified courses.
- **Awareness** of agri-tourism has to be increased through online and social media platforms because tourists are highly influenced by social media. For instance, Incredible India and Enchanting Tamil Nadu digital platforms can be utilised for promoting agri-tourism.
- **Marketing** may be in partnership with the travel trade and online platforms, as agri-tourism centres can benefit from the former's network and marketing expertise.
- The hospitality services of agri-tourism farms can be improved by roping in professionals to impart training. State governments must organise workshops to enrich the hospitality skills of farm resort owners and local communities of the region, to ensure better customer experience.

Agri-tourism potential in the Rural Hill Regions

The economy of rural Uttarakhand is majorly agrarian and these areas are geographically constrained in infrastructural development. This development inadequacy limits the livelihood options and thus for majority of the rural population agriculture becomes important not just economically but also because of its capacity to engage a sizeable working population. The phenomenon of male rural-urban migration to earn money is common in Uttarakhand as the small agriculture holdings with limited development potential and inadequate irrigation facilities majorly provide options for subsistence. This leaves the females of the households to look after the children, ageing parents and the agricultural land in absence of their male counterparts. This has resulted in significant issues wherein on one hand the rural hill regions have become female dominated and on the other, strenuous labour has had significant health related ill effects on the residual female population. Majorly provide options for subsistence. This leaves the females of the households to look after the children, ageing parents and the agricultural land in absence of their male counterparts. This has resulted in significant issues wherein on one hand the rural hill regions have become female dominated and on the other, strenuous labour has had significant health related ill effects on the residual female population (Kandari, 2013).



The mountain region of Uttarakhand, due to its fragile ecosystem and inadequate socio-economic environment, therefore represents the specific context for which diversification is required. This paper through case studies highlights that rural hill regions of the state can evolve into areas of socio-economic adaptations and generate income through the integration of agriculture and tourism. Globally, mountain regions have been areas of neo-tourism activities, a result of their strong and diverse resources. These regions offer natural, cultural and social diversity, tapping tourists' values and needs of experiential tourism (Jepson and Sharpley, 2015). With a focus on meaningful and local experiences, majority of the activities related to alternative tourism may take place in these territorial contexts (Nepal, 2002). As part of the future strategy for sustainable livelihoods, 'Uttarakhand Vision 2030' also advocates the potential of agro-tourism for employment generation (IHD, 2018).

Conclusion

The tourism sector is one of the major foreign exchange earners for the country. Agri-tourism is one such form of tourism which has recently emerged in Maharashtra. Agritourism may help farmers and their families by providing additional revenue and job opportunities. However, elements influencing the development of agritourism products include farm locations, physical resources and infrastructure, sanitation and hygiene, safety and security, the choice of on and off-farm activities, and the experience and skills of the host farmers. It would also be naive to disregard the value of stakeholder engagement and people's participation in defining a successful agri-tourism enterprise. Thus, agri-tourism industry in India has a lot of potentials to develop rural India.

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