



Innovative Trends in Agro Tourism: Special Reference to Maharashtra State – An Indian Model for Cross Culture

KEYWORDS

Agro-Tourism, Cross Culture, Foreign Tourists, Farmers, MTDC, interculturalism

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ABSTRACT

The present research study is an attempt to explore Indian agro-tourism as an innovative tool to strengthen 'Cross Culture'. It mainly covers sub-points - Present Scenario of Indian Agro -tourism, Agro-tourism – An Innovative Tool of Socio-economic Activities, Objectives of study, Research methodology, Study area, Hypothesis, Sample Size, Collusion of Agro-tourism with cross culture transmission, Innovative trends in Indian agro-tourism for cross cultural activities, Analysis and interpretation of data, Maharashtra state agro-tourism- A model, and Suggestions.

The study proves that one of the best features of Indian agro-tourism especially for the foreign tourists is 'life experience -live' and also serving for the cross cultural trend.

Present Scenario of Indian Agro –tourism:

Tourism sector has both economic and non-economic significance from local to international arena. The scope of the agro-tourism is endless. India has a wide scope to explore tourism potential and to put on fruitful returns from this industry. As per a private survey – 'Indian tourism industry is growing @ 10.1 percent as against the rate of growth world tourism is only 4 percent. It means the Indian tourism industry is fastest growing industry and that to 2.5 times more as compare to world. By introducing agro tourism concept not only present growth rate is sustained but also this value-add contribution to further growth especially concentrating domestic tourism addition to the pilgrimage tourism. This would also strengthen the competitiveness of Indian tourism industry in global market.

Agro-tourism – An Innovative Tool of Socio-economic Activities:

As a part of innovative idea any rural individual farmer can start the agro-tourism business with his existing resources. Apart from the individual farmer, agricultural co-operatives societies, Non-Government organizations, Agricultural Universities, and agricultural colleges may start their agro-tourism centers. Even the community participation is must for the success of agro-tourism. On the government front, even Grampanchayats (Local Bodies) can start such centers in their operational areas with the help of villagers and farmers. Agro tourism has great scope in the present context due to:

- Agro tourism is an inexpensive gateway.
- Additional employment and income source for the farmers which protest against income fluctuation.
- Health consciousness of urban population and finding solace with nature friendly means.
- It fulfils curiosity about the farming industry and life style.
- Strong demand for wholesome family oriented recreational activities.
- Creates interest and awareness in nature.
- It is good source for cultural transformation between urban and rural peoples.
- An innovative way which reduce disillusionment with over crowded resorts and cities.
- Nostalgia for their roots on the farm.
- Education value of agro tourism.

- Helps to reduce burden on the other traditional tourist centres.
- Last But not least best source for cross cultural transmission.

Objectives of the Study:

- To study level of growth of ' Agro-tourism 'industry' in Maharashtra State
- To identify agro-tourism as a tool of cross-cultural trend and to make suggestions to present Maharashtra State as a 'Model of Indian Agro- tourism'.

Research Methodology:

Maharashtra State possesses good position from the point of view of availability of different tourist spots. In Maharashtra 'Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta Caves' is the best triangle of World Heritage Sites. Maharashtra also have different tourist attractions like Pilgrimage Places, Wildlife, Adventurous Sports, Sea Resorts, Beautiful Natural Sites, Forts, Festivals & Fairs, Medicare Centers, Museums & Art Galleries, Shopping Centers, etc. Agro tourism is unique way of presenting agro sector as 'tourism product.'

The Maharashtra has good infrastructure facilities and also possesses good position as 'tourist destination' on the basis of geo-socio-culture identity. So it is better to adopt specific tourism development plans and actions through proper administrative setup for overall tourism perspective in agro tourism also.

On the above-mentioned background, and researcher being a resident of Maharashtra State, a research project related to the home state naturally came as an obvious best choice. On the different social, cultural and environmental effects, and future challenges before agro tourism sector as a tool of cross culture' will be observed in the present research work.

A primary and secondary method of data collection was used. The questionnaires were used to collect the data from the foreign tourists, tourism centers and officers of MTDC.

Secondary data was collected from various reports of Tourism Ministry, MTDC offices, ATDC in Maharashtra State, Ar-

cheological Department of Maharashtra State, some drafts and papers published by WTO and also from some of the private tourism organizations and publications, etc. Other than these resources, the researcher has used tools of Information Technology such as Internet, web-services, multi-media virtual tours of various tourist sites and services, etc.

Study Area:

Preliminary, the area of this research study is Maharashtra State. The Maharashtra Agro Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) is working for tourism promotions in Maharashtra.

Hypothesis:

1) It is hypothesized that Agro-tourism generates opportunities for Cross cultural activities'

2) It is hypothesized that the 'Maharashtra State Agro-tourism' is 'Model for Innovative Trend' in Indian agro-tourism.

Sample Size:

The area selected is a particular region i.e. Maharashtra State as a universe for in-depth study. Universe consists of 20 agro tourism centers in the state. A size of 25 percent of the universe i.e. 5 centers was considered sufficient to make its representative. Stratified random sample method has been applied for selection.

After selecting centers, a representative number of respondents from different categories were selected for their responses through 'e-questionnaires'. These were as follow:

1) Foreign Tourists-50 2) MTDC Officers- 10

Collusion of Agro-tourism with Cross Cultural Transmission:

By 1990's the LPG has accepted a part of economic force which captured almost each and every sector of the economic-world. In the same wave tourism expanded at a large extent and crossed all economic and socio-cultural boundaries. The cross culture is ultimate positive impact of all these diffusion. Tourism developed as a prominent application of cross-cultural paradigm, in response to the pressures of globalization which produced a demand for cross cultural awareness and needed to present tourism sector as one of the best source of cross cultural transmission. The cross cultural activity often called as 'cross-culturalism' or 'transculturation', it involves cultural interactivity or to promote various forms of cultural interactivity considering both cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity over the world canvas.

Agro tourism is based on 'live-experience' and naturally it contributes more than the regular tourism activity for cross culture. It is definitely construed as an ideology and advocates value for the wellbeing for the human lives. The cross culturalism is a fundamentally neutral term in which favorable portrayal of other cultures or the processes of cultural mixing are reflected. It is concerned with exchange the ideas beyond the boundaries of the nation or cultural groups.

Innovative Trends in Indian Agro-tourism for Cross Cultural Activities:

Agriculture is a most important occupation in the India. But, today it has becomes unprofitable due the irregular monsoon, prices fluctuations of Agro-products and some internal weakness of the agriculture sector. Hence, there is need to do some innovative activities in the agriculture,

which will help to farmers, and rural peoples and support them financially. The agro-tourism is best option for the same.

Urban population is increasing day by day in India. Today the urban people's world is restricted in the closed door flats, offices, clubs, television, video games, spicy fast food, computer, internet, and so on. They can see nature only on television or screen of the computers. Moreover some people living in the cities do not have relatives in villages and they never visited or stayed in village. These peoples want to enjoy rural – agricultural activity based life but there is problem of such type of facilities. Hence, it is opportunity to the farmers for development of the agro-tourism centers and serves him and create additional income source. As per a private survey more than 70 percent of the urban Indian class has not seen a village and this urban population can tab through agro tourism.

Analysis and interpretation of data:

Researcher arrived on the following conclusions:

- 1) Agricultural tourism is concept of a holiday in which a tourist visits a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operations having local culture for the purpose of enjoyment, education and serve for exchange of socio-cultural ideas.
- 2) All respondents belonging to all categories are of the opinion that there is scope for further development of existing centers and creation of new agro-tourism centers especially to support the concept of cross cultural phenomena.
- 3) 90 percent centre and 60 percent officer respondents stated that agro-tourism is an additional source of income for farmers.
- 4) Maharashtra state agro-tourism plays a role model for the 'Agro-tourism' in every sense as it is proved that it is one of the favorite destinations among both domestic and foreign tourists.
- 5) All centre and officer respondents stated that agro-tourism provides employment opportunities to people living in rural area and contributes a lot for cross cultural activity by offering live experience to the foreign tourists.
- 6) 80 percent centre and 90 percent officer respondents stated that existing agro-tourism centers lacks facilities due to lack of awareness about agro-tourism and financial constrains.

Maharashtra State Agro-tourism - A Model

Maharashtra is the second largest state of India, both in area and population. It is located on the west coast of India with a 720 km long coastline along the green Konkan region. Nestled in the Western Ghats and the Sahyadri mountain ranges, there are several hill stations and water reservoirs with semi-evergreen and deciduous forests.

There are many tourist centres in Maharashtra which are the support the natural environment for the agro-tourism centres in Maharashtra. Although, Maharashtra has a total 22368 thousand hectare area under the agriculture and 36122 thousands of livestock including cow, buffalos, goats etc. Principal crops include rice, Jowar, Bajra, wheat, pulses, turmeric, onions, cotton, sugarcane and several oil seeds including groundnut, sunflower and soyabean. The state has huge areas, under fruit cultivation of which mangoes, bananas, grapes, lemon and oranges, sugarcane, etc.

Maharashtra is blessed with a rich and diversified cultural

heritage. The state has several communities belonging to different religions, and a number of festivities colors the culture of Maharashtra with the spirit of unity in diversity. Maharashtra abounds in numerous tourist attractions ranging from ancient cave temples, unspoiled beaches, ancient forts and monuments, forests and wildlife, unique hill stations, pilgrimage centers, and a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture. More than 4.11 (43 percent of total) core populations are living the urban areas of the Maharashtra, which can become customers of the agro-tourist centers are located in the rural areas. Maharashtra state has enough infrastructural, communication facilities, good road and rail connectivity in urban-rural areas. Many foreigners are paying visits to Maharashtra being the financial capital of the country and famous culture of its own state.

Agriculture Tourism Development Corporation – (ATDC) of Maharashtra has main promoter of agro-tourism. ATDC is promoting to agriculture tourism for achieving income, employment and economic stability in rural areas. Help boosting a range of activities, services and amenities, provided by farmers and rural people to attract urban tourists to their area thus providing opportunity to urban people to get back to the rural roots”.

Suggestions:

- 1) More funds at the lower rate of interest should be provided to agro-tourist centers to strengthen them financially.
- 2) Infrastructural facilities and awareness about agro-tourism should be made by the government at the tourist centers especially to encourage agro-tourism.
- 3) More publicity and financial subsidy should be given to the agro-tourism centers.
- 4) Practical-life approach of Indian culture through agro-tourism especially keeping in view scholars, artists, professionals, and varnished programs including educational tours, seminars, meets, conclaves should initiate.
- 5) 'User Friendly' marketing strategy, use of technology, Cultural compliances and best amenities are essential to attract foreign tourists.

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