



AGRO TOURISM: A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL AREAS OF INDIA; WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAHARASHTRA

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Abstract:

The urban population having roots in villages always have had the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. These changes have generated new ideas as well as approaches to leisure and recreation. These ideas and approaches have paved path towards rural and agro tourism development. Agro tourism is complimentary to traditional agricultural activities. It is an opportunity for farmers to use the available resources in a diversified and innovative way. It creates a win-win situation to farmers as well as tourists. Farmers earn better from innovative use of available resources and the tourist can enjoy village life and nature in an affordable prices. Not only is this, the villages also benefited due to the development of agro tourism. In spite of growing agro tourism, the fact remains that the government support through appropriate and conducive policies for agro tourism development is lacking and government should give priority to agro tourism business in Maharashtra through appropriate policy measures

Key words - Agro tourism, rural life, rural recreation

Introduction:

Tourism is termed as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. During 1999-2000, direct employment created by tourism was 15.5 million. Besides, tourism also promotes national integration, international understanding and supports local handicrafts and cultural activities. During 2000, the number of foreign tourists that visited India was 26.41 lac. India's share in world tour market is just 0.38 percent. With this major share, foreign exchange earned is Rs.14,475 crores. The urban population having roots in villages always have had the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. Agro-Tourism which revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.

Busy urban population is leaning towards nature. Because of natural environment is always away from busy life. Birds, animals, crops, mountains, water bodies, villages provide totally different atmosphere to urban population in which they can forget their busy urban life. Villages provide recreational opportunities to all age groups i.e. children young, middle and old age, male, female, in total to the whole family at a cheaper cost. Rural games, festivals, food, dress and the nature provides variety of entertainment to the entire family. Agro tourism, in which tourists see and participate in traditional agricultural practices without destroying the ecosystems, the host bases. Promotion of Agro-tourism involves some more

important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and line departments at state and central governments and farmers. Promotion of Agro-Tourism needs conceptual convergence with Rural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Health Tourism, Adventure Tourism and culinary adventures Some of the important advantages of Agro – Tourism are it brings major primary sector agriculture closer to major service sector tourism. This convergence is expected to create win-win situation for both the sectors. Tourism sector has potential to enlarge. Agriculture sector has the capacity to absorb expansion in tourism Sector.

Scope of Agro - Tourism:

Agro-Tourism has great scope in the present study for the following reasons:

1. An inexpensive gateway
2. Curiosity about the farming industry and life style
3. Strong demand for wholesome family oriented recreational activities
4. Health consciousness of urban population and finding solace with nature friendly
5. Desire for peace and tranquillity
6. Interest in natural environment
7. Rural recreation

Objectives:

1. To examine the importance of agro-tourism development in Maharashtra.
2. To study challenges before agro tourism in Maharashtra

Methodology:

- The research is will be mainly carried through desk research i.e., secondary sources like maps, photographs, books, internet web sites,

dissertations, doctoral level research work, journals, magazines, newspaper clippings and conference material etc.,

- Research methodology is partly descriptive and partly exploratory.

Need of Agro-tourism in Maharashtra:

1. Small and fragmented land-holdings:

The problem of small and fragmented holdings is more serious in densely populated and intensively cultivated states like Maharashtra where the average size of land holdings is less than one hectare and in certain parts it is less than even 0.5 hectare.

Sub-division and fragmentation of the holdings is one of the main causes of our low agricultural productivity and backward state of our agriculture. A lot of time and labour is wasted in moving seeds, manure, implements and cattle from one piece of land to another. So their needs of adjoining agricultural activity like tourism to improve economic benefit.

2. Agricultural Marketing:

Agricultural marketing still continues to be in a bad shape in rural Maharashtra. In the absence of sound marketing facilities, the farmers have to depend upon local traders and middlemen for the disposal of their farm produce which is sold at throw-away price. In most cases, these farmers are forced, under socio-economic conditions, to carry on distress sale of their produce. In most of small villages, the farmers sell their produce to the money lender from whom they usually borrow money.

3. Irregular monsoon:

Agriculture business is becoming more unsecured in the Maharashtra due to the irregular monsoon, unsecured product prices. Many farmers cannot afford it and have a problem of indebtedness. Due to the agricultural problems some farmers are committed to suicide in various districts of the Maharashtra. More than 29,000 farmers committed suicide between 1997 and 2005 in the Maharashtra, official data show, no other state comes close to that total. Hence, there is need of start any of allied agri-business to support their farming and create allied income source from farm. In order to encourage farmers for establish small and viable agri-business activity, such as agro tourism. It offers several potential benefits to farm operators. It can help supplement income generation

4. Economic Benefits:

As is well known that Tourism is always has multiplier effect and here too it was envisaged that the tourist's trips and associate spending will make significant contribution to

rural economy and improve quality of life of the farmers. Agro Tourism has provided the Farmers a source of additional income on their existing assets. Besides it provides them with an opportunity to interact socially with various kinds of visitors, elevating their social status and enriching their lives in general.

Potential of Agro-Tourism in Maharashtra:

Maharashtra is the third largest state in India, both in area and population. It is bestowed with 720 k.m. long coastline. It is nestled in the Western Ghats and Sahyadri mountain ranges and with semi- evergreen and deciduous forests.

Over 68.8 present population engaged in agricultural activities in Maharashtra. They practise different type agriculture. Maharashtra has a total 22368 thousand hectare area under agriculture and 36122 thousands of livestock (cow, beffellows, goats etc.). Principal crops include rice, jowar, bajra, wheat, pulses, turmeric, onion, cotton, sugarcane and several oil seeds including groundnut, sunflower and soybean. The state has huge areas under fruit cultivation of which are mangoes, bananas, grapes, and oranges etc. Maharashtra is blessed with a rich and diversified cultural heritage attract tourist

As well as following factors explore the potential in agro-tourism of Maharashtra.

- Renowned cultural heritage
- Diversity regarding crops, climate, people, mountain etc.
- Good connectivity through communication and transport facilities.
- Availability of various tourist places supporting agri tourism.
- Maharashtra has emerged as horticulture state due to deliberate efforts of government.
- Development of rural tourist spots.
- Technological agro farming in various areas for fruits, flowers and vegetables.

Due above all reasons various places in Maharashtra have become popular as tourist places. Following table shows tourists in Maharashtra

Challenges before agro tourism in Maharashtra

The Maharashtra has a greater potential of the development of the agro-tourism centres due to the good natural and climatic conditions. But there are some problems in the process of agro-tourism development in the state.

Major challenges and problems are as follows;

- Absence of perfect knowledge about the agro tourism

- Lack of communication skill and lack of commercial approach of the small farmers
- Shortage of capital to develop basic infrastructure for the agro-tourism
- Ignorance of the farmers regarding the such type of activities.
- Presence of unorganized sector in the agro-tourism industry.
- Ensuring hygiene and basic requirements considering urban visitors.
- Most of farmers have small size holding, low quality land and little or no access to credit.

Table. 1: Tourists Arrival at Agro Tourism Centres in Maharashtra

Year	No. of tourists
2010	47000
2011	38900
2012	46700
2013	49850
2014	51980
2015	54080



Figure. 1: Tourists Arrival at Agro Tourism Centres in Maharashtra

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The above table -1 and graph-1 shows increasing trend in tourists visited Maharashtra from 2010 to 2015. More than threefold increase has taken place in tourist visited to agro tourism Centres in Maharashtra.

Conclusion and Suggestions:

Maharashtra has a high potential to the development of agro-tourism, because of environmental conditions and various types of agro-products as well as variety of rural traditions, festivals. More than 45 per cent of population is live in the urban areas and they want to enjoy rural life and to know about the rural life. It is a good opportunity to develop an Agro-tourism business in Maharashtra In spite of growing agro tourism, the fact remains that the government support through appropriate and conducive policies for agro tourism development is lacking and government should give priority to agro tourism business in Maharashtra through appropriate policy measures. Prepare Agro Tourism project and business plan for each applicant agriculture farm. Help to facilitate the financial support from Nationalize banks, institutes and government agencies to built agriculture and rural tourism facilities and infrastructure like accommodation, sanitation, approach road etc. Conduct Agro Tourism Business Training Program. Conduct Seminars and conferences on agro-tourism business. Provide sales and marketing support. Co-ordinate tours from urban areas to the farms. Professional training for farmers to applies agro tourism in rural areas. The training can be carried out by non-governmental organizations.

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