



RELEVANCE AND SCOPE OF AGRO- TOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract

Wide cultural diversity across regions has always been of interest for tourist in India. Being an agrarian economy, the importance and need of agro-tourism has made it important to be explored. Recently, government of India has also taken initiatives to strengthen it. The present study through secondary information attempts to discuss the relevance, scope and government initiatives for Agro-tourism. The purpose is to bring attention of researchers and policy maker to put effort towards this rising industry which acts as a supplementary income generating source in rural area.

I. Introduction

India is an agrarian economy. After 70 years of independence, 60 per cent population of India is living in rural area and half of the working population is engaged in agriculture occupation. Average growth rate of agriculture sector has been around 4.1 per cent for 2016-17 (Economic Survey, 2016-17). Agriculture sector depends on monsoon, and changes in climate change over past few decades have made the situation more challenging. Around 2/3rd area of farming is not getting irrigation facilities due to which the productivity of this sector is less. The government policy of Minimum Support Price (MSP) is available only for few products. There are many intermediaries between farmers and ultimate consumers and because of that, farmers do not get fair price for their products. Disguised unemployment also prevails in the agriculture sector. 47.2 per cent of workforce is employed in agriculture sector (Human Development Report, 2014-15) in spite of that share in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 17.4 per cent for the year 2014-15 (Economic Survey, 2014-15). This shows that there is unequal distribution of income between agriculture sector and rest of the sectors. Efforts have been made to strengthen agriculture sector, with advancement of agriculture technologies, Green revolution in 60s was a big success. However, there are constraints for increasing productivity, for instance, farmers are poor and have no financial support to invest in new technologies, and they are uneducated and still bound with their traditional thoughts. At the same time, the population is increasing, especially in rural area. This calls for more livelihood strategies for rural poor. Agro- tourism possesses immense capability to supplement this need. The concept of Agro- tourism was introduced in India by Mr. Pandurang Taware in the year 2005. He is known as the father of Agro- tourism in India. The growth rate of tourism industry in India is around 10 per cent which is far better than average growth rate of World Tourism. Agro- tourism combines the tertiary and agriculture sectors together. Tertiary sector is the fastest growing sector in Indian economy which gives Agro- tourism great potential to improve the overall growth rate of India. Italy has achieved remarkable growth in agro- tourism because of substantial regional government support and European Union.

India with diverse culture has always been a point of attraction by foreign visitors. Every state has their own historical background and within states, villages are rich with their culture. Villagers (farmers) lifestyle, dress, languages, culture/traditions, festivals, handicrafts always add values to the entertainment of visitors. The present study attempts to discuss the relevance, scope and government initiatives for Agro-tourism. The purpose is to bring attention of researchers and policy maker to put effort towards this rising industry which acts as a supplementary income generating source in rural area. The rest of study has outlined as follows: the next section has document the concept of agro-tourism. The following section discussed the research methodology. Fourth section is literature review. Fifth section has discussed the relevance, scope and existing government policies for agro-tourism in India. The last section concludes with policy recommendations.

II. Concepts of Agro- Tourism

There are many notable definition of Agro- tourism. Some of them are as follows:

“It is an enterprise at a working farm conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates income for the owner” (American Farm Bureau Federation, 2004).

“The form of rural tourism which involves a combination of education and recreation of the tourists at a working farm by engaging them in to observation, demonstration and participation in farm activities and various allied activities offered in the farm setup”. (Shembekar, 2016).

Agritourism was defined by the Italian Government under National Law in 1985 as “...activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities.” (Sonnino, p. 286)



"Rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component" (Weaver and Fennel, 1997; Mc Gehee et al., 2007)

"Any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors." (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008).

"Any activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment or educational purposes, to view or enjoy rural activities, including farming, wineries, ranching, historical, cultural, harvest-your-own activities, or natural activities and attractions. An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant paid to participate in the activity." (Virginia law)

On the basis of above definitions we can say that Agro- tourism is a kind of tourism which allows the general public to visit on working farm or other activities like horticulture, bee- keeping, dairying, fishing, hunting etc. participate in rural activities, enjoy rural life and provide information about life style, culture, customs, traditions of the village and how to work on farm. It allows farmers to diversify their activities by using the existing resources of farms to increase their income.

III. Research Methodology

The research study is based on secondary data. The data has been collected through various research articles, research papers, reports and National tourism policy of India. Also, the data has been collected from various websites.

IV. Review of Literature

This study is based on a comprehensive literature review. It is important to document that there is dearth of literature in this area. Below are few studies which have discussed the scope, problem and opportunities of Agro-tourism. However, these studies are also limited to scale in terms of addressing the issue.

Vijay M. Kumar (2010) in his article 'Agro-Tourism Scope and Opportunities for the Farmers in Maharashtra' discusses about the scope, minimum requirement, benefits and problems of Agro- tourism in Maharashtra. He concluded that it has great potential in Maharashtra because of different kinds of products and beautiful natural sites but has several problems like low awareness among farmers and finance.

Dr. Jayashree Upadhy (2015) in her article 'Problems of Agro- tourism Industry in Maharashtra: A Study' discusses about the importance, social and economic impact, problems of Agro- tourism in Maharashtra. She also discusses about the various product which could be offered in Agro- tourism. She concluded that Agro- tourism has positive social and economic impact but has lack of government support.

Martha A. Walker (2009) in his article 'Agritourism: Ideas and Resources' discusses about the meaning, challenges, potential activities and partners of Agro- tourism. He also discusses about the how to develop and implement a successful Agro- tourism plan.

Dr. Nartsuda (2013) in his article 'Community Potential Development for Sustainable Agro tourism in Thailand' concluded that training manuals are required to develop new product for Agro- tourism and community participation is essential for developing the community potential.

Dr. R. Gopal, Ms. Shilpa Verma, and Ms. Rashmi Gopinathan in their article 'Rural Tourism Development: Constraints and Possibilities with a special reference to AgriTourism' discusses about the key issues and challenges in the development of Agro- tourism and also suggested recommendation for the success of this industry.

A paper contributed by **Pandurang Taware** and published by Confederation of Indian Industry titled 'Agri – Tourism: Innovative Supplementary Income Generating Activity For Enterprising Farmers' discusses about the scope, opportunities, marketing mix strategy, basic principles, issues and 3 important factors of Agro- tourism.

V. Scope and Relevance of Agro- Tourism in India

As highlighted in introduction section, rural India has broad scope for Agro- tourism. The following reasons support this argument further

- It has range of country side e.g. beautiful landscape, desert, mountains and costal system etc.
- It can grow variety of agricultural products.
- It has magnificent cultural heritage and diverse traditions.
- A significant proportion of population falls under middle income class group which cannot afford high cost tourism product. Agro- tourismis low cost products. So India has huge domestic urban market for Agro- tourism.



The scope has paved way to realize the relevance of agro-tourism in rural Indian scenario. The following points suggest the relevance:

- **Additional Source of Income and Employment Generation:** Farmers run the Agro- tourism activity with farming. So it is an additional source of income for farmers. It also generates employment in rural area.
- **Restraining the Migration:** Farmers are migrating from rural to urban areas in search of jobs. This is increasing the burden on urban area to provide employment and other facilities. It is very difficult to generate employment because of low industrialisation. So it is necessary to keep the farmers on farms. Agro- tourism provides a solution for the same.
- **Efficient Utilization of Surplus Labour:** There is disguised unemployment in agriculture sector. It means there is an excess of people working in farms and these redundant worker's productivity is essentially zero. Agro- tourism utilizes the surplus labour force in agriculture.
- **Provide Direct Market:** It will provide the direct market for handicraft items, agro products and village industry products which in turn develop the small scale industry in rural area.
- **Efficient Utilisation of Natural Resources and its Sustainability:** Agro- tourism efficiently utilizes the natural resources like land, water etc. It is sustainable in nature because it has low impact on environment and local culture.
- **Provide Employment to Women in Rural Area:** There are very few employment opportunities in rural area for women. Agro- tourism activities are run by the farmers and their family members. There are various activities which can be performed by women like cooking, hospitality etc. So it provides employment for women too.
- **Development of Rural Area:** Agro- tourism development is associated with the development of infrastructures, medical facilities, water supply etc. So it develops the rural area.
- **Improving the Living Standard the People:** It does not only increase the income but the farmers also come in contact with the urban people (visitors) and are affected by their lifestyle and thinking, which improves the living standard of the rural people.

Again, as highlighted in introduction section, the efforts have actually started in 2005 and there are variations across state governments. It is important to understand the present scenario of existing policies.

We attempt to highlight below the existing policies:

- Central government does not have any specific policy for Agro- tourism.
- National tourism policy of India focuses on rural tourism. Under 'Rural tourism scheme for infrastructure development' a maximum Rs.50 lacs assistance would be provided for the infrastructure development in rural areas.
- Maharashtra is pioneer state to introduce the Agro- tourism in the state in the year 2005. Maharashtra Tourism policy 2016 focuses on Agro- tourism under rural tourism policy and introduced action plan for agro/rural tourism. Maharashtra Tourism policy 2006 did not have any action plan for the same.
- There are some other states in India which has taken initiative to promote Agro- tourism in their respective states like Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan. But they are in early phase. They do not have specific policy for the same.

VI. Conclusion

Agro- tourism as supplementary source of income is pertinent for the development of rural area and improving the quality of life of farmers. It has ample scope in India. But because of lack of government support, the expansion of Agro- tourism in India is restricted to some specific states like Maharashtra, Punjab and Haryana etc. Maharashtra being the first state to introduced Agro- tourism, does not have specific action plan regarding the same in tourism policy of 2006 but now after 10 years, government of Maharashtra has taken initiative and given action plan for agro and rural tourism in the Maharashtra tourism policy of 2016. Government has suggested that at least one educational trip to be made mandatory for students from class V to X in the policy. But in all other states the concept is either in initial phase of development or developed at a small scale. It is developed in many European countries because of massive support from European Union and their respective state government support. Without the government support it cannot develop. Therefore Government should give priority through appropriate policies measures. State government role is very much needed or the development of Agro- tourism industry. Although government support is required in various fields but because Agro- tourism is at initial phase, support is much required in financing, training and promotion.

VII. Recommendations

Government support is imperative in the development of Agro- tourism in India. It is in emerging phase in India. The support of government is vital not only for the development of infrastructure, medical facilities and transportation but also for financing, training and promotion of Agro- tourism. Therefore, the government should support the Agro- tourism. Some measures to support are:



1. By Providing Adequate Financing

Farmers do not have adequate fund because of low level of earnings. Financial institutions are also not interested in providing loans to them because of their poor financial position. They depend only on the moneylenders, who charge high interest rate. Consequently; government support in financing is necessary. Many European countries provide financial support in the form of subsidies and incentives. The measures that can be taken by the government are:

- Government should allocate separate funds for the development of Agro- tourism. It should provide specific grants and funds like grants for construction of building, grounds and water facilities etc.
- Government should provide funds on periodical basis.
- Private sectors do not want to provide funds because of the risk factor. Government should encourage private sectors by giving them some benefits like tax exemption, subsidies and incentives so that they start providing funds to farmers.

2. Training of Farmers

- Farmers are illiterate and unskilled. They have communication problem and are not very much prone to hygiene and safety. So training should be provided in all of these fields such as hygiene, safety, communication skills and hospitality so that the level of services provided to the tourists improve. Also then atural resource management training e.g. land and water management etc. should be given to farmers.
- They do not have entrepreneurial skill, so they are unaware of how to develop a business plan. Training should be provided to develop their entrepreneurial skills and legal knowledge.
- Due to the scarcity of the resources, the resources should be utilized in an effective manner between the agriculture and Agro- tourism industry.

3. Promotion

Awareness of Agro- tourism among urban people is essential for the success of the product. An effective promotional strategy is required for this. Farmers do not have the knowledge and fund for the promotion of the product and hence government support is essential in the promotion. In Italy the idea is so ingrained in their culture people speak of taking an 'agritourism holiday'. Some key techniques for promotions are as follows:

- Present Agro- tourism product as a brand like it is presented as Agro-tourism brand 'Gallo Rosso' or 'Red Rooster' which commenced in the Alto Adige region in northern Italy in 1999 presents an excellent model for Agro-tourism development.
- Use all type of media e.g. - Newspaper, Radio, Television and display board with website name.
- Tour and Travel Company can play significant role in it. But because of low earnings they may not be interested. Government should encourage them by giving tax exemption, incentives and subsidies.
- Promote the Agro- tourism product with an USP(Unique selling preposition) as it is used in foreign counties e.g.- Wine tour in Virginia where visitors come and see how to convert grapes into wine , pick your own fruit, come-pluck a fruit, smell a flower, run in the field. This is dependent upon the uniqueness of the particular agricultural area(unique heritage, activities and product etc.).

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