Problems of Agro Tourism Industry in Maharashtra: A Study

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ABSTRACT

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 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 a affordable prices. Not only that, the villages are also benefited due to the development of agro tourism. Some cases of agro tourism in Maharashtra Dist. Raigad; Pune and Satara have proved that agro tourism not only bring development of farmers but to the village as a whole from social and economic angle.

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, agricultural transformation, sunrise industry, rural life, rural recreation
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 people. At the same time it is an opportunity for rural people for diversified activities to complement their earnings through farming.

Following are the basic requisites to develop as an agro tourism centre:

- **Offering something innovative to see/observe/enjoy** - Animals, birds, farms and nature, culture, dress, festivals and rural games or nearby forts, religious places, forest, bird watching etc. could create interest among visitors in Agri-Tourism.

- **Novel activity to perform or play** - Participating in agricultural operations, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, fishing, cooking and participating in the rural games/festivals/celebrations are few activities to quote in which tourists can take part and enjoy.

- **Purchasing innovative/attractive items** - Have something for visitors to buy. Rural crafts, dress materials, farm gate fresh agriculture products, processed foods etc. are the few items which tourist can buy as memento for remembrance.

Agro-tourism is an innovative agricultural activity related to tourism and agriculture both. It has a great capacity to create additional source of employment and income generating activities to the farmers. It is a fact about agriculture that the dependence on monsoon leads to the failure of crop and ultimately to the losses but agro tourism can prove to be one of the solutions to diversify the farming activity and earn money. The reasons why farmers tend to take diversion from their routine agriculture activities are as follows:

- Indian agriculture is facing tremendous competition driven by global trends.
- The practices of farming are changed due to forces of globalization
- The dependence on monsoon makes the situation worse if the climatic conditions are not favorable.
- Agriculture support prices many times are not favorable to the farmers.
- Agricultural surpluses are not sufficient to cope the increasing need of the farmers.

In this scenario the Agro-tourism has emerged as a complimentary activity to farming and farmers are coming up with heterogeneous products in the agro tourism.

**Introduction**

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.
Following factors are instrumental enhancing agro tourism in Maharashtra –

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

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

**Table -1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of Tourists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>15000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>23500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>31200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>47000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>38900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>46700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>49850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Compiled from various sources
The above table 1 and graph 1 shows increasing trend in tourists visited Maharashtra from 2007 to 2013. More than threefold increase has taken place in tourist visited to agro tourism centers in Maharashtra.

1. Review of literature

Vijay Kumhar (2009) in the report ‘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. Also he compares traditional and agro tourism. Kumbhar Vijay Maruti, (2009) in the article ‘Agro-Tourism: Scope And Opportunities For The Farmers In Maharashtra’ discuss about the benefits and potential for agro tourism development in Maharashtra. Also he discusses about the problems faced by agro tourism and solutions for the same. Nicole Häusler and Dörte Kasüske, in the article ‘Back to the Roots: Agritourism in India, International Cases in Sustainable Travel & Tourism’ (2011) introduces agro tourism as an approach to tourism which may pave the way for sustainable development in rural areas. It provides a detailed discussion of the concept of agro tourism, including the benefits, constraints and success factors involved, using the example of India, a country where 85% of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. A paper contributed by Pandurang Taware and published by Confederation of Indian Industry titled ‘Basic Principles of Agri – Tourism Situation of Agro tourism by region, elements, 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’ discuss about the the potential socio-economic benefits that can be offered by the agro-tourism activities to progressive fishing communities in Malaysia. It enhances the understanding the probable potentialities to bring socio economic changes due to agro tourism.

2. Objectives and Methodology-

The present paper discuss the Agro tourism with the following objectives-
1. To examine the importance of agro-tourism development in Western Maharashtra.
2. To study the various products provided by Agro Tourism in Maharashtra
3. To study the problems of agro tourism industry in Maharashtra

The present study is based on the secondary data. The data has been procured from the related articles, research papers, reports and 11th plan document of the government of India. Some data has been furnished from the website of the Ministry Of Tourism And Culture for the Government of Maharashtra.
Also the personal observations during visits to agro tourism centers are instrumental in the present study.

4. Various Products Provided by Agro Tourism

Tourists opting for agro tourism are attracted towards agro tourism because of variety of innovative products which they cannot enjoy with traditional tourism. Thus agro tourism is getting very good response from urbanites. The innovative products provided by agro tourism are as follows-

- Visiting eating organic food, fruits items and enjoy pictures view of flowers.
- See water storage farm pond – Shet-tale
- Sweet water fishing
- Local / herbal tree plantation
- Tour of farm
- Various rides like – bedfellow, bullock cart, tractor, horse etc.
- Rod fishing
- Dairy, piggery, poultry etc.
- Processing of farm products
- Demonstration of farm activities
- Wool processing
- Cross country skiing
- Special Events and festivals-
  - ✓ Music Festivals
  - ✓ Holiday celebrations
  - ✓ Harvest festivals
  - ✓ Rural festivals (Jatra, Mela etc.)

Above mentioned are few of the products and there is much scope for providing innovative products depending on place, time etc.

5. Importance of Agro-Tourism Development in Western Maharashtra.

The importance of agro tourism development can be discussed from demand for and supply of agro tourism in Maharashtra.

The demand / supply side factors are as follows-
• **Cost effectiveness** – This widens the tourist’s base as tourists can enjoy their holidays in affordable prices with wide range of products to enjoy.

• **Live experience of rural life** – Agro tourism revolves around village life, culture, crops, animals, village crafts, festivals etc,

• **Family oriented recreation activities** - Villages provide wide range of recreational activities to all age groups through variety of entertaining and recreation activities.

• **Preference to peaceful destinations and tranquility** – Work more and earn more is the ‘Mantra’ of urban life. This demands change in life at weekends and holidays as their life is full of worry and hurry. Agro tourism can be one of the destinations to avail with peace and tranquility which is not possible in resorts of overcrowded cities.

• **Interest in nature and environment** – Urban population is leaning towards nature. Proximity to nature through birds, animals, mountains, crops, village etc. provides an atmosphere to urban people where they can forget their busy urban life.

• **Rural recreations** – Various festivals and celebrations in rural area provides recreation to urbanites. Various forms of agro tourism like – Agri- shopping, culinary tourism, health tourism etc. are examples for the same.

• **Educational Value of Agro –tourism** – Agro tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agricultural science among urban school and college children. It provides an opportunity for hands on experience for urban students in agriculture and rural life / activities.

6. **Socio Economic aspect of Agro Tourism**

Agro tourism development is bringing about changes in agricultural practices, earning of the farmers etc. It will be interesting to see the socio economic changes taking place in rural area due to agro tourism.

- The economic impact can be discussed as follows –

- Increased income of the local community – backward and forward linkages of agro tourism business become an instrumental in enhancing income of the local community. These linkages pave path for various income generating activities in rural area.

- Intensified and diversified economic activities – Economic activities in rural area gets intensified due to interlinks of agro tourism and various income generating activities as follows-

http://www.ijellh.com
Accommodation (Bed and Butter scheme of Govt. of Maharashtra)

- Food
- Transport and excursion
- Tour Operators
- Tourist Guides
- Ready market for village craft items
- Opportunity for programs by village artists

- Employment opportunities – With diversified and intensified economic activities new and innovative employment and self-employment opportunities get generated leading to enhanced earnings of the villagers.

- Poverty alleviation – Enhanced earnings of the community leads to alleviation of poverty in rural area.

The social impact can be discussed as follows-

- Agro tourism programmes can help in community development.
- It helps building pride and confidence of the community.
- Better quality of life - Intensification and diversification of economic activities through agro tourism enhances the purchasing power of the community. No doubt, that improves the standard of living and ultimately quality of life in rural area.

- Cultural transformation – cultural transformation is possible through interaction with various guests/tourist of different caste, creed and communities.

- Strengthening the community institution - Also it is possible that agro tourism will strengthen the community institution specialization, networking and leadership. The services like schools, library, health care, ICT centers, public transportation etc. also gets developed due to agro tourism.

7. The problems of agro tourism industry in Maharashtra

Agro tourism in Maharashtra is developing very fast in Maharashtra. In spite of this fact, there are problems, which limit the further development of agro tourism in Maharashtra. Some of them are as follows-

- Quality and complexity of services
- Dependence on stake holders involved in tourism development on local and regional level.

- Entrepreneurial environment in Maharashtra
Government support to agro tourism

Quality and complexity of services

Quality in service is the basic prerequisite for the survival of local entrepreneurs in agro tourism. The existing products in agro tourism are attractive enough and the equipment supporting these products are improved in last few years. The problem lies in lacking of motivated and skilled staff, presentation of products in a professional way, hygienic conditions etc. It is fact that tourists want to enjoy rustic flavor of rural life but majority tourist from urban area expect professional approach by host and hygienic conditions for stay and food.

The quality service is a task as there is complexity in services provided to the tourist in agro tourism. Usually the hosts try to provide accommodation services in private facilities to reduce service cost. On the other hand, in many villages there is lack of other facilities and other services like entertainment services, rental services, swimming pools etc. This leaves a negative impact on satisfaction level of visitors.

Majority entrepreneurs in agro tourism do not have training in tourism and hospitality. Also there is limited possibility of getting professional knowledge for their entrepreneurial activities.

a. Cooperation of Stakeholders in Tourism on Local and Regional Level

The following diagram shows the network of stake holders for the promotion of agro tourism business. The farmer who is an entrepreneur in agro tourism is at the centre in following diagram. The success of agro tourism business lies in the existence and network of stake holders in the local and regional level. But in agro tourism business it is hard to implement this statement and bring it in the practice.
Some of the stake holders in above diagram are from private sector and some are from public sector (Government). As the objectives and interests of both the sectors are different and there is lack of cooperation among them the entrepreneurs in agro tourism find many difficulties. Also this sector is sunrise industry in Maharashtra, the policy measures are inadequate for the development of industry. Even the stake holders mentioned above are also not sure about the gains from the development of agro tourism and thus many time the negative approach of stake holders hamper the business of agro tourism.

b. Entrepreneurial Environment In Maharashtra

Rural Maharashtra has following features –

- Low per capita Income
- Low land holding
- Low level of development
- Inadequate transport facilities
- Low level of education

Due to all above features majority farmers rely only on traditional cropping pattern. Due to limited land holding they cannot create / develop new products for agro tourism. As the professional attitude is lacking in rural area they are reluctant to take entrepreneurial task in agro tourism. Risk bearing and uncertainty are the basic tasks of an entrepreneur. Rural farmers in Maharashtra are basically from low income group and thus have less courage to undertake entrepreneurial task.

c. Government Support To Agro Tourism

The development of agro tourism in Maharashtra and creating suitable policy for the same is task of Ministry of Tourism and cultural affairs of Government of Maharashtra. The tourism policy of government of Maharashtra is in effect from 2006 and will effect till 2016. In the action plan it speaks about agro tourism under rural tourism and indirectly speaks under craft development. The detailing about the provisions and action plan is not in the above mentioned policy document.

It is necessary to prepare strategic documents aimed on agro tourism development under umbrella policy for rural development. This will enhance the possibility for agro tourism entrepreneurs to get support for development. If the holistic approach is taken by government towards the development of agro tourism, it will help agro tourism entrepreneurs to have technical, financial, marketing support etc.
Conclusion - 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 and recreation. These ideas and approaches have paved path towards rural and agro tourism development.

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