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Abstract:-

Tourism is now well recognised as an engine of growth in the various economies in the world. Several countries have transformed their economies by developing their tourism potential. 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. Some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro-Tourism. Promotion of tourism would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the people. Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get aware with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions. Moreover, this activity brings visitors closer to nature and rural activities in which they can participate, be entertained and feel the pleasure of touring. Agro-Tourism is helpful to the both farmers and urban peoples. It has provided an additional income source to the farmers and employment opportunity to the family members and rural youth. But, there are some problems in the process of the development of such centres. Hence, the government and other related authorities should try to support these activities in Maharashtra for the rural development and increase income level of the farmers. The farmers should also try to establish their co-operative society for the development of agro-tourism centres. The agro-tourism may become a cash crop for the farmers in Maharashtra and also an instrument of the rural employment generation.

Keywords: Agro-Tourism, Tourism Sector, Employment Generation, Farming, Rural Life, Agricultural Farms, Public Awareness, rural tourism, agricultural transformation,

Introduction: The fact is that Agro-tourism is the latest and very popular key concept in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms. Nowadays, agriculture sector is becoming more and more popular for the Agro-tourism business. Moreover, it is a form of agricultural multi-functionality which provides an opportunity to experience the real alluring and authentic contact with the rural life, taste of the local food and get familiar with the many farming activities for the foreigner tourists. It also provides an opportunity to get rid of hectic life of cities and an opportunity to live in the peaceful village environment with the rural people and farmers in the pure natural environment, surrounded by splendid setting in rural areas on farming sites. Today many Indian farmers especially from Pune and Maharashtra currently are considering the use of agro-tourism as a mode of diversifying their farm operations. Now it has become an assumed fact that the overall potential for agro-tourism can only be achieved if strategies to address and overcome their challenges.

Research Objectives: The present research paper includes the following objectives:

- To explore the concept of Agro-tourism.
- To highlight the current scenario of Agro-tourism in Maharashtra.
- To point out and identify key factors for the development of Agro-tourism.
- To find out the major challenges of agro-tourism sector.

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 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.

The Concept of Agro-tourism: The term ‘Agro-tourism’ is defined most broadly, involves any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch and it 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, slopping hogs, picking fruit, feeding animals, or staying at a bed and breakfast on a farm. Moreover, agro-tourism is a form of niche tourism that is considered a growth industry in many parts of the world. Here it is noteworthy that agro-tourism is possible where agriculture and tourism meet to provide us with an amazing educational experience whether it may be a tour of a farm, a festival or a fair in rural areas. In such type of tourism activity, farmers turn their farmland into a tourist destination which attracts a large number of commercial activities. Today agro-tourism is becoming very popular business activity at the global level and even in almost every state of India. It is a leisurely activity that helps a tourist to understand the rural life of a particular area.

Agro-tourism in India: The idea of agro-tourism makes tourists live life like a villager, right from milking the cow, ploughing the field, bathing in a well, to climb a tree and plucking fruits from trees. Therefore, it is a new concept in Indian tourism sector which normally occurs on farms which gives an opportunity to experience the real enchanting rural life with the taste of local food including the familiar with the various farming tasks during the visit on a farm. India is a agriculturalist country and since 2004 Agro-tourism is operational, which started in Baramati Agri Tourism Center under the guidance of Pandurang Taware who received the National Tourism Award from the President Of India, for the most innovative Tourism Product. Agri-Tourism Development Corporation in India is pioneer in the development and marketing of agro-tourism concept in India which has 218 affiliated farmers and operates agro-tourism centers in their respective villages in the state of Maharashtra in 2014

Need and Importance of Agro-tourism in India: It is said that agro-tourism is a better way to know about the traditional agricultural farming activities which brings us very close to mother-nature and it is also very essential thing for a sustainable living on this planet. Today, Indian cities are facing the problem of overcrowd and environment pollution. Now, it has become an assumed fact that agro-tourism can give us a relief from the hectic life of urban areas. That is why; agro-tourism, eco-tourism and rural tourism are emerging as key sectors of tourism business in India.

Importance and need of agro tourism on the following basis:

- Agro-tourism is a sustainable form of tourism business.
- It provides an additional source of income for the farmers.
- It gives prestige to rural life and creates new jobs at local levels.
- It gives an opportunity to urban tourists to escape from hectic life of the city.
- It enhances the quality of life for local residence.
- It gives the tourists glimpse of village ambience, local cuisine, culture and art.
- It expects the active involvement from the tourist, rather than a passive spectator, so a bond between guest-host is strengthened.
- It is eco friendly which is very essential in the present environmental scenario.
- It makes tourists familiar with the rural life and roots of early civilization.
- It is less expensive gateway of tourism and the cost of accommodation, food, travel and recreation is very less in Agro-Tourism when compared to any other type of tourism.

- It widens the tourist base by widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness.
- It has a strong demand in the contemporary world scenario.
- It provides all opportunities to all age groups i.e. children, young, middle and old age, female, male, in total to the entire family at a cheaper cost.
- It makes tourists familiar with rural games, traditional dresses, festivals and food.
- It brings tourists close to the nature and provides variety of entertainment to them.
- It is a source of knowledge to get information about plants, animals, raw materials like handicrafts, woods, rural lifestyle and their languages, culture, tradition.
- Agro-Tourism which generally revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the potential to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.
- It is a way for tourists to look towards agro-tourism as a means for searching peace and tranquillity.
- It brings tourists very close to nature and crops, birds, animals, mountains, water bodies, villages provide totally different atmosphere to urban population in which they can forget their busy and hectic urban life.
- It provides tourists an opportunity to visit villages and spend time with family. • It creates awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban children and it can effectively be used as educational and training tool to train urban tourists.
- It provides variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts.

Challenges to the Agro-Tourism in India: However, Agro-tourism is a boon for the development of our rural society but there are some challenges as:

- Lack of quality of the services given to the tourists.
- Poor infrastructural facilities in rural areas.
- Low literacy rate of the farmers and farm owners
- Inadequate information about the farms and farming life.
- Lack of government support and identification of problems faced by the tourists.
- Lack of effective agro-tourism resource centers.
- Lack of proper marketing strategy for agro-tourism.
- Inadequate risk management programs and techniques.

Policy Implications

Maharashtra has a great potential to the development of agro-tourism, because of natural conditions and different types of agri products as well as variety of rural traditions, festivals. More than 45 percent of population live in the urban areas and they want enjoy rural life and to know about the rural life. It is a good opportunity to develop an agro-tourism business in Maharashtra. But there is a problem of low awareness about his business in the farmer and problem of the finance and proper view in the farmers of the Maharashtra.

Hence, the agriculture departments of the districts, Agriculture Universities should try to give orientation about it and provide some innovative ideas regarding to the Agro-Tourism. The government should try to provide optimum financial aids to the agro-tourism activities in Maharashtra by the grants and institutional finance. Bank should provide optimum financial help for the agro-tourism activities in the Maharashtra. Union of the agro-tourism service providers is also another need of these farmers which helps the agricultural tourism network in the India including Maharashtra

Conclusion: Thus it can be concluded that agro-tourism in India is facing many problems and Indian farmers need to cater the concept of agro-tourism as diversifying their operation. 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 at national and state level. In this regard we need proper recognition of agro-tourism industry, government supported policy structure of agro-tourism, education of the farmer and farm owner, proper financing solution for its enhancement, liability and risk management programs, product and service quality improvement. Moreover, a Public Private Strategic Partnership Development Model may be created to boost the agro-tourism sector in India. Agri tourism is now an additional artery of the tourism sector in India. Though at present it is in nascent stage, with proper government incubation it can gain flight. There by introducing agritourism concept all over India not only the present growth rate can be sustained but it is also a value addition and can accelerate further growth

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