

AGRITOURISM IN INDIA: A VIRGIN MARKET

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Agriculture serves as the backbone of the Indian economy with a contribution of nearly 16.5 percent in India's GVA (Gross Value Added) in the year 2019-20. But unfortunately, due to several reasons, it has become a most critical industry, resulting in economic distress on the part of the farmers. Thus, agritourism, an enterprise set up on a commercial basis on a functional farm for the educational or recreational purpose of visitors, can be seen as a secondary and stable source of income for the farmers. Also, India is counted amongst the top 10 tourist destinations in the world (Conde Nast Traveller "A leading European Travel Magazine). It serves as a home for the diverse culture and agro-climatic conditions, providing scope for the growth of this business. Thus, there lies a lot of opportunities for agritourism in India, including an increasing preference for non-urban tourist spots.

Travel centred around farming, small-scale production, animal husbandry, etc. can be termed as agritourism or agrotourism. It is fundamentally an association between tourism and agriculture that serves as a key component of an ecologically and socially accountable tourism. Agritourism is a recent concept in the tourism sector that provides a chance mainly to the urbanites, to reconnect with the land, to gain an insight into the lifestyle of the farmers, to experience rural life, to taste the local food and to get hands-on experience with various farming activities.

Pandurang Taware, considered as the Father of agrotourism in India, founded the Agri-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) in 2005 at Pune (Maharashtra) with the following objectives:

- To develop and promote Agritourism with the aim of diversifying and stabilising the rural economy;

- To provide an opportunity for generating employment, enhancing income and offering a wider market base for local business;
- To promote small tourism industries by attracting tourists to rural areas;
- To provide training and infrastructural support to farmers for growth of the concept;

Need and Importance of Agritourism

About two-thirds of the Indian population being dependent on agriculture as their source of income, the farmers form the backbone of the country. But due to rapid urbanization, people are getting detached from nature and the “land”. Thanks to technology, the only source of viewing and enjoying nature nowadays is via television, internet, VR, etc. Thus, agritourism provides them with an escape from the daily hectic and mechanical lifestyle and enjoy the tranquillity of rural area in a peaceful environment. Agriculture, these days, has taken the form of the business, compared to the subsistent nature earlier. As a result of that, the majority of the small and marginal farmers cannot afford it, and they need a supplementary source of income to support their families.

Benefits of Agritourism

For Farmers:

- Acts as a secondary source of income for farmers, improving their living standards.
- Helps in making the tourists or visitors aware of the lifestyle of the rural people and gain insight into the locally produced agricultural goods.
- Helps in creation of employment in rural areas.
- A spirit of entrepreneurial behaviour can be inculcated in rural youth.

For Community:

- Generating employment opportunities will strengthen the rural economy.
- Locally produced agricultural goods and services can be promoted.
- Provides opportunities to the communities to enhance their local tax bases.
- Traditional knowledge and wisdom of India can be preserved and promoted.
- An improvement would be there, in terms of protection and aesthetic value, in the sites which are supposed to serve as agritourism areas for attracting the tourists.

For Tourism Operators:

- Tourism market can be strengthened in the rural areas.
- It will provide an opportunity for the flow of non-local currency in the rural economy.

For Tourists/Visitors

- It will provide a first-hand experience about the various farming activities carried on in a farm.
- It will also provide an opportunity to the visitors to interact directly with the nature and know about the importance of the environment in which they are living.

Principles of Agritourism

- To have something for the visitors to see, in the form of natural resources, tradition, culture and values of rural people, fairs and festivals, etc.
- To have something for the visitors to do, in which they can participate and enjoy, like horse-riding, milking cattle, picking fruits, etc.
- To have something for the visitors to buy, like on-farm agricultural products, rural crafts, etc.

Activities/ Services Provided in Agritourism

Chase *et al.*(2018) has categorised agritourism activities into various types like direct-to-



consumer sales, educational activities, recreational activities, hospitality services, etc.

Scope of Agritourism in India

- A cost-effective gateway- The current concept of tourism is limited to urban and elite people, constituting only a small portion of the population. However, agritourism has the potential to widen the tourist base due to its cost-effectiveness as the cost of food, accommodation and recreation is minimum.
- Agritourism provides scope to satisfy the curiosity about the farming community as it centres around the lifestyle of rural people, their tradition and culture.
- A break from the hectic daily routine- The lifestyle of people has become so mechanical these days, that all they want is an escape from such routine and finding solace to make life more peaceful. Being closer to the nature, peace and tranquillity are two in-built factors in agritourism.
- Due to urbanization, rural people are migrating to urban areas in search of jobs. Thus cities are growing at the cost of villages and yesterday's villagers are today's urbanites. But deep down in their hearts, lies love and respect for their villages. Thus, agritourism provides an opportunity to satisfy such desires.

Agritourism Destinations in India

Agritourism has not yet popularised across the Indian states, except the western belt of Maharashtra. Being the pioneer state to introduce the concept, Maharashtra did not have a specific action plan regarding it in the tourism policy of 2006. But in the recent years, the Government of Maharashtra has taken the initiative and provided action plan in the tourism policy of 2016, which includes a mandatory educational tour for students from classes V to X. However, the concept is gradually taking momentum in other states like Uttarakhand, Punjab, Rajasthan, Karnataka, etc. Some successful agritourism destinations and farm stays are mentioned hereunder:

- **Maharashtra-** Baramati Agritourism Centre, Palshiwadi (Pune);Dirgayu Agritourism Centre (Thane);AnandKrushiParyatan Kendra (Satara);
- **Karnataka-** Green Dreams Farm(Coorg);
- **Kerala-** Dewalokam Farm Stay; Vanilla County (Kottyam);Mepra: The Hidden Roots (Kuttanad);

- **Goa-** Dudhsagar Plantation and Farm Stay;
- **Tamil Nadu-** Destiny Farm stay (Ooty); Acres Wild Cheese-making Farm Stay (Coonoor);
- **West Bengal-** Tathagata Farms (Darjeeling);
- **Uttarakhand-** The Goat Village (Garwahal);
- **Rajasthan-** The Country Retreat (Pali);

Conclusion

To overcome problems like lack of social recognition and respect, lack of adequate incentives, etc. the youth, nowadays, are not willing to take up agriculture as a profession. Even a large portion of farmers are resorting to suicide every year due to several reasons like cut-throat indebtedness, crop failure, lack of proper irrigation facilities, etc. According to the NCRB reports, nearly 3.5 lakh farmers have committed suicide since 1995 to 2018. Thus, the time has come for the policy-makers to successfully harness the potential of agritourism to boost up the rural economy of the nation. However, just like any other new concept, agritourism is also not without challenges, the major ones being lack of proper credit facilities, lower literacy rate and lack of proper market orientation on the part of the farmers, lack of awareness about the concept, fragmented and small land-holdings and lack of Government support. Thus, initiatives on the part of the Government along with promoting and making the people aware about this virgin concept is the need of the hour to harness the immense potential that lies in it.

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