

## RESHAPING RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM CONNECT

Dr. Parveen Kumar

**T**ourism has been rightly said as a major social phenomenon of the societies all along and India is no exception. It is an indispensable sector for the economic development of the country. It is a low capital, labour intensive industry having an economic multiplier effect and all the potential to stimulate other economic sectors through its forward and backward linkages with sectors like agriculture, horticulture, poultry, handicrafts, transport, construction and many others. The direct employment multiplier in case of tourism is fairly high. It is estimated to be about 2.36 which means that direct employment of one person in tourism creates employment opportunities for 1.36 persons in other enterprises like agriculture horticulture, handicrafts etc.

Over the years Indian economy has also undergone a sea change. From what was once described as a closed economy with a low growth rate usually called as the Hindu growth rate; things are now different. The economy is now becoming more and more liberalized and with the WTO bindings and the various Free Trade Agreements

(FTAs) between different countries, the markets are now in a free for all condition. As with other regions, the Asian markets are being opened to cheap agricultural produce from abroad. Indian goods are now facing stiff competition from abroad. This will make the situation more worse. Already the income gap between the farmers and urban workers has become a major problem in the Asia and pacific region. Majority of farmers in India are small having less than 1 ha of land. They have to work on others land along with their families to supplement their income.

An analysis of the economics of farmers based on data collected in 2012-13 through NSSO also is an eye opener. It reveals the sorry state of affairs in the Indian agriculture. Farmers with 10 hectares of land have incomes nearly ten times that of the small farmers (Table 1). The expenditure of small farmers is more than their income. To maintain their standard of living farmers will have to find new ways of earning their livelihood in favourable areas and thus





agricultural tourism can become an important source of farm income.

### Agri tourism

Agri tourism can be viewed as an integrated system of activities that takes place in rural areas; activities that are in relationships of independence and which have as their final goal of regional rural development. Sh. Pandurang Taware is regarded as the father of Agri Tourism concept in India. Infact, Degan (2011) has identified agri tourism to be a tool for measuring the quality of life, the quantification of the standard of living of certain social groups. It promotes agriculture related range of activities to achieve income, employment and economic stability in rural communities by providing a host of amenities and services to the urban tourists in rural settings ultimately connecting peoples back to their roots. It also represents an economic activity taking place in parallel with agriculture, recovers surplus of accommodation in peasant household, provide for tourist services like accommodation, catering, leisure. The visitors have the opportunity for recreation, to participate in the activities like preparation of various food products, fruit picking, fishing, milking the cow.

In India the concept is new but this has been

in practice in so many countries for considerable time. In Maharashtra rural areas have formed an organization named Maharashtra State Agriculture and Rural Tourism (MART). The state has more than 150 Agri-tourism centers running with financial assistance under different government schemes. The concept has been successfully implemented in states like Kerala, Gujarat, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Jharkhand. There are many enterprises that can be successfully tried in Agro Tourism. The University of California Small Farm Programme (UCSFP) has identified potential enterprises for Agro-tourism. These are depicted in table 2 mentioned below.

Dorobantu, Fieldsend (2011) has described how Agro-tourism contributes to villages' economic development

- Agro tourism helps in long term development of village agriculture, infrastructure and environment protection;
- It provides ample opportunities for business development, encouraging local activities; the arts and crafts and thereby creating new jobs that help to improve local living standards
- Increasing local villagers' income by best capitalizing local resources and use of local resources in local areas

**Table 1: Vital figures about the economics of farmers in India**

Parameter	Marginal (up to 1 ha)	Small farmers (1-2 ha)	Big farmers (Over 10 ha)
Proportion of all farmers	75%	10%	0.24%
Share of land owned	30%	24%	6%
Average monthly income	Up to Rs 5,247	7,348	41,388
Average monthly expenditure	Up to Rs 6,020	6,457	14,447
Average investment in Productive assets	Up to Rs 540	422	6,987
Average saving/deficit	Rs -1500	Rs 469	Rs 19,954

**Table 2: Potential enterprises in Agro tourism according to UCSFP**

Outdoor recreation	Educational Experience	Direct Agricultural sales	Accommodation	Entertainment
Viewing wildlife	Agricultural tours	On farm sales	Bed and breakfast inn	Festivals
Horseback riding	School tours	Roadside stand	Guest ranch	Farm fairs
Camping	Historical agricultural exhibits	Agricultural related crafts and gifts	Elder hostel	Concerts or special events
Fee hunting	Exotic animal farms	Farmers market	Guest ranch	Petting zoo



- It acts as a bridge between the communities who are somehow isolated from mainstream development path by increasing opportunities for social interaction of local people
- World Bank data also show that Indian female work participation rate of 27 is very less as compared to China at 64. One of the reasons for this low female work participation rate in India is the lack of ample employment opportunities to Indian women. It is also true that when it comes to hospitality, Indian women are second to none. Women can be involved in small ancillary activities related to farm tourism. Their potential in handicrafts, weaving, food products and many other activities can be best utilized in agri-tourism. By this they can supplement their income as well as increase the female work participation rate.

### Rural Tourism

Over the years the rural areas have also experienced numerous transformations that have mostly been due to the renewed thrust in these areas. Rural areas through traditions and customs preserved from generation to generation, offers the possibility of developing this form of tourism, which is sustainable, inclusive and source of livelihood for millions of peoples. The positive contributions towards promoting rural tourism in rural areas are: the stabilization of the population, creating new jobs, diversify use of labour into different activities, promotes pluralism through the provision of additional activities, promoting and developing services, promoting and supporting the popular art and local handicrafts.

Rural tourism has taken different forms in different countries. In Japan the most common form of rural tourism is the Farm Inn which offers

accommodation and usually meals. In Korea, tourism farms have been developed by a group of more than five farm house holds and home stay villages near tourist resort areas. In Malaysia the government has provided most of the funding to more than 30 agri tourism centers. Rare plants and animals, historical buildings and handicrafts are the main source of attraction. In France, Camping and caravans is the most popular form of accommodation in rural areas. Many farmers have developed camping sites on their farms to promote rural tourism.

Roberts and Hall (2001) have also concluded that the rural tourism results in economic growth, diversification results in provision of supplementary income for farming community and stabilization through employment generation in agriculture and allied sectors, craft and service sector. It also results in social contacts, especially in breaking down the isolation of the most remote areas and social groups. In India, Ministry of Tourism had started the scheme of rural tourism in the year 2002-03 with the objective of highlighting rural life, its culture and values with the ultimate aim of benefiting the rural communities economically, ecologically and socially. During twelfth five year plan the scheme was replaced with 'Rural Tourism Cluster' wherein group of villages is developed as a Tourism product.

### Rural Tourism vs Agro tourism

There are a number of differences between the most practiced forms of tourism in the countryside: rural tourism and agro tourism, the relationship between these is that the part of the whole.

- Agri tourism is a subset of larger industry called Rural Tourism. Agri tourism is a commercial enterprise of working at farm, ranch or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment

**Table 3: Forms of rural tourism in different countries**

S. No	Country	Form of Tourism
1	Indonesia	Mainly in the plantation areas. Visitors stay in the hotel but visit farms to see activities such as rice planting, rubber tapping
2	Japan	Have Farm Inn where accommodation is offered and meals are provided
3	Korea	Have Tourism Farms and home stay villages developed by a group of more than five farm households
4	Malaysia	Have agri tourism centers mostly funded by the Malaysian government
5	France	Camping sites and Caravans developed by farmers for providing accommodation.



of visitors that generate supplemental income for the owner.

- Rural tourism enterprises do not necessarily occur on a farm or ranch or an agricultural plant. They also do not necessarily generate supplemental income for the agricultural enterprise
- Agri tourism is largely a secondary activity with the agricultural activity remaining the main occupation and source of income, Rural Tourism is not secondary to any other enterprise
- The importance of rural tourism should not be overestimated, it is and remains a complementary activity, seasonal, but taking it at face value is beneficial to the rural importance, importance that cannot be neglected

### Major bottlenecks in Tourism Industry

**Marketing:** The widely prevalent bottleneck in the rural and agri tourism is that the rural tourism facilities are small and widely scattered with no proper linkages with the markets. As such the rural entrepreneurs find it difficult to sell their produce and often they have to go for distress selling of their produce.

**Infrastructure:** Most rural areas in the country that have outstanding beauty serve no purpose because of the poor road connectivity and other related infrastructure in these areas. The limited tourism season also hinders the prospects of rural tourism.

**Low returns:** The small scale farmers cannot afford to invest in high cost buildings. In a country where majority of the farmers have marginal and small land holdings, one cannot invest in high cost buildings.

### Lack of skilled professionals

Marketing of tourism is a professional and specialist job. If we have to attract the tourists towards rural tourism or agro tourism we need man power which is skilled and competent that can catch the attention of the visitors, influence them to visit these places and hold on to their interests.

### Strategies to promote Tourism

Simpson (2007) has rightly said that the key challenge in sustainable tourism is to develop economically viable enterprises that provide livelihood benefits to local communities while protecting indigenous cultures and environments. Now the question is how to achieve this. Here are some of suitable policy options:

- The entire village community has to be properly sensitized and prepared to share their life with the visitors. The role of each and every stakeholder has to be identified and delegated to avoid any clash of interest.
- The government should engage the private sector also for promoting rural tourism. Already there are many private players in this vocation but more needs to be done by incentivizing them
- It also should be ensured that the rural peoples are not exploited by the urban investors. The local artisans and other aspiring entrepreneurs should be benefitted.
- The revenue generated from rural tourism should be used for the development of these areas only.
- Rural tourism should take forward the social agenda and empower the deprived ones.
- Infrastructural development should not lead to environmental degradation and natural ecology should not get disturbed

### Conclusion

Promotion of agro and rural tourism can contribute to major socio-economic changes of the rural localities and can be an alternative source to provide additional income for the population of rural areas. In conclusion, to achieve sustainable development through rural tourism and agro tourism what is needed is the close cooperation between all the stakeholders involved in the activities of tourism. All of us have a shared responsibility in the realization of sustainable tourism and in protecting the environment besides generating additional income for those engaged in this noble profession.

*(The author is a J&K based Senior Research Fellow; writes on agricultural and social issues and can be reached at [pkumar6674@gmail.com](mailto:pkumar6674@gmail.com))*