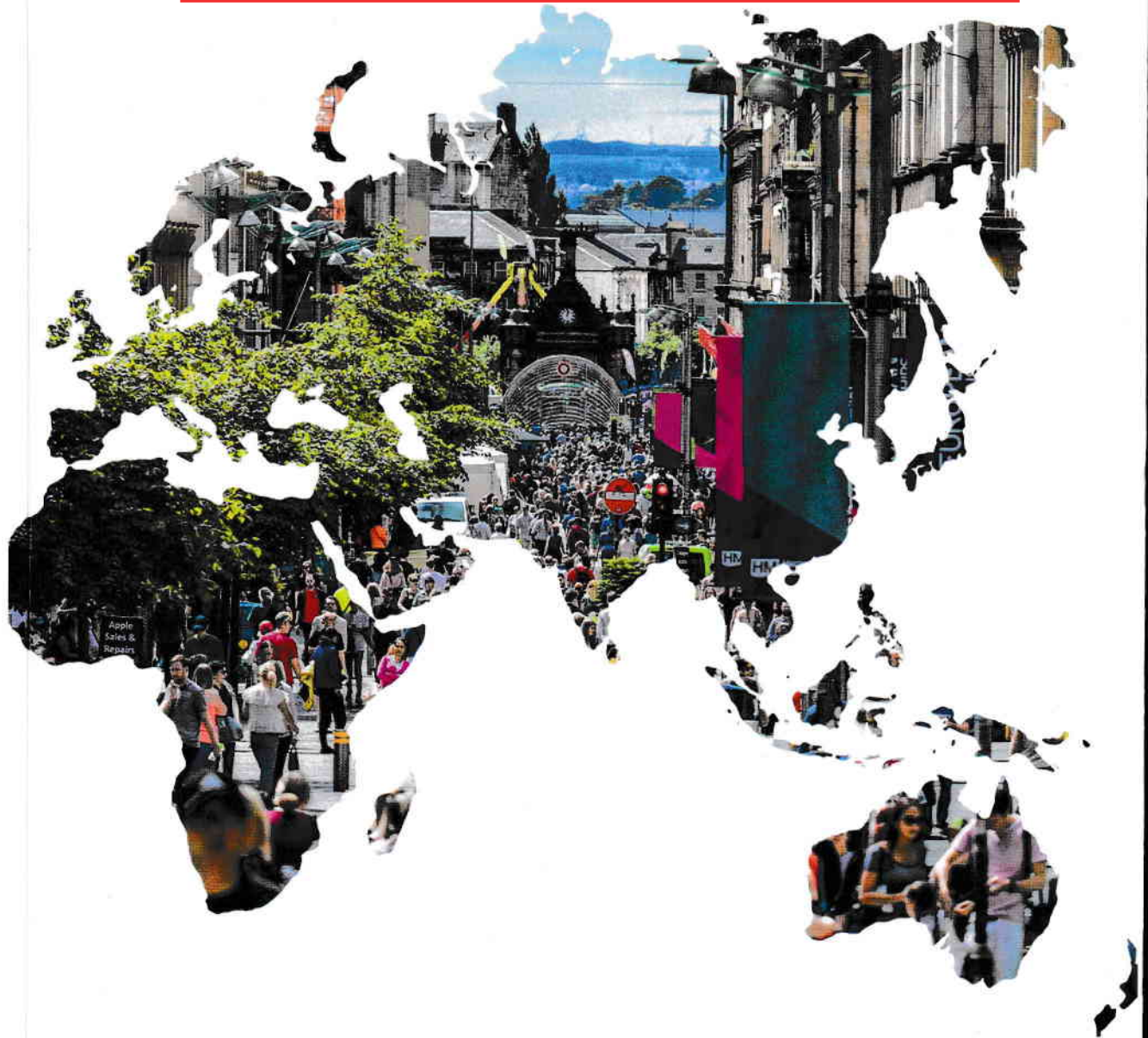




MEDLEY IN TOURISM



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AGRO TOURISM –A ROAD TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Rural tourism exhibiting the unique experiences of Indian villages is exclusively related with the niche areas of tourism. Agro tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry. It is regarded as the intersection of tourism and agriculture where tourist gets an opportunity to experience the real rural life by familiarizing various farming activities during the visit. Agro tourism also helps to maintain the balance of nature by giving importance to the natural resources. Any agricultural based activity which attracts tourist can be termed as Agro tourism. It provides a great opportunity to promote Responsible tourism and Sustainable development in the country.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Agro-tourism, Responsible tourism, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Tourism is an indispensable sector for the economic development of a country. It not only generates employment opportunities but also alleviates poverty and is a catalyst for rural development.

Minister Government of India " Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community, economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity that takes place in the countryside. It is

multi-faceted and may entail agro tourism/farm tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism and eco- tourism. As against conventional tourism, agro tourism has certain typical characteristics like – it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is pre- dominantly in natural environment, it is associated with seasonality and local events and preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

India is predominantly an agricultural country and the sector has been providing stability and boost to the economy as well as is a major source of livelihood for 50 percent of the total population. Agriculture has been the brightest spot in the economy despite covid-19 as the share of agriculture in GDP has reached 20 percent in the financial year 2020-21. The Government of India is making a series of progressive efforts to further improve the agricultural sector by launching several programs and schemes. The government is committed to make agricultural sector a flourishing sector and truly a source of Atmanirbhar Bharath. To maintain the standard of living farmers have to find new ways of earning their livelihood in favorable areas and thus agro tourism can become an important source of farm income.

Concept

Agro tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry. It is regarded as the intersection of tourism and agriculture where working farm territory works in conjunction with remunerative tourism unit, which is segment of rural enterprise. The farms have series of activities including production, post-production and processing activities, which are linked to tourism sector that attracts visiting tourists to such venture of activities. Agro tourism has been promoted across the world since decades. In India every tourism stands on three pillars: (i) Farm recreation (ii) Farm stays and (iii) Marketing of local farm produce.

Agro tourism can be categorized based on the type of farm setting, farm facilities, farm experience and types of activities involved –

- Passive tourist contact – it restricts to accommodation, food and entertainment activities of the tourists.
- Indirect tourist contact- it adds other activities like exposure of tourists to farm demonstrations and basic farm education.
- Direct tourist contacts – it includes all the above mentioned activities as well as participation of the tourists and different farm operations like seed sowing, planting, gardening, harvest the produce, milking a cow.



Benefits

Tourism is always accused to have a bad effect on our environment and natural resources. Introducing agro tourism is a new way to tackle this. Agro tourism also helps to maintain the balance of nature by giving importance to the natural resources. An agricultural based activity which attracts tourist can be termed as Agro tourism. The benefits of agro tourism development are manifold.

From the farmers' perspective, it doesn't require large holdings and from the tourist perspective, it is less expensive with respect to travel, accommodation, food and entertainment.

Agro-tourism has the potential to reduce the uncertainty of farming or agri-entrepreneurship or agribusiness by generating additional income and creating job opportunities in the farm families. Agro- tourism can provide additional income in several ways:

- Direct marketing in farmers market where tourists can purchase farm products.
- Picking up products, where tourist harvest produces by them.
- Local food, where tourists prefer to have local flavors for meals.
- Participation of tourists in different farm activities and entertainment activities like fish hunting and bird watching.
- Experiencing rural life through local tours at different rural settings. Since there is an increasing trend of 'experiential tourism'.

Increases income and employment for localities indirectly as tourist needs other amenities and products also. New consumer market niche can be established with higher awareness of local agricultural products.

It provides great opportunity to develop sustainable and responsible tourism in the country.

It also helps in preserving local traditions, art and culture. Tourists visiting farms to purchase the local products and which helps in empowerment of rural women, diversifies and improves rural economy.

It can prevent viable traditional occupations from being displaced. Agro-tourism facilitates up gradation and revitalization of community facilities, maintenance of rural landscapes and natural environment for tourists and local people.

Agro tourism helps to preserve agricultural lands and promote agripreneurship and retain the youth in agriculture.

It reduces migration from rural to urban area as well as paves the way for redevelopment and rejuvenation of rural life. The interactions with the visitors expand their knowledge and educational opportunities.

Progress in India

Rural tourism was first introduced in India in the National Tourism Policy where 103 projects were sanctioned by the government during the Tenth Five Year Plan. In the eleventh Five Year Plan rural tourism became one of the primary tourist products and the government sanctioned 69 rural tourism projects. By the 12th Five Year Plan it was decided to develop clusters proposing 70 such clusters with a total investment of INR 770 crores. Rajasthan, Kerala and Maharashtra were the early movers in implementing the scheme.

Agri- Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) was established in 2004. Initially it launched agro-tourism as a pilot project in Palshimwadi in Baramati Tehsil of Pune in 2005. The main activities include opening of Agro tourism centers, encouraging more farmers to take up agro tourism and conducting training and research programs. Under Maharashtra state Agri Tourism Vistar Yojana, ATDC launched training and skill development program in 2007 which aimed to conserve the values, environment, traditions, culture, customs, art and handicrafts. 'Mahabhraman' scheme of Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation is another step to promote Agro-tourism.

The homestays amidst the wheat fields and scenic mountains views with participatory activities in Uttarakhand, the Montana homestay and Annual flower festival of Sikkim, The Spice Garden Tours in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are the attractions of the tourists. Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) has been promoting agro tourism in terms of integrated horticulture farming, dairying, fishing, vegetable poly houses and farm stays to enjoy the natural environment and rural life.

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Business Story

Responsible Tourism has been in the forefront of developing the rural tourism model and evolving it under the greater ambit of 'Responsible Tourism'. The award winning project makes the local people to get involved in promoting tourism projects in their respective regions. Along with improving tourism in the state, this also helps the locals to earn livelihood and also to sustain the nature. The department of tourism implemented the project in 2008. Kumarakom, Wayanad, Kovalam and Thekkady were selected for this purpose. The project implemented in Kumarakom got noticed and some of the major achievements and interventions by the Responsible Tourism in Kumarakom are:

Balancing Agricultural Productions



With the help of Responsible Tourism, the government was able to initiate agricultural activities in those lands which were left fallow because of low yield, low demand for agricultural produces etc. the department approaches Kudumbashree volunteers and made them to take up paddy cultivation in 55 acres of land. They also initiated the Kottam Panchayat to boost vegetable cultivation in another 30 acres of land. Now this helped the farmers to return to agricultural production and to increase the cultivation. Thus responsible tourism indirectly began to push agro tourism in Kerala.

Fish farms and lotus cultivation

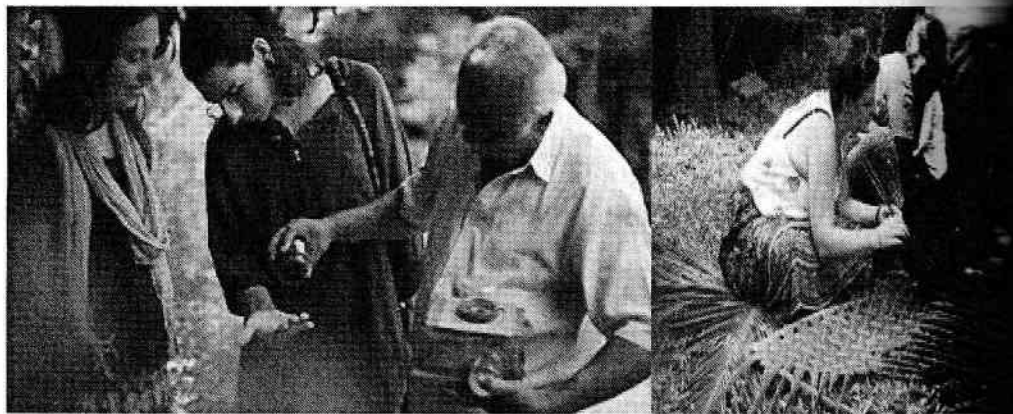


The unused ponds were cleaned and promoted for fish cultivation and local consumption. This indirectly improved the living condition of the local community.

- **Promoting local products**

The Responsible Tourism Cell initiated hotel industry to purchase products from locals. Thus it promoted local products and gave financial benefits to the rural people.

- **Developing community based tourism products**



The Responsible Tourism Cell has developed two packages in Kumarakom. They are 'Village Life Experience at Kumarakom' and 'A Day with Farmers'. First one will take the tourist to experience the real village life through guided tours in the village. The second one will give them an opportunity to be close with the farm activities.

The Responsible Tourism initiative of Kerala was honored with United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Ulysses Award for innovation in Public Policy and Governance in January 2014, National Award for Best Tourism Project and Padma Grand Award for Environment.

Challenges

Agro tourism needs continuous effort in different stages like land development, developing accommodation and other facilities (farm stays), developing enterprises (Processing, value addition, and marketing farm produces) and other required infrastructure development.

Identification of potential farmers and entrepreneurs who can implement agro tourism requires skilled advisory services. This needs education and capacity building.

Planning and management of agro tourism enterprises is another challenging task. Formation of farmers' co-operatives can be helpful in this regard. Quality and complexity of services as well as cooperation among stakeholders are the challenges.

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Conclusion

A large part of the country is rural and a large population resides in rural areas. The village life in India is where you meet the 'real India'. Developing rural economy and creating job opportunities in rural areas is therefore essential for "Aatmanirbhar Bharat". The villages are also the repositories of the country's culture, tradition, crafts, heritage and agri- practices. Developing these local products through tourism can generate income and employment in rural areas and empower rural communities, youth and women, fulfilling the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. This will help in reducing the migration from rural areas, poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

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