

# Prospective Role of Agro-Tourism in Transformation of Rural India

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**Abstract:** *High poverty level is one of the major developmental challenges facing India with over 21.9% percent of the population living below poverty line in 2011-12. Agriculture is the main occupation of Indian Economy. Around 65 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. Out of total GDP around 13 percent GDP comes from agriculture sector. The overall development of rural areas requires, among other things, the involvement of the non-agrarian sector. The high incidences of poverty level calls for farmers to find alternative sources of livelihoods to generate additional income. . The multifunctionality of agriculture is evidenced, inter alia, by its conjunction with tourism and environmental protection. In this scenario agro-tourism is gaining increasing importance and can contribute to the development of rural communities. Agro-tourism which is a recent offshoot of tourism sector is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas aimed for enhancing higher standards of living for rural communities especially through increased income for people who work in agriculture The authors analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the further development of agritourism, From various literature review on agro-tourism of India ,as a strategy for poverty alleviation and livelihood improvement, by focusing on specific conditions and constraints that influence the progress of agritourism business initiatives as viable entrepreneurial solutions for self-sustainable rural communities in India it is concluded that Agri-tourism as a viable venture for farmers in this county. Which help in the transformation of the lives of the farmers in particular and rural economy in general.*

**Keywords:** Agro-tourism, Poverty Alleviation, Rural Transformation

## 1. Introduction

The term agro-tourism emerged in the late twentieth century. It includes agricultural farms that are related to tourism. It is often used to describe all tourism activities in rural areas, more frequently the term rural tourism and agro-tourism relates to tourism products which are 'directly connected with the agrarian environment, agrarian products or agrarian stays' staying at farm, whether in rooms or camping .This concept was initiated and developed in Europe and North America, then developed in many countries. In India it was initiated in 2005 at Malegaon village, near Baramati, Maharashtra by Agri Tourism Development Company (ATDC). Agro tourism philosophy aims to increase farmers' incomes and the quality of life of rural society. Agriculture is considered to be the backbone of the Indian economy. Around 85 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and allied activities and almost 26 percent of India's GDP comes from agriculture. More than a profession or a business, agriculture is deeply rooted in the Indian culture. Farmers are now enthusiastic to try newer methods away from the typified and orthodox patterns to build relations with the consumers directly and earn extra. This supplementary income for farmer may provide a partial contribution in India's Prime Minister's vision of doubling income of farmer by 2022. Hence, adding on to the agricultural income with some touristic activities is bringing in new hopes and better lives..Similarly tourism is a very significant contributor to the GDP in India and is a crucial tool for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable rural development.. The development of a strong platform around the concept of agro-Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million village.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines rural tourism (Agro-tourism) as tourism that gives to visitors a personalized contact, a taste of physical and human environment of the countryside and as far as possible, allows them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people (Aref and Gill, 2009).. Promotion of Agri-Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and line departments at state and central governments and farmers. In agro-tourism sector increasing the involvement of local communities, especially the poor, in the tourism value chain can contribute to the development of local economy and poverty reduction.

India being a land of diverse climatic conditions and various terrains the plethora of agri-tourist destinations from all the corners of the country could help to give an array of different kinds of entrepreneurial approaches, the needs of local communities can be given serious attention in tourism development which in turn may result in improvement of standards of living, high tourist expectations and the protection of natural and cultural environments. Thus agri-tourism approach has got lot of potential to transform and develop a rural economy into a modern economy by utilizing the local resources to its fullest potential. Governments and all stakeholders including the local communities and the relevant institutions in a country need to work together so that the utilization, development and management of tourist areas could be given serious attention (Nandi, 2008; Narayan, 2000). Economic dimensions of tourism do not only depend on the input, but also on other sectors such as the agricultural sector which complements tourism through Agro-tourism (Cikin, Ceken, and Ucar, 2009).

### 1.1 Research Objectives

The present research paper includes the following objectives:

- To explore the concept of Agro-tourism.
- To highlight the Role of Agro-tourism in transformation of rural India.
- To know about the various Agro-tourism destinations in India.
- To find out the major challenges of agro-tourism sector.

### 1.2 Research Methodology

The present research work is exploratory in nature and based on the secondary source of data collection. The researcher has collected the secondary data from the reputed books, journals, newspaper and official websites of the tourism department and department and tourism boards of different states as well as of tourism ministry of India. To pace the study, the researcher has also used some observational facts by visiting frequently to some of micro agro-tourism sites.

## 2. Literature Review

Literature has it that Agritourism started in the United States in the early 1800s (Karabati et al., 2009). A number of countries of the world have transformed their economies through agro-tourism activities. The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) has been promoting agritourism in the Caribbean since 2005 to strengthen links between tourism and agriculture (IICA, 2011). In Thailand, it has been used as one of the main medium to attract tourists from all over the world. Since the advent of agritourism in Thailand in 2002, agro tourism has created a great impact by having a record of more than half a million tourists visiting farm areas in a national scheme (Taemsaran, 2005). In Europe, agritourism has become a way of life for Europeans as a large percentage of Europeans take farm holidays (Frater, 1983). Agro-tourism industry is gaining ground in Malaysia as the country has a wealth of products for visiting tourists (Hamzah, 2011). Main activities involved in the area entail farm visits and home stays. It is reported that Agro-tourism activities are diversified and entail consumption of natural resources and the local culture as well as the development of personal relationships between visitors and the local community (Iakovidou, 1997 in Lathiras et. al., 2010) and these activities increase the economic income of the local community (Sosnowski and Ciepiela, 2011). The country has more than hundred tourist destinations that offer agro-tourism activities. In Africa, agro-tourism has a short history and, in most countries, it is at the developing stages (Maumbe, 2012; Bernardo et al., 2007). Agro-tourism is improving South Africa's economic performance as well as contributing to rural development and employment creation (Kepe et al., 2001). It is utilized as a means to alleviate poverty and create employment opportunities in rural areas. In Ghana, Fanteakwa District in 2007 attracted over 4,000 paying visitors who were interested in cocoa farms Cocoa (2006)

When it comes to Indian contexts, majority of literature seems to concentrate around the agro-tourism operations in western belt of Maharashtra and the activities of Agro-

Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC).” Agro-tourism has not spread much across the states of India and is still concentrated in western belt of Maharashtra. Agro-tourism is still a small scale venture and has low impact on macro economy of India It is slowly growing in some states like Karnataka , Punjab and Rajasthan. Hamilpurka (2012) indicated that Agro-tourism in Karnataka, India, has improved farmers 'income and also contributed to educating the tourists and local communities on sustainable agriculture. As Shembekar points that, “There needs to be a proper business model to promote and propagate the concept of agri-tourism as an easily adoptable and implementable venture for farmers in India. All challenges that researchers face can have solutions and agri-tourism can be ventured in gradually step by step. All depends on the will power of farmers and proper promotional strategies adopted to market the concept in weekend tourists”. Shembekar pointed that “Agri-tourism as a concept does not have a concrete literature which encompasses the entire scope of it from a holistic point of view Rather there are more specific studies which are either region specific or enlighten a particular part of it such as agri-tourism destinations or agri-tourism in a particular place such as a district in Rajasthan or Punjab. Recently a lot of research work has been done in this field and most of the suggestions made by the researchers indicate a great potentiality of the development of Agro-Tourism in India. Many researches have well stated the term ‘Agro-tourism’ as any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors. P. Singh and Manoj Kumar (2016) in their study have stated that Agro-tourism is a supportive system to the agricultural activities in India. Moreover, it is an Innovative practice which can be utilized by the famer and farm owners to harvest this opportunity, through a diversified approach in the core areas of agriculture sector in India. Azimi Hamzah et. al. (2012) in their study have discussed about the potential socio-economic benefits that can be offered by the agro-tourism activities to progressive fishing. Vijay M. Kumbhar (2010) in his study of Maharashtra has pointed out that tourism is now well recognized as an engine of growth in the various economies in the world. Therefore, tourism has great capacity to generate large-scale employment and additional income sources to the skilled and unskilled. Today the concept of traditional tourism has been changed and some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro-Tourism. Consequently, the promotion of Agro-tourism would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the local people by generating new job opportunities in rural areas in the farming sector. N. G. McGehee, et. al. (2007) in their study has explained Agro tourism as rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component. Marques (2006) in his study has pointed out agro-tourism as a specific type of rural tourism in which the hosting house must be integrated into an agricultural estate, inhabited by the proprietor, allowing visitors to take part in agricultural or complementary activities on the property.

“We hope to bring the farmers together and help them understand agri tourism better. This will increase their income levels and the entrepreneur-based activities,” D Ranjit, assistant general manager of NABARD said. (SharleenDSouza, 2011) Pandurang Taware (2008) said

about Agritourism scope, “The urban population which is having roots in villages always has the curiosity to learn about rural life regarding sources of food, plants, animals, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. Agritourism has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.”

Thus, it can be observed that there is a wide scope for the concept to grow in all agricultural states of India as the market is not at all saturated and is in fact virgin in many of the states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh which are prominently agri-driven states of India, but unexplored.

### **SCOPE OF AGRO TOURISM:**

Agro-Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of traditional agriculture.

The benefits of agro-tourism development are manifold. Agro tourism is an inexpensive gateway as it takes travel and tourism to the larger population, widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness. Employment opportunities to the farmers including farm family members and youth is increased many folds and the additional income source for the farmers act as shield to protect against income fluctuation. Thus in the process It supports and further promotes rural and agricultural development process. Additionally, It brings cultural transformation between urban and rural people including social moral values. Farmers tend to improve their standard of living due to the contacts with urban people. (Duesenbery effect) It also brings benefits to the urban people, they can understand about the rural life and know about the agricultural activities. Hence, Agro-tourism has the capacity to create a win win situation for both the farmers as well as the tourists. Thus, to optimize the use of existing local resources in rural area and to disperse the benefits among urban folk also agro-tourism is one of the best options in developing country like India. Agro tourism could be a lucrative strategy to promote agricultural economic development in India. By introducing agro-tourism concept, not only present growth rate could be sustained but also this value addition contributes to further growth. But, adequate facilities and publicity are must to promote such centers.

### **Potential & importance of agrotourism in Indian perspectives**

India has a long stretch of coastline and have several hill stations and water reservoirs with semi-evergreen and deciduous forests, also abounds in numerous tourist attractions ranging from ancient cave temples, unspoiled beaches, ancient forts and monuments, forests and wildlife, unique hill stations, pilgrimage, centers, and a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture There are many tourist centers in India which are the supporting natural environment for the agro- tourism centers. India exhibits diverse form of art and culture entrenched through a rich heritage, which makes India a hot global tourist destination. India has diverse agro-climatic conditions too. All these factors provides scope for promotion of all season, multi-location tourism spost. India has a thriving tourism industry, which contributes over 6%

to the national GDP and 8% of the total employment. India is already established as one of the top tourist destinations in the world. Value addition by introducing novel products like agro-tourism would only strengthen the competitiveness of Indian tourism industry in global market. Indian tourism industry is growing @10.1% -The World Tourism organization has estimated that the tourism industry is growing at the rate of 4% a year, hence 2½ times more that the growth rate at global level. Agriculture is considered to be the backbone of the Indian economy. Around 85 percent of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture and allied activities and almost 26 percent of India’s GDP comes from agriculture. Agritourism provides a number of economic, educational, and social benefits to producers, consumers/tourists, and communities. Furthermore, agritourism provides incentives for producers to remain in agriculture. The agriculture sector is also facing a growing number of challenges, such as market competition, rising land and input costs, encroachment from sprawl, and a complex regulatory environment. In order to stay in business, some operations have had to look for ways to add value to their products and create dependable revenue sources. Agritourism enterprises provide numerous economic benefits to the surrounding community as well.. Operations create jobs and support the local economy through their purchases of goods and services. Other “spillover” economic development opportunities occur when agricultural tourists shop, eat and lodge in the surrounding community. More importantly, agritourism operations are unique, local businesses, which cannot later be “outsourced” to other communities. Agritourism can provide in sustainable ways to care for rural working lands and scenic areas. Hence, adding on to the agricultural income with some touristic activities is bringing in new hopes but, there are some problems in the process of the development of such centers. Hence, the government and other related authorities should try to support these activities in India for the rural development and increase income level of the farmers. Besides farmers, 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 Agrio-Tourism needs conceptual convergence with Rural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Health Tourism, Adventure Tourism and culinary adventures. Agotourism has enjoyed sustained growth in Italy and other parts of Europe since the 1980s. It is a carefully blended mixture of two industries, agriculture and tourism, that offers farming communities, as well as tourists, substantial advantages. By introducing agri-tourism concept, not only present growth rate is sustained but also this value addition contributes to further growth. But adequate facilities and publicity are must to promote such centers. Government initiatives and policies in XII th five year plan allocation has been increased. Increased financial allocation reaffirms the government commitment.

### **Major Agro-tourism Destinations in India: Some of the famous and major agro-tourism destinations in India are as under:**

- Dewalokam Farmstay Retreat, Karimannoor, Kerala.
- Vanila County, Kottayam District, Kerala.
- Maachli and Dwarka Farmstay, Sindhudurga Region, Maharashtra. Dudhsagar Plantation and Farmstay, Goa.



- Destiny Farmstay, Ooty, Tamil Nadu.
- Acres Wild Cheesemaking Farmstay, Coonoor, Tamil Nadu.
- Banyan Tree Farmstay, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.
- Green Dreams, Coorg, Karnataka.
- Citrus County, Hoshiarpur, Punjab.
- Prakriti Farms, Rupnagar, Punjab.
- Thathagata Farm, Darjeeling, West Bengal.
- The goat Village, Garhwal District, Uttarakhand.
- The Country Retreat Farmstay, Pali, Rajasthan

### 3. Problems of Agrotourism in India

However, Agro-tourism is a boon for the development of our rural society but there are some challenges as: India has a greater potential of the development of the agro-tourism centers due to the good natural and climatic conditions. Although it is very likely that agritourism development can be successfully integrated into local communities without great disruption, there are some potential challenges. General population is not much aware about the agro-tourism, till date. Farmers are having weak communication skill and lack of commercial approach which is prime important for running any enterprise. Lack of capital to develop basic infrastructure for the agro-tourism is another constraint for the poor farmers to develop. Lakhs of farmers have small size holding, low quality land and little or no access to credit or irrigation. They have to negotiate with consistent drought. Though some agro-tourism enterprises can be launched with very little financial support but there is lack of financial awareness, as most of the sectors in agro tourism industry is unorganized. 80% farmers have small holdings and their job is hand to mouth cannot give more to visitors as per their expectations. The whole tourism concept is very indigenous in the rural areas. Though initiative attempt has been taken by the local youths, yet the professionalism is lacking. They are lacking proper training to project in the manner from tourism perspective. Residents often have concerns about the potential noise, traffic, and trespassers because these impacts have the potential to change the overall character of the community. When farmers take proactive actions to maintain good relationships with neighboring land owners, local decision makers and the community many of these concerns can be resolved informally. Increased noise levels can potentially diminish the quality of life for neighboring land owners. Machinery, equipment, trucks and animals produce various noises. Increased traffic can also be a concern for neighboring land owners.

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. Not only that, the villages is also benefited due to the development of agro tourism from social and economic angle. But, farmers have multiple interests in their property that can conflict with each other. As simultaneous landowners, business owners, taxpayers and community members, a farmer's interest may vary depending on the issue. Different types of farms may also have different priorities. Communities must consider the local diversity in agriculture to ensure that all interests

are taken into consideration so to achieve the optimum results.

### 4. Suggestions & Recommendations

Promotion of agro-tourism involves besides farmers some other important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and rural development ministry of the state and central governments. To promote domestic tourism, thrust areas should be identified by the government of India for the development of infrastructure, product development and diversification, development of eco-adventure sports, cultural presentations, providing inexpensive accommodation etc. To make it a successful venture lot of research works needs to be encouraged. The Indian farming industry is facing decreasing profitability because of declining returns to productions agriculture. Communities that are interested in diversifying their local economy and maintaining rural character recognize the need to support agricultural operations and plan for agro-tourism. Potentials revealed included the possibility of generating opportunities for local farmers to increase income, revenue generation and improved food security, enhanced entrepreneurial skills and the diversification and uniqueness of traditional food crops within the county., hence reverse migration

Government should be interested in creating awareness on options for diversification of agro business and options for additional income and also should encourage interstate participation of farmers, industries and researchers. Farmers, planners, interested citizens and elected officials must work together to create a vision for the community and develop plans and implementation tools (i.e., zoning, permitting, etc.). Federal, state and local laws and other decisions can directly impact local agricultural uses. The farmers should also try to establish their co-operative society for the development of agro-tourism centers. Tremendous opportunities exist in the country to cultivate agritourism development through proactive policy and strategic investment of resources that alleviate constraints faced by farmers interested in providing on-farm recreational and educational activities to the public. Financial support is also crucial for agritourism development in the unexplored backward but potentially viable areas. The agro-tourism may become a cash crop for the farmers in India and also an instrument of the rural employment generation. Wide publicity has to be given so as to get more tourists throughout. Family members and other staff needs to be trained for receptions and hospitality. Educated farmers needs to be trained on development of IT and innovations and websites. The needs of customers needs to be assessed and thus develop good relations between customers and hosts farmers. Address book notes comments tourists etc. needs to be preserved for record and lastly develop agro tourism package for different types of people to make it more attractive venture for general fun-loving public.

Finally small scale agritourism could be initiated on an experimental basis through demonstration farms at strategic sites. Due to synergetic characteristics in a system, the total output will have an impact in the county. More research on agritourism needs to be conducted on the management, planning, and policy implications.

Thus it can be concluded agri tourism which shows rays of hope for sustainable rural development in certain pockets of India could be tested in unexplored virgin rural areas across country to make it large scale cost effective enterprises.

## 5. Conclusions

India has unique climatic, cultural and historical features that create ideal conditions for the development of agro-tourism. However, in the administrative sense, agro-tourism is a concept that is still practically non-existent. Logically, it is at the junction of agriculture and traditional tourism, but in practice there is no single economic policy for the development of agro-tourism in India. India basically being a rural economy, rural tourism and agri tourism significantly can contribute to the GDP of the nation and could act as a crucial tool for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. Though at present it is in nascent stage, with proper government incubation it can be promoted efficiently. Today Agro-tourism needs a creative strategy for the betterment but it is not an easy task. Therefore, here it is an urgent need to implement a well-defined strategy for the development of agro-tourism

The paper reveals that the potential socio-economic impacts for agritourism in India are great and largely untapped. The success stories of few agro-tourism enterprises from different geographical locations of the country reflect the idea of how marketing of the farms interspersed with tourism services are able to help in the transformation of the lives of the farmers as well as tourists. It is a two way process where both the parties are engaged as well as share a symbiotic relationship. Although it is a long way to go as the development and acknowledgement of the Agro-tourisms it's potential is seen and cultivated by only Maharashtra government and its supporting agencies. Rest of the nation is yet to understand its worth and move ahead on it. To convert it as best platform for the socio-economic development of the rural areas the government has to provide a full fledged policy support system for the rooting and strengthen of the Agro-tourism in India.

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