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Agro Tourism: An Innovative Approach

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The Indian economy is thought to be based primarily on agriculture. Nearly 26% of India's GDP comes from agriculture, which also supports about 85% of the country's total workforce either directly or indirectly. In 0.625 million villages, 90 million farmers live and produce more than 20 metric tonnes (MT) of food grains to feed the nation. Agriculture is ingrained in Indian culture more than it is a career or a business. Farmers are increasingly eager to experiment with novel approaches that depart from the typical and conventional patterns in order to forge closer ties with consumers and make more money. By adding certain tourist-related activity to the agricultural revenue is creating new opportunities and better lives. Agri-tourism is one of the activities that fits the criteria and is currently the subject of serious efforts in this area. Although its use is restricted to a few locations, the concept of agri-tourism is not particularly new. With its baby steps and the talisman of research, agri-tourism may undoubtedly transform farmers' lives, and consumers will also benefit from it.

Due of its exclusivity, the idea is seen as an addition to the main source of income and targets a certain niche. The concept has a novelty component to it in terms of nostalgia and customer visits to villages. A variety of diverse activities combined with scientific crop-growing techniques are laying the foundation for a mechanized and safe future. The menu is loaded with options like hay-making, wine tasting, bird viewing, dairy farming and regional handicrafts to entice customers with the ease of peasants engrossed in it in the background. Farmers and line departments in state and federal governments, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, are some of the more significant stakeholders in the promotion of agritourism. Conceptual alignment with rural tourism, ecotourism, health tourism, adventure tourism and culinary adventures is necessary for the promotion of agritourism. One of the most important components of discipline growth is research since it enables practitioners and students to explore their areas of interest and look for every answer in order to aid local problems and communities.

About Tourism

The World Tourism Organization (W.T.O.) has estimated that tourism is the world's largest service industry and fastest growing industry in terms of revenue generation and also ensures consequential development of infrastructure at the destination. There is hardly any other field of activity where so many people are involved directly or indirectly. Tourism industry also became an instrument for sustainable human development including, job creation, poverty elimination, foreign exchange, enhancing environment, preserving culture and tradition thereby facilitating overall development.

Tourism can give quick relief to the areas where there is higher rate of unemployment. Tourism is travel for culture, historical, religious, study, recreational leisure

or business purposes. Today's tourist is not content with cultural or religious tourism only. People look for some thrill, fun, adventure and something other than the routine. With changing times, interests of tourists have also changed requiring development of newer varied forms of tourism. And hence some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro Tourism. As India's main occupation is agriculture, it has large scope and great potential to develop agri-tourism in India. Agri-tourism has helped to gain sustainable supplementary income to the farmers.

Concept of Agro-tourism

Agro-tourism is the concept of visiting an agricultural, horticultural, animal husbandry or agri-enterprise operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm operation. In general, agro-tourism is the practice of attracting visitors to an area used primarily for agricultural purposes. It could be described as Rural/Agricultural Environments + Farm Commodities + Tourism Services = Agro-tourism. Agro-tourism is basically a subset of rural tourism where tourism concept is invoked in the agriculture activities (Kartik and Gajanand, 2019). Agro-tourism is 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' (Gannon, 1994). In general, agro-tourism is defined as any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations thereby benefitting the local community economically and socially and enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience (Krishna, 2019).

The concept of agro-tourism developed due to urbanization, as many people are not aware of rural background and the constraints in production of grain fruits, and vegetables. Agro-tourism not only provides opportunity to the visitors to involve in the activities such as visit to farmer's markets to purchase farm fresh products, taking part in orchard and floral garden tours, bullock cart rides, tractor rides, agricultural operations, Pottery making, using farm bed and breakfast, accommodation, wineries, aquaculture, petting farms and participating in other such agricultural activities. It is also a source of income to the farmers in the Agro-tourism Centres (ATCs).

An agro-tourism is farm based business activity that is open to the public. These specialized agro-tourism destinations generally offer things to see, things to do and produce to buy and are open to the public.

According to Mr. Panduranga Thavare (who is considered as father of agro-tourism) defines "Agro-tourism is that agri-business activity, when a native farmers or person of the area offers tours to their agriculture farm to allow person to view them growing harvesting and processing locally growth food such as coconuts, corn, pineapple, sugar cane, variety of vegetable or any agriculture produce that the person would not see in their city or home country. Often the farmers would provide a home-stay opportunity and education."

Agro- Tourism and Eco-Tourism are closely related to each other. Eco-Tourism provides by the tour companies but, in the agro-tourism farmers offer tours to their agriculture farm and providing entertainment, education and fun-filled experiences for the urban peoples.

Scope of Agro - Tourism

Agri-tourism has vast scope in the present context for the following reasons:

- **Less expensive gateway** - The cost of accommodation, food, travel and recreation is very less in agri-tourism compare to any other type of tourism. Present concept tourism is limited to urban and rich class which constitutes very small proportion of the population. However, the concept of agritourism takes travel and tourism to the larger population, this widens the tourist base by widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness.

- **Have strong demand for wholesome family-oriented activities** - Villages provide amusement 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. Rural games, traditional dresses, festivals, food and the nature provide variety of entertainment to the whole family.
- **Curiosity about the farming and farmer lifestyle** - Almost all urban population having roots in villages, so they always have had the curiosity to learn or at least see about sources of plants, animals, raw materials like handicrafts, woods. Rural lifestyle and their languages, culture, tradition, agri-tourism which generally revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the potential to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.
- **Finding solace with nature friendly means** - Present urban lifestyle has made life stressful and brings average life span comedown. Hence, people are in continuous search of pro-nature means to make life more peaceful. Indigenous medical knowledge of villagers is must be respected. Ayurveda which is a pro-nature medical approach have its roots in villages. Organic foods are in higher demand in urban areas and foreign countries. In totality, our health-conscious urban population can look towards pro nature villages for solutions.
- **Desire for peace and Interest in natural environment** - Busy and hectic urban life is an outcome of diversified activities and diversified thinking. Today every individual attempt to work more and hard, in different directions to earn more money and enjoy lavish life comforts. Hence, peace is always out of his system. They can look towards agri-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. Crops, birds, animals, mountains, water bodies, villages provide totally different atmosphere tourban population in which they can forget their busy and hectic urban life.
- **Disillusionment with resorts and illusionment with farm** - In the late 90's people use to visit resorts to get an peaceful and green environment but now the crowded peace seekers disturb each other's peace. Hence, peace is beyond cities and resorts. 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.
- **Educational value of agri-tourism** – As we all know Indian economy is an agricultural driven economy. Agri-Tourism creates awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban children. It would be effectively used as educational and training tool to train agriculture and line department officers. It is a means for providing training to future farmers. This provides unique opportunity for education where learning is fun effective and easy. “Seeing is believing, doing is learning”. This experience based concept is the USP of agri- tourism.

Benefits of Agro-Tourism Centres

Agro-Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of traditional agriculture. It would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the farmers and rural people. Some of those as follows:

1. Employment opportunities to the farmers including farm family members and youth.
2. Additional income source for the farmers to protest against income fluctuation.
3. Farmers can improve their standard of living due to the contacts with urban peoples
4. Urban peoples can understand about the rural life and know about the agricultural activities.

5. Agro-Tourism support for rural and agricultural development process.
6. Cultural transformation between urban and rural peoples including social moral values
7. Help to the reduce burden on the other traditional tourist centers.

Key Techniques for Success in Agro-Tourism

Agro-Tourism is a one of the business activities. So, farmers must have commercial mindset and some marketing techniques for the success. For the better success in the agro-tourism farmers should follow the following things;

- Give a wide publicity of your tourism centre by new papers, television etc Use all possible advertisement means.
- Develop contacts with the schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, unions, organisations etc.
- Train your staff or family members for reception and hospitality
- Understand about the customers wants and their expectations and serve
- Charge optimum rent and charges for the facilities/services on the commercial base
- Do the artificially use local resources for the entertain / serve to tourist
- Develop your website and update time to time for attract foreign tourist
- Take their feedback and comments about the service and suggestions to more development and modification
- Develop a good relationship with the tourist for future business and chain publicity
- Develop different agro-tour packages of for different type of tourist and their expectations.
- Preserve an address book and comments of the visited tourists for future tourism business
- Behave sincerely with the tourists and participate with them / him
- Small farmers can develop their agro-tourism centres on the basis of cooperative society.

Challenges to the Agri-tourism industry

Agri-tourism is although a boom for the development of our rural society but if it can positively handled the following challenges in its path as stated below.

1. Pull more tourists at destination.
2. Lack of awareness among people about the agro-tourism concept.
3. Poor infrastructure facilities like drinking water facilities, electricity, good telecommunication, safety and security, transportation facilities, medical facilities etc.
4. Marketing agro-tourism as a product effectively and consistently.
5. Differentiating Tourism and agrotourism.
6. Weak communication skill of farmers.
7. Lack of commercial approach of the small farmers.
8. Ignorance of the farmers towards new avenues.
9. Danger of over exploitation of natural resources.
10. Insufficient Financial Support from government.

Suggested Strategies to the Indian Agri tourism Industry

- Proper recognition of agri-tourism industry.
- Government supported policy structure of agri-tourism.
- Education of the farmer and farm owner for the development of the entrepreneurial skill in their work operations.
- Proper financing solution for its enhancement.
- Liability and risk management programs.
- Product and service quality improvement: In terms of the product quality enhancement as well as the delivery of the service has to be elevated up to the standards.
- A public private strategic partnership development model has to be created.

- Proper marketing and promotional assistance has to be provided.

Conclusion

- In India, agri-tourism is a system that supports agriculture. Farmers and farm owners can take advantage of this opportunity by using innovative practices and a diversified strategy.
- Both the farmer and the visitor will benefit from the model, as the farmer will have an advantage in terms of income and employment, while the tourist will have the opportunity to experience the tranquilly, calm and reviving culture of our agricultural past.
- Although there is still a long way to go, only the Maharashtra government and its supporting agencies perceive the potential for developing and recognizing agri-tourism.
- Is it the most effective platform for rural communities' socio-economic development? So, in order to establish and promote agri-tourism in India, the government must give a full-fledged policy support structure.
- Is it the best platform for the socio-economic development of the rural areas? Thus the government has to provide a full fledge policy support system for the rooting and strengthen of the agri-tourism in India.

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