

Agro-Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges For Farmers in Ratnagiri District

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ABSTRACT

The process of Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization has brought about a significant change in the economies of the world. Global economic restructuring has created an environment in which economies have to adjust to maintain their social and economic viability. The change forces demand operations at global level that has brought change in the thinking and use of the nature and the rural resources. These changes have generated new ideas as well as approaches to leisure, recreation, and tourism in particular. 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.

This paper is an attempt to identifying the potential for agro-tourism in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra state by highlighting the need and importance, major opportunities and challenges in this connection with some useful suggestions or keys for success.

Keywords: Agro-tourism, Agro-tourism products, Potential for Agro-tourism, Additional income, Opportunities and challenges, Keys for success

INTRODUCTION

Among the few states in India, Maharashtra remained the pioneer of Agro-tourism. And Agro-tourism in Konkan, particularly in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurga districts has bright future. Among the various driving forces for social and economic development, tourism is termed as instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. Tourism is now well recognized as an engine of growth in the various economies in the world. Several countries have transformed their economies by developing their tourism potential. Today, the concept of traditional tourism has been changed. Some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro-Tourism.

In late 20th century the concept of agro tourism was developed. With increasing urbanization people need the change in routine life and thus short duration and cheap tourism products are demanded by them. At the same time it is an opportunity for rural people for diversified activities to complement their earnings through farming. Since, now days the major development in Agro-tourism is taking place all around the world, different forms of Agro-tourism are seen. Agro-tourism gives people the chance to live in healthy environment and breathe fresh air, learn about rural environment and culture, ride horses and bullock carts, pick fruits and vegetables, feed animals, milk cows, boating and fishing, and also to participate in actual work of farm and buy produce directly from a farm. Agro-tourism is thus a form of niche tourism in which farms are used as tour destinations for educational and recreational purposes.

Agro-tourism today is considered as the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry. The concept has been successfully implemented in states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. It has become a new avenue for earning the income for the rural farmers. The state of Maharashtra is the pioneer state to develop and promote Agro-tourism in the country. And most importantly besides other districts in the state Ratnagiri and Sindhudurga districts have great potential for Agro-tourism.

OBJECTIVES

In the present study the efforts have been made -

To examine the concept of Agro-tourism and take review of Agro-tourism in various countries.

To identify the types of products or services which can be offered by existing Agro-tourism businesses.

To highlight the need and importance of Agro-tourism in Ratnagiri district

To find out opportunities and challenges for the farmers engaged in Agro-tourism in Ratnagiri district

To give some useful suggestions for the growth and development of Agro-tourism in Ratnagiri district

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive and partially exploratory in nature and is based on the secondary data. The data or information has been obtained from the related articles, research papers, and reports. Review of literature is also carried out in order to get better insight into the subject or topic under study. Official websites are also visited to collect necessary information in order to fulfill objectives of study.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

It is important from viewpoint of agricultural community i.e. farmers and the government regarding study of Agro-tourism that if it is to be used as a dominant diversification option for sustaining the viability of the agricultural sector and rural communities. The present study is restricted and related to identifying the need for Agro-tourism in Ratnagiri district. It also covers the study of opportunities and challenges for the farmers in the district. The study concludes with some useful suggestions to explore the benefits of Agro-tourism.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Agro-tourism can rejuvenate the conventional concepts and views on tourism, and is bringing in a new dimension in the sustainable development. Existence and growth of Agro-tourism business is associated with and driven by both the sides of supply (farmers) and demand (tourists). To overcome the problems of lower income from farming through the related and unrelated diversification strategy farmers (supply side), are forced to supplement their income. Along with this tourists' (demand side) increased income and demand for more specialized forms of vacation to experience the rural environment and culture has stimulated growth for tourism activities in rural areas. The present study on Agro-tourism in Ratnagiri district in its little contribution will help in highlighting such issues. The growth of Agro-tourism will not only lead to increase in income but also ensure better use of unused land and untapped resources. Further, it will promote socio-economic development in the district.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kumbhar, V. M. (2009) in the report on 'Agro-Tourism: A Cash Crop for Farmers in Maharashtra (India)' discusses about the basics of agro tourism and the reasons for the development of agro tourism. He also compares traditional tourism with Agro-tourism. Kumbhar, V. M. (2009) in the article titled 'Agro-Tourism: Scope and Opportunities for the Farmers in Maharashtra' discusses about the benefits and potential for agro tourism development in Maharashtra. He also discusses about the problems faced by agro tourism and provides solutions for the same. A research paper contributed by Taware Pandurang and published by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) titled 'Basic Principles of Agri-Tourism' discusses the situation of Agro tourism by region along with elements, and scope of Agro-tourism. Azimi Hamzah and others (2012) in the article 'Socio-economic Impact Potential of Agro-tourism Activities on Desa Wawasan Nelayan Community Living in Peninsular Malaysia' discusses about the potential socio-economic benefits that can be offered by the Agro-tourism activities to progressive fishing communities in Malaysia, which has much relevance to the district under study because of huge coastline. It enhances the understanding the probable potentialities to bring socio-economic changes due to agro tourism. Upadhye Jayashri (2015) in her research paper titled 'Problems of Agro Tourism Industry in Maharashtra: A Study' discusses the requisites, products, importance, socio-economic aspects, and problems of Agro-tourism industry along with certain measures. Ingavale Deepa (2015) in her research paper titled 'Agri-Tourism – A Business Model of Agri-Tourism Development Corporation' discusses the concept of Agro-tourism, the scope for Agro-tourism, the functioning and business model of Agri-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC). It is a case study of Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) where she discusses services and functioning of ATDC. Singh Priyanka and Mishra Manoj Kumar (2016) in their research paper titled 'Identifying the Potential of Agri-Tourism in India: Overriding Challenges and Recommend Strategies' discusses the potential of Agro-

tourism in India by highlighting major challenges of it along with some useful recommendations. They also discuss status of Agro-tourism and factors responsible for development of Agro-tourism in India. Shivkumar K. C. and Shabarish P. S. (2019) in their research paper titled 'Medical Tourism: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities for Indian Healthcare Industry' discusses the potential for medical tourism industry in India along with the projects which can be undertaken by the government to boost up medical tourism industry. They express that India has tremendous capability to grow as world's best destination for medical tourism. Chatterjee, Soumi and Durga Prasad, M. V. (2019) in their research article titled 'The Evolution of Agri-Tourism Practices in India: Some Success Stories' discusses some success stories with the hope that Agro-tourism with its baby steps and the talisman of research can definitely bring changes in the life of farmers and consumers shall also reap the benefits of it. Besides the above few other literature is also reviewed which helped to develop better insight into the subject or topic of the present study.

CONCEPT OF AGRO-TOURISM

Agro-tourism or Agri-tourism is comparatively the latest concept and activity in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms. Agro-tourism is a form of agricultural multi-functionality that gives an opportunity to experience the real alluring and authentic village life, culture, food, and agricultural activities. Agro-tourism in its broader sense involves any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm. Agro-tourism has different definitions in different parts of the world, and sometimes refers specifically to farm stays, as in Italy. Elsewhere, Agro-tourism includes a wide variety of activities, including buying produce direct from a farm stand, navigating a corn maze, riding horses and bullock carts, slopping hogs, picking fruits and vegetables, feeding animals, or staying at a bed and breakfast on a farm. Agro-tourism is a form of niche tourism that is considered a growth industry in many parts of the world, including Australia, Canada, United States, Philippines, and few others. Other terms associated with Agro-tourism are 'Agritainment', 'Value-added Products', 'Farm Direct Marketing' and 'Sustainable Agriculture (Wikipedia).

In general, Agro-tourism is a practice of attracting travelers or visitors to an area or areas used primarily for agricultural purposes. However, Agro-tourism is small-scale, low-impact, and, in most cases, education-focused. Because landowners operate the majority of farms, opportunities for uniqueness and customization are limitless.

Agro-tourism is a holidays concept of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of farm. Mathematically it can be described as $\text{Agro-tourism} = \text{Rural/Agricultural Environments} + \text{Farm Commodities} + \text{Tourism Services}$. A conclusive definition of Agro-tourism includes activities that go on within the property generating occupations that complement the agricultural activities that continue to make up a part of daily life on the property with greater or lesser **intensity**.

SCOPE OF AGRO-TOURISM

Basically, Agro-tourism covers a wide range of activities and services. The list of a few things that a farm operator may offer to tourists mainly include, Overnight stays: Lodging and camping (Bed and breakfast, Camp sites, Youth camp, Farm vacation (farm stays, feeding animals, picking fruit/vegetables), Day trips/picnics, Weddings, receptions, honeymoons etc.); Special events and festivals (Music festivals, Holiday celebrations, Harvest festivals (time of taking agricultural produces and breeding time of tortoise), Rural Festivals/Jatra etc.); Off the farm (Farmers' markets at taluka place, Taluka Milk Collection Centers, Village fairs, Roadside produce stands etc.).

Some of the prominent Agro-tourism centers in the Ratnagiri district offering many of the above mentioned products or services includes Ganesh Agro Tourism, Nate-Rajapur, Garva Agro Tourism, Abloli-Guhagar, Sawali Agro Tourism, Oni-Rajapur, Kokangabha Agro Tourism, Gavane-Lanja, Farm of Happiness Agro Tourism, Phungus-Sangameshwar, Nihar Agro Tourism, DandeAdom-Ratnagiri and to name a few.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF AGRO-TOURISM

Agriculture remained the main sector of Indian Economy. Majority of the population is directly or indirectly dependent of agriculture. Considering current situation of agriculture there is a need to provide alternative sources of income. Agro-tourism will serve this purpose. Agro-tourism gives farmers an opportunity to

generate additional income and an avenue for direct marketing to consumers. Additionally, Agro-tourism provides educational opportunities to the public, helps to preserve agricultural lands, facilitates optimum use of agricultural resources, and allows states to develop business enterprises. Today, rising input costs, decreased yields, poor agriculture commodity prices are becoming responsible for declining agriculture income and profit. Pressures due to globalization and industrialization are threatening the existence of agriculture. This is forcing farmers to look for additional income via job or business so as to sustain their household income. Even worldwide scenario states that, farmers across the globe are recognizing the need and desire to diversify their farm products and services to supplement their agriculture income. Moreover, farmers in Ratnagiri district have a good opportunity to diversify their agriculture business into Agro-tourism so as to increase the sustainability of farming by offering value added products and services to the farm tourists.

In today's era of liberalization and globalization travel and tourism is extensively recognized as an important civil industry worldwide which provides major potential for economic growth and development. For many developing countries it is one of the main sources of foreign exchange income and the number one export category, creating much needed employment and opportunities for development. In over 150 countries tourism is one of the five top export earners, and in 60 countries it is the number one export category. (12th Five Year Plan Report, 2011) Travel and tourism in India is getting a massive impetus due to globalization and opening of economy to the world. India's travel and tourism industry is the second highest foreign exchange earner for the country and according to an estimate total direct employment in the tourism sector is around 20 million. (CII Report, 2011) As discussed in the Maharashtra's Agro Industrial Policy Report 2010, Maharashtra is a bio-diverse state with nine Agro-climatic zones and varying soil types suitable for agricultural development. Though Maharashtra is a highly industrialized state of India, agriculture still continues to be the major livelihood earner for the people of the state (Industrial Policy Report, 2010). And Ratnagiri and Sindhudurga districts being recognized districts for agriculture, fruit production, and tourism; with huge coastline and rich bio-diversity have huge potential for Agro-tourism.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRO-TOURISM

The main reasons i.e. opportunities why farmers in Ratnagiri district should take diversion from their routine agriculture activities are summarized as follows.

- The practices of farming are changed due to forces of globalization
- Indian agriculture is facing tremendous competition driven by global trends.
- There is increase in dependence of agriculture on monsoon and climatic conditions
- There is an increase in costs and reduction in agriculture income
- The agricultural surpluses are not sufficient to cope the increasing need of the farmers
- The existing natural and agricultural resources have huge potential which remained untapped
- There is a great demand for leisure, recreation, and agro-tourism products from urban population (Upadhye, J., 2015).

Thus, the Agro-tourism can act as a complimentary activity to farming and the native farmers can come ahead with heterogeneous products in Agro-tourism

CHALLENGES FOR AGRO-TOURISM

Ratnagiri district has a greater potential for the development of Agro-tourism centers due to favourable natural and climatic conditions. But there are some major problems or challenges and problems which may encounter in this process.

- Lack of sufficient knowledge about the Agro-tourism
- Lack of commercial approach among the farmers

- Lack of capital to develop basic infrastructure for the agro-tourism
- Ignorance on the part of the farmers regarding such a type of alternative activities
- Presence of unorganized sector in the Agro-tourism industry
- Use of inappropriate marketing and promotional strategies
- Inadequate education and training to farmers

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AGRO-TOURISM

The full potential of Agro-tourism has not been realized in the Ratnagiri district. Tremendous opportunities exist to cultivate Agro-tourism development in the district. Problems should be solved through proactive policy and strategic investment in Agro-tourism so that farmers interested in Agro-tourism get motivated. All Agro-tourism centers should not only use all possible advertisement and promotional media for increasing awareness among the tourists but also should undertake effective marketing strategies supported by enough financial resources. Following are the few important suggestions or keys for success which the farmers and government should take into account.

- Farmers should take training about Agro-tourism through MART and ATDC
- Farmers should also conduct a feasibility study so as to know the potential for Agro-tourism development
- Farmers should also take care in conserving the integrity and developing the unique nature of the center
- Farmers should plan facilities and services with care considering needs of tourists
- Farmers should address the main people-related issues like safety and security apart from leisure and recreation
- Farmers should develop effective marketing and promotional strategies so as to give wide publicity to Agro-tourism
- Farmers should make effective use of advance technology like websites, apps, social media, etc.
- Government should provide for recognition and support to Agro-tourism
- Government should promote a Public-Private Strategic Partnership Development Model
- Government should make available project consultancy services and timely financial assistance
- Government should make available from the agencies like Maharashtra State Agricultural and Rural Tourism Co-operative Federation Limited (MART) and Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) (Singh, P. and Mishra, M., 2016).

CONCLUSION

To summarize it is to be said that agriculture and its allied activities are on the brink of a change for both the farmers as well as consumers. Global economic restructuring has created an environment in which economies have to adjust to maintain their social and economic viability. The change forces demand operations at global level that has brought change in the thinking and use of the nature and the rural resources. These changes have generated new ideas as well as approaches to leisure, recreation, and tourism. These ideas and approaches have paved path towards rural and Agro-tourism development. In spite of gradually growing agro tourism, the fact remains that the farmers should follow commercial approach; the government support through appropriate and conducive policies for development should give priority to Agro-tourism business in rural India.

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