

## **AGRO-TOURISM IN MAHARASHTRA: A STUDY OF INFLUENTIAL FACTORS AND CHALLENGES**

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### **Abstract**

India's tourist sector is expanding. The concept of tourism is gradually moving from the mainstream to the niche as a result of the expanding socioeconomic environment. Agro-tourism is a branch of tourism that gives city dwellers the chance to interact with locals and learn about their customs and way of life in rural areas. Due of its impact on societal development, it has drawn more and more attention from researchers in both developed and developing nations. As a newly emerging phenomenon in the urban population, it has a number of impacting growth elements, including climate, sociocultural, demography, and economic background. The purpose of the study is to identify some of the essential factors that may influence the choice of destination as a significant possibility for tourism growth. However, Maharashtra's agro-tourism promotion faces unique difficulties, which the study makes an effort to pinpoint and resolve using a conceptual framework model. The study's primary objectives are to create a useful tool for rural job prospects and to assist rural residents in improving their economic situation through increased revenue.

**Keywords-** *Tourism, Agro-Tourism, Agriculture, Rural Economy, Indian Tourism*

### **1. Introduction**

Globalization of Indian economy has created a scenario in which societies must change to conserve their social and economic viability. The change forces are demanding global operations that have brought a change in the way nature and rural resources are used.

Recent developments have given rise to new concepts and approaches to recreation and leisure. Such theories and strategies paved the way for the growth of rural and agro tourism. Agro tourism is in addition to traditional farming practices. It is an opportunity for farmers to make creative and inventive use of available resources. It creates equal benefits for both tourists as well as farmers. Farmers get an opportunity to earn extra income by using available resources, and the tourist can relish village experience and nature in affordable prices. Not only that the development of agro tourism benefits the villages in various aspects. Some cases of Maharashtra districts agro-tourism at Raigad, Pune and Satara have shown that agro-tourism brings social and economic development not only to the farmers but to the village as a whole. (Upadhye, 2015).

Agriculture is perhaps the most significant development and invention made by mankind. The word 'agriculture' itself demonstrates how well it blends together with the origin of human culture. Agriculture is not just a profession; it is a lifestyle which is different. Furthermore, in times when the distinctive lifestyles have become tourist attractions, tourism as a sector has grown into one of the largest global and rapidly growing sectors, with several years of growth and diversification. Modern tourism has become more 'experience-oriented', requiring new forms of tourism with the potential to provide tourists with authentic and innovative tourism experiences (Borlikar, 2017).

Agriculture is regarded as the Indian economy's backbone. Around 85% of the population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture and related activities, and nearly 26% of India's GDP comes from agriculture. Ninety million farmers live in 0.625 million villages that produce more than twenty metric tons (MT) of food grain. Agriculture is deeply rooted in Indian culture, further than a profession or business. Farmers are now excited to try new ways away from the typical and orthodox patterns of directly building relationships with consumers and earning extra money. Therefore, adding some tourism activities to agricultural profits brings new hopes and better lives. In this direction, significant efforts are being made and Agro-Tourism is one such endeavor that fits the bill. But still, agro-tourism is not a novel concept; its reach is limited to just a few places. With its slow rise and the use of technology, agro-tourism will certainly bring changes in the lives of farmers and consumers will also benefit (Chatterjee & Durga Prasad, 2019).

Maharashtra is India's third biggest state, both in terms of area and population, with a 720 km long coastline. It is situated in the mountain ranges of the Western Ghats and Sahyadri

with semi-evergreen and deciduous forests. Maharashtra is one of India's main tourist centers and there are considerable scope and opportunity for developing agro-tourism (Ghopal, Benke, & Gade, 2016).

Encouraging rural tourism is time-consuming, and the State of Maharashtra is also committed to improving the situation of farmers. The government of the Union and the government of the state took a poor pro position. Another major reason for encouraging and selling rural tourism is the resultant benefits of developing as farm land often develops infrastructure such as highways, bridges, communications, housing, hospital and healthcare services, sanitation and waste disposal, followed quickly by schools, colleges, business and economic activities.

## **2. Literature Review**

Theoretically, in the recent past, the idea of agro-tourism has grown, but Agro-tourism has been experienced in many countries for many decades. In both theoretical and practical terms, agro-tourism is prominent in developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, France and other European countries, especially after the 1940s. The word agro tourism has emerged in the last 25 years (Sznajder , Przezbórska, & Scrimgeour, 2009).

As Shembekar stated up, "Agro tourism as a term has no specific literature from a comprehensive point of view that encompasses the entire scope of it. However, there are more regional studies in some specific places like some districts in Panjab or Rajasthan, which are either region-specific or focus on a certain part of it, such as agro-tourism destinations or agro-tourism. Before it relates to Indian contexts, most literature seems to focus on agro-tourism activities in Maharashtra's western belt and Agro Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) practices (Shembekar P, 2016)."

Agro tourism is strictly defined by Manhas as "travel that combines farmland or rural settings with agricultural products, all in a tourism experience or a variety of farmers ' activities, facilities and services." He as well calls it "innovative activity generating income for entrepreneurial farmers" (Manhas P. S. , 2012).

Anne-Mette Hjalager (1996) states that tourism, by its very nature, affects the local people living in villages, which further leads them to economic benefits that can act as a survival

factor for a rural community undergoing an economic transformation. These economic advantages include diversification of the base of the local industry, increased public employment, higher incomes, widening the tax base and growth of business income.' In this regard, agro-tourism is seen as a tool for sustainable economic development in rural areas. (Borlikar, 2017).

Global Studies in Sustainable Travel & Tourism' (2011) presents agro-tourism as a tourism solution that can set the stage for sustainable rural development. This provides a comprehensive overview of the agro-tourism idea, along with the advantages, constraints and success factors involved, using the illustration of India, a country where 85% of the population relies on agricultural income for their subsistence.

Azimi Hamzah et al. (2012) address the possible socio-economic benefits that agro-tourism activities can bring to the fishing communities in Malaysia in their article 'Socio-economic impact of agro-tourism activities on Desa Wawasan Nelayan community living in Peninsular Malaysia.' It strengthens the understanding of the potential that agro-tourism will bring about socio-economic changes.

### **3. Factors affecting the agro-tourism in Maharashtra**

Most of the agro and rural tourism literature finds that farmers ' primary motivation to diversify from farming and opt for tourism is economical (Beus, 2008). The pressure of poor agro-product prices, the growing cost of production, intense competition, industrial development, suburban development encroachment on rural and agricultural areas and commodity market elasticity have led farm families to explore the sustainability of alternative economic methods in an attempt to preserve the family farm. The additional problems for Indian farmers are erratic monsoons and inadequate irrigation. (Barbieri , Mahoney, & Butler, 2008).

While entering the field of agro-tourism, these farmers must consider the following factors if they want to flourish this side business.



**Figure 1 - Factors Affecting Agro Tourism in Maharashtra**

- **Location:**

Location is perhaps the most important aspect of success in the agro-tourism. The location of the center must be easy to arrive and have a good natural background. Urban vacationers want to enjoy scenery and rural life. Farmers should therefore only grow their center in rural areas with a beautiful natural backdrop in order to attract urban visitors to your farm. The agro-tourism core site must be easy to access by rail and road. Tourists, along with agro-tourism, want to visit certain historical and natural tourist sites. Therefore, near these tourist sites, the center should be built. It is better for both tourists and farmers. Tourist destinations such as Panchgani, Mahabaleswara, Nashik, Narshinghvasi, Jotiba, Akkalkot, Pandharpur, Konkan etc. These would be the best places for agro-tourism growth. Farmers can grow their centers in any affordable location besides these places.

- **Infrastructure:**

Infrastructure plays an important role in this field. Though the visitors come with an expectation to experience the rural ambience, they do expect a certain level of professional approach and compatible infrastructure. The farmers can provide them with accommodation facilities at the location or have collaboration with the nearest hotels. Farmhouse having a rural look and feel but offering urban comfort is one more option. Offering rich agricultural resources namely, plants, water at the place will be an added advantage. Providing rural cooking equipment to the interested tourists will enhance their rural experience. The main part of the infrastructure is it must have emergency medical care with a first aid box. The ambience should have a well or lake or swimming tank for fishing, swimming. Bullock cart,

cattle shade, telephone facilities etc. Goat farm, emu (Ostrich bird) farm, sericulture farm, green house will add to the rural feel.

- ***Service Quality:***

Service quality is the basic precondition for the stability of local agrotourism business owners. The current agrotourism products are attractive enough, and in the last few years, the equipment supporting these products has been improved. The problem is the lack of trained and qualified staff, competent presentation of goods, basic hygiene conditions, etc. Tourists want to enjoy the rustic flavor of rural life, but most urban tourists expect a professional approach through hosting and hygienic stay and food conditions. Quality service is a challenge because the services provided to tourists in agro-tourism are complex. The hosts usually try to provide private lodging facilities to reduce the cost of operation. On the other side, other amenities and other utilities such as entertainment services, rental services, swimming pools, etc. are missing in many villages. This leaves a negative impact on the level of visitor satisfaction. Majority agro-tourism entrepreneurs have no tourism and hospitality training. There is also a limited opportunity for entrepreneurial activities to gain professional knowledge.

#### **4. Agro-tourism boosters in Maharashtra**

Some following noteworthy factors are useful for Maharashtra agro-tourism. There are already tourist sites to support agro-tourism—good communication and transportation facilities—greenhouse cultivation of long stem cut flowers, vegetables, fruit etc. Maharashtra is already established as one of the top global tourist destinations. Maharashtra is India's biggest producer of fruit, spices, medicinal and fragrant plants. Here the number of visitors who choose non-urban tourist destinations is growing. Additionally, Maharashtra has varied agro-climatic conditions, deserts, people, and mountain ranges that provide room for all-season promotion, multi-location agro-tourism. The traditional Lavni dance, Povadas, Koli dance, Dhangari Gaja, and Tamasha are the common folk dances from rural Maharashtra. And some religious folk dances like Dindi, Kirtan. Maharashtra's culture with a great variety is very beautiful. It gives rural Maharashtra a unique identity. The following factors are essential for enhancement of agro tourism in Maharashtra:

- Diversity in terms of weather, crops, people, hills etc.
- Magnificent cultural heritage

- Existence of numerous tourist sites that supports agro tourism.
- Good connectivity through communication and transport facilities.
- High-Tech cultivation of fruits, flowers and vegetables in different areas.
- As a result of deliberate government efforts, Maharashtra has emerged as a horticultural province
- Development of tourist destinations outside the urban area.

#### ***4.1 Problems of the agro-tourism in Maharashtra***

Due to the good environmental and climatic conditions, Maharashtra has a greater potential for the creation of agro-tourism centers. But there are some problems in the state's growth of agro-tourism. The following are major challenges and problems; Lack of information regarding the agro tourism

- Small farmers lack communication skills and an entrepreneurial approach.
- Lack of resources to build basic agro-tourism infrastructure.
- Farmers' ignorance of such activities.
- Unorganized sector presence in the agro-tourism sector.
- Many farmers have limited holdings, low-quality land and little or no credit access.
- The government's support for agro-tourism in India is missing.

#### ***4.2 Key techniques for success in agro-tourism***

Agrotourism is one of the business activities, so for success, farmers need to have a business mind and some marketing techniques.

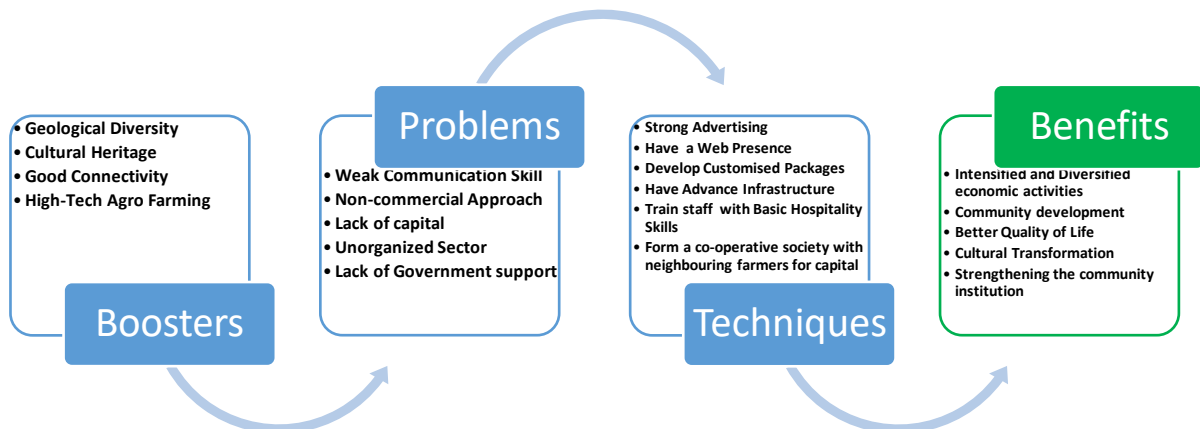
For better success in agrotourism, the following tips should be pursued.

- Give new journals, television, etc. to a large tourism center campaign.  
Use any form of advertisement.
- Build connections with the schools, universities, charities, clubs, associations, organizations etc.
- Train personnel or family members for reception and hospitality.
- Understand the needs and desires of consumers and work accordingly.
- Optimum rent charges and fees for commercial-based facilities / services.
- Use local resources artificially to entertain / serve visitors.
- Improve your website and change your time to attract foreign tourists.

- Take feedback about the services to get suggestions for further growth and adjustment.
- Establish a good relationship with the visitors for future business and word of mouth publicity.
- Develop innovative agro-tourism packages for different types of tourists and their expectations.
- Be active and contributive with the guests.
- Small farmers can collectively form a cooperative society and develop their agro-tourism centers.
- Ensure hygiene and basic needs for urban visitors.

## 5. Conceptual Framework

According to the Global Development Research Center, in its purest sense, agrotourism is an industry that seeks to have a low impact on the environment and local culture while helping to generate income, employment, and local ecosystem conservation. Ecologically



and culturally sensitive, it's responsible for tourism.

**Figure 2 - Conceptual Framework for Supporting the Agro-Tourism Industry in Maharashtra**

## 6. Implications and Conclusion

Due to natural conditions and different types of agro-products as well as a variety of rural practices, festivals, Maharashtra has great potential for the growth of agro-tourism. More than 45% of the population live in urban areas and want to experience rural life and learn



about rural life. Building an agro-tourism business in Maharashtra is a good opportunity. But in the farmers, there is a problem of low understanding of this sector and the financial problem and the correct view of the Maharashtra farmers. The paper, therefore, aims to suggest a conceptual framework for farmers to help them run their agro-tourism business in a more efficient manner and achieve maximum profits. Therefore, the districts ' agricultural departments, Agriculture Universities, should try to provide orientation and some innovative ideas on agro-tourism. The government should try to provide the best financial support through the grants and institutional financing to the agro-tourism activities in Maharashtra. Banks should provide optimum financial assistance for Maharashtra's agro-tourism activities. The need for these farmers is the Agro-tourism service providers ' union, which supports the Indian agricultural tourism network, like Maharashtra.

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