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Agri Tourism – A Concept and Working Model for Earning Learning and Fun

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Abstract:

Purpose – Agriculture was the backbone of Indian Economy some decades ago. Around 85 percent of the population was directly or indirectly dependent on Agriculture and almost 26 percent of India's GDP comes from Agriculture. 90 million farmers are dwelling in 6.25 lac villages producing more than 200 MT of food grains feeding the country, but in the scenario now has the percentage of people depending on agriculture is coming down. Their contribution is more secondary and migration to the urban area in search of livelihood is increasing. This type of growth is not good for our economy. In this paper we have attempted to analyze the possibilities of using Agro-Tourism as a tool for rural Entrepreneurship and retaining the rural population by augmenting the income and in turn containing the migration of poor to the cities, which is adding to the problems of exploding cities .

Findings – Many of our educated youth, forced to migrate to cities on account of lack of opportunities in rural areas, are really interested to go back to rural or remote area and setup a business. There are scores of urban people are interested in visiting eco-friendly tourism spot. Agro-Tourism holds the key to many of our rural problems of lack of opportunities and urban problems of overcrowding and consequent on civic amenities. Since the Agro – Tourism as workable alternative solution has remained unexplored; initiatives by govt. are not up to the mark.

Practical implications -The study clearly analyzes the possibilities of Agro-Tourism as a solution for Rural Development. Our Government can use Agro – Tourism for promoting rural entrepreneurship, which has the potential to augment the earnings of farmers by better deployment of the land assets more profitably and reduce urban problems.

Keywords: *Agro-Tourism, Eco-Friendly, Entrepreneurship, Rural India*

1. Introduction

India has been a developing economy with agrarian society, having almost 60 percent of the population dependent upon agriculture. The contribution of the agriculture to the GDP is 40%, as per the recent figures. Despite the fact that since Independence, industrialisation has increased by leaps and bounds, the contribution of industry to the GDP has been steadily growing, and the service sector too has been growing fast enough, especially after the advent of globalisation, yet the anguish of poverty of the farmers often leading to suicides, abysmally low returns from the farm sector is a stark reality that cannot be denied. Indian agriculture suffers from many ills, including and mainly the dependence of the agricultural sector on the vagaries of rain Gods, low productivity of land, uneven, unscientific and unnecessary usage of the fertilisers, low productivity of the land due to excessive deployment of the manpower, uneconomic yields due to small land holdings, unscientific and yet mostly traditional methodology adopted in agriculture etc.

On one side is the stark reality of farmers experiencing uncertainty, poverty, hardships, deprivation, and generally a lack of enough penetration of the information and communication technology and the modern systems and methods; while on the other hand there is affluence, abundance of opportunities and generally a situation of the life of comfort and luxuries the modern city dwellers experience. While the farmers dream of life of comfort, the city dwellers are cut off from the realities of village life closer to the beauty of natural environment. There is a great divide between the India i.e. the developed society – mainly those who belong to the middle and affluent classes of people dwelling in the cities, leading a comfortable life in industrial and commercial occupations; and the Bharat – mainly situated in the villages and far cut off from the development and modern activities of the city dwellers. Bharat and India both are appearing to be living in 19th and 21st centuries simultaneously.

How can we attempt to change the dark and stark realities of poverty and indebtedness of the farmers, taking advantages of the prevailing situation and bring succour to the lives of both, farmers and the city dwellers?

By meeting the needs of both sections of the society to their benefit and create an economic concept and a working model through the concept and working model of Agri - Tourism for bringing additional earnings to the farmers, learning in respect of the comfortable life style, working methodology, challenges and benefits involved in the city life and village life for both the farmers

and the City dwellers and fun for the city dwellers who can decide to cut off from the rigours of city life selectively for some time and be with nature, for fun at a cost, is what is attempted in this exploratory article taking into account of the beginning and successful attempts of Agri –Tourism as a working model.

2. Concept of Agri – Tourism

This is a new concept developing in the agricultural sector where a farmer or an agro – entrepreneur having his own farm land and growing agricultural or horticultural produce, also develops certain amenities in the farm land where he can invite and entertain certain guests from the cities that he can comfortably accommodate in the natural setting for a fee for certain period which will afford the city dwellers an outing from their usual work packed environment and acquaint them with the vitals of life of villages. Such an opportunity will be a source of learning and fun for the city dwellers, while adding to the income of the farmer entrepreneur providing a financial cushion to him in his occupation. This will also bring him knowledge of the newer technological developments through the acquaintance of the guests and bring him closer to the modernity. The idea is though may appear to be similar, is actually different from running a resort, which is out and out a business for pleasure often in the outskirts of the cities, whereas the Agri – Tourism is actually developing out of mainly agricultural occupation, where facility to relax, learn and make fun is added by the farmers to earn.

Greater interactions between the farming community with the city dwellers by way of the Agri – Tourism is likely to facilitate exchange of ideas, better understanding of the opportunities and advantages, threats and problems of in various occupations in the villages and the cities and enlarge the vision of the farming communities, increase their earnings possibilities, afford alternative ideas in times of financial crisis and embolden them in their risk management capabilities. One of the crucial realities of the small land holder, totally depending upon the uncertain earnings from the same, is the lack alternative sources of income and non availability of a socio – financial network to bail him out during financial and seasonal crisis. Agri – Tourism can be a real alternative, given the opportunities for every strata of the land holders engaged in agriculture.

3. Scope for Agri – Tourism

The scope for Agri - Tourism, indeed is not even. It is depending upon the convenience of the location, the kind of facilities that can be offered, proximity to the city and the marketing of the same. Obviously in the hinterland and in the arid zones, Agri – tourism may not gather momentum. Or, greater effort and offering of typically interest holding activities including learning or enjoyment supplementing the usual attraction for relaxation and facilities therefore may bring in the city agri – tourists. However it must be remembered that agriculture being the main activity must not be subordinated to tourism otherwise the whole concept of agri tourism being an innovation in agricultural sector will fail.

In the recent days People have become more interested in nature and how their food is produced. They want to meet farmers and processors and talk to them about what goes into food production. For many people who visit farms, especially children, the visit marks the first time they see the natural environs, source of their food, be it a dairy cow, an ear of corn growing in a field, or an apple they can pick right off a tree.

Agro-tourism, as it is defined most broadly, *involves any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farmer's ranch*. 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, picking fruits, feeding animals.

4. Scope of Agro-tourism

- An inexpensive gateway - The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is least in Agro-tourism. This widens the tourist base. Present concept of travel and tourism is limited to urban and rich class which constitutes only a small portion of the population.
- Curiosity about the farming industry and life style - The urban population having roots in villages always have had the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle.
- Health consciousness of urban population and finding solace with nature friendly means - Modern lifestyle has made life stressful and average life span has come down. Hence, people are in constant search of pro-nature means to make life more peaceful. Ayurveda, which is a pro-nature approach medicine, has roots in villages. Indigenous medical knowledge of villagers is respected.
- Rural recreation - Villages provide variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts. Villagers' (farmers) lifestyle, dress, languages, culture / traditions which always add value to the entertainment. Agricultural environment around farmers and the entire production process could create curiosity among urban taught. Places of agricultural importance like highest crop yielding farm, highest animal yielding farm, processing units, farms where innovations too add attraction to the tourists.
- Educational value of Agro-tourism – Agri-Tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban school children. It provides a best alternative for school picnics which are urban based. It provides opportunity for hands on experience for urban college students in agriculture. It is a means for providing training to future farmers

5. Issues related Agro-Tourism

5.1. Publicity

It is difficult to provide publicity to a remote Agro-tourism unit. Hence, either collectively such Agro-tourism operators can provide publicity or organizations like ITDC, State tourism development corporations (KSTDC), NGOs, press and tour operators can take up this responsibility. Information technology can play very important role in promotion of Agro-tourism. Alternatively the Village Panchayats could be encouraged to launch portals that can be visited by the interested Agri Tourist from the cities. An interactive website containing all details about Agro-tourism locations and a toll free 24 hours help line can provide necessary information to Agri-tourists. Associations of Agro-tourism can launch website which gives clear and proper information about services.

5.2. Transport

Reaching the remote Agri-tourism units is the greatest challenge due to lack of approach roads and poor transportation facilities in the rural areas. Tele connectivity is must which is yet to reach villages. Government should play important role in creating these facilities namely roads, transport and telecommunication to rural areas especially where Agri-tourism units are established on priority basis. These efforts could be effective with private participation in partnership mode.

5.3. Accommodation

Safe and clean accommodation is must in Agri-tourism. Urban and foreign tourists look for these minimum facilities. Orienting Agri tour operators on one hand and providing incentive to such efforts on other hand is necessary. Regular clean water supply and neat and clean toilets are important. At the same time, it is necessary to limit modern facilities in which Agri-tourist is not interested.

5.4. Safety of tourists

Agri-tourism units are located in remote areas which lacks roads, medical facilities, telecommunication and sometimes threat from theft and wild animals. Hence, support of local population is must besides facilities for emergency medical care.

6. Statement of Problem

We started our schoolings with the great quotes like “Agriculture is the backbone of India”, “more than 65% of Indian population is directly or indirectly depending on agriculture”, “Indian Agriculture is like gambling with Monsoon”, but if you consider today’s scenario not even 30% of population depending on agriculture and they don’t want to be doing so. Reasons are well known, like inadequate or often nonexistent profit, non remunerative heavy work, etc...

This status is not good for any economy. We need to focus on agriculture and need to retain formers in the same sector by providing good opportunities and support. One of that is Agriculture; this paper is focused on how Agri- tourism can be a tool for the successful development of Rural Entrepreneurship.

7. Objectives of Paper

- To establish causal relationship between agro-based tourism, entrepreneurship and augmenting the farmers’ income.
- To analyze the governmental initiatives that need to be taken and provision of facilities towards Agro-tourism
- To examine the possibility of development and importance of agro-tourism in Karnataka.

7.1. Economics of Agri – Tourism

The economics of the Agri – Tourism is crystal clear. Since the mainstay of Agri – Tourism is agriculture, there is additional investment required in the main occupation on account of this business model. What would be required would be certain additional lodging and boarding facilities which have the modern amenities with indigenous flavour to give the guests the feel of village life in the natural environs without the need to forego the standards of cleanliness and comfort of the city life. The additional investment would only be required only for creating these facilities to provide the comfort, privacy and flavour to the guests, depending upon the size, quantity and nature of facilities provided which of course would be project by itself to be separately studied for the financial implication, facilities to be provided are for the year long / seasonal business proposition, viability and projection of profitability and the payback period.

7.2. Seasonal/Part time additional occupation or Whole year regular side by side activity

The Agri - Tourism facilities to be provided are to be considered vis a vis the land holding and nature of agricultural activity being done – whether horticulture , agriculture or floriculture, availability and the gender based composition of the manpower available for the year long / seasonal business proposition.

7.3. Research Findings and Suggestions

Our study of Agro – Tourism as in practice today has led us to the following findings and we make the suggestions:

8. Findings

- Uncertainty of Manson has major impact on agricultural life, and it causes migration of people from rural area to urban area.
- Due to the unethical practices of Brokers and merchants, farmers are not able to recover their investment leading to indebtedness and continuing poverty.
- Migration of people from rural area to urban area can have negative effect on food supply in the country, apart from resulting in overcrowding and civic problems in cities.
- Urban area people are likely to be more interested in eco-friendly tourism than city mall culture.
- Government support towards agri-tourism is not up to the expectations.
- Usage of Pesticides and fertilizers can lead to long term diseases in long term.

9. Suggestions

1. Agri-Tourism is an effective tool for promoting rural entrepreneurship
2. It is also relatively an inexpensive business compared to any other kind of business.
3. There is a chance of creating employment opportunities in the rural area.
4. It will be a good recreational activity for urban people
5. Government need to take necessary steps to promote agri-Tourism

10. Impact of Agri – Tourism in Confidence Building

This model of business not only can build the finances of the farmers, but has the much needed potential to build the confidence, risk taking abilities and rational approach to life of the farmers and the members of his family which is the biggest benefit in the development of human resources at the village level. One of the greatest dangers the farmer faces is that the indebtedness and his inability to repay the village money lenders, who operate as money sharks, and the absence of alternative sources of income, and that often leads to macabre spectre of suicide of the sole earning member of the farmers' family, endangering the future of his entire family.

11. Conclusion

The Agri Tourism is a sound proposal for development of additional source of income on the part of the farming community with multiple benefits for the villages in terms of their development of amenities, finances and human resources and the city dwellers for in terms of relaxation, fun in the natural environs and understanding of the village life and bringing in the bonhomie of relationships between farmers and the city dwellers. Such a development to take sustained, concrete and all round shape, the Agriculture department will have to create the Agri – Tourism eco – system in conjunction with the financial institutions and the tourism department possibly also creating facilities for preparation of project reports with financial implications, training facilities in select areas and continuously promoting Agri – Tourism. Agri Tourism definitely holds promises to bring in anti dotes for poverty and extreme despair leading to farmer's suicide.

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