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AGRO TOURISM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT:

India is known as "Land of villages" 65% of people live in rural area and only 35% people live in urban area. Rural areas are undeveloped as compared to urban areas. Majority of rural India is engaged into agricultural occupation. But farmers did not get enough benefits from agricultural sector. This is the reason people from rural area migrating towards urban area in search of jobs, income source, etc. Because of this urban areas are becoming more overburden. Hence, disparities are instigated between these two areas. To avoid this chaos, there is need to rejuvenate rural areas of nation.



KEYWORDS: *Agro Tourism, Socil Economic Development, Rural India.*

INTRODUCTION:

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 source in every sector.

Maharashtra is one of the major tourist centers in India and there is large scope and great potential to develop agro-tourism. Maharashtra is blessed with nature's gift. Dense forests, high hills & deep valleys, many rivers flowing across the length & breadth of the Maharashtra. It has made Maharashtra nature's paradise. But this has to be complimented by planned development in order to generate employment. Acknowledging that traditional farming along with supplementary activities can generate tremendous employment

Today the concept of traditional tourism has been changed. Some new areas of the tourism have been emerged like Agro-Tourism. Agro-tourism is an innovative agricultural activity related to tourism and agriculture both. It has a great capacity to create additional source of income and employment opportunities to the farmers.

Agricultural tourism is the holiday concept of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in activities of the farm or operation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the economic benefits of agro tourism to the farmers.
2. To Study the problems faced by the agro tourism centers in Maharashtra.
3. To study the techniques for success of agro tourism business in Maharashtra.

Importance of the Study

Agriculture is the most important occupation in the India including in the Maharashtra. But today it has become unprofitable due the irregular monsoon, price 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, rural people.

Urban population is increasing day by day in Maharashtra, 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. More over some people living in the cities do not have relatives in villages and they never visited or stayed in village. These people want to enjoy rural 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 for them and create additional income source. These agro-tourism centers are right blend of rural lifestyle and modern need.

Concept of Agro-Tourism

The term '*Agro-Tourism*' is a new face of tourism. An agro-tourism is farm based business that is open to the public. These specialized agro-tourism destinations generally offer things to see, things to do, and produce or gifts to buy, and are open to the public. Agritourism is defined as "Travel that combines agricultural or rural settings with products of agricultural operations – all within a tourism experience". According to Mr. Pandurang Tavare (ATDC, Pune) - "Agro-Tourism is that Agri-Business activity, when a native farmer or person of the area offers tours to their agriculture farm to allow a person to view them growing, harvesting, and processing locally grown foods, such as coconuts, pineapple, sugar cane, corn, or any agriculture produce the person would not encounter in their city or home country. Often the farmers would provide a home-stay opportunity and education". Agro-Tourism and Eco-Tourism are closely related to each other. Eco-Tourism provides by the tour companies but, in the agro-tourism farmers offer tours to their agriculture farm and providing entertainment, education and fun-filled experiences for the urban 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.

Benefits of Agro-Tourism Centers –

Agro-Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of traditional agriculture. The benefits of agro-tourism development are manifold. It would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the farmers and rural people. Some of the benefits are following:-

1. Employment opportunities to the farmers including farm family members and youth
2. Additional income source for the farmers to protest against income fluctuation.
3. Cultural transformation between urban and rural people including social moral values.
4. Farmers can improve their standard of living due to the contacts with urban peoples.
5. Benefits to the urban people, they can understand about the rural life and know about the agricultural activities.
6. It supports for rural and agricultural development process.
7. Help to reduce the burden on the other traditional tourist centers.

Problems of The Agro-Tourism In Maharashtra :-

Maharashtra has a greater potential for the development of the agro-tourism centers due to the good natural and climatic conditions. But there are some problems in the process of agro-tourism development in the state. Major challenges and problems are follows:

1. Lack of perfect knowledge about the agro-tourism.

2. Weak communication skill and lack of commercial approach of the small farmers.
3. Inadequate capital to develop basic infrastructure for the agro-tourism.
4. Ignorance of the farmers regarding to the type of activities.
5. Presence of unorganized sector in the Agro-Tourism Industry.
6. Ensuring hygiene and basic requirements considering urban visitors.
7. Lakhs of farmers have small size holding, low quality land and little or no access to credit or irrigation. Have to negotiate with consistent drought.

Techniques for Success In Agro-Tourism -

Agro-Tourism is a one of the business activities. So, farmers must have commercial mind and some marketing techniques for the success. For the better success in the agro-tourism, you should follow the following things:

1. Give a wide publicity of your tourism centre by news papers, television, etc. Use all possible advertisement means.
2. Develop contacts with the schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, unions, organizations, etc.
3. Train your staff or family members for reception and hospitality.
4. Understand about the customers wants and their expectations and serve accordingly.
5. Charge optimum rent and charges for the facilities/services on the commercial base.
6. Do the artistic use of local resources for the entertain / serve to tourists.
7. Develop your website and update time to time to attract foreign tourists.
8. Take their feedback and comments about the service and suggestions for more development and modification.
9. Develop a good relationship with the tourist for future business and chain publicity.
10. Develop different agro-tour packages for different type of tourist and their expectations.
11. Maintain a address book and comments (Feedback) of the visited tourists for future tourism business.
12. Behave sincerely with the tourists and participate with them / him.
13. Small farmers can develop their agro-tourism centers on the basis of cooperative society.

Findings -

- Maharashtra is one of the major tourist centers in India and there is large scope and great potential to develop agro-tourism.
- Agriculture represents the backbone of the Indian economy and nearly 85% of the population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, but increasing competition in the sector means that other ways of supplementing income is needed to help provide a viable livelihood for rural villagers who are farmers, and their families.
- Agro Tourism based in rural Maharashtra countryside in central India, is an innovative scheme to invite city-slickers to get back to their rural farming roots.
- In an area where youngsters are eager to flee a declining farming industry for quick cash in neighboring urban areas, Agri Tourism is successfully reversing this trend and giving new hope to rural populations.
- This dynamic business is attracting tourists from far and wide areas wanting to experience agriculture heritage. Generating interest, income and demand for this important part of India's culture, Agro-tourism is witnessing local farmers diversifying to reap the benefits of both agriculture and tourism.
- Agriculture business is becoming more unsecured in Maharashtra due to the irregular monsoon, unsecured product prices. Many farmers cannot afford it and have a problem of indebtedness. Due to the agricultural problems some farmers have committed suicide in various districts of Maharashtra. More than 29,000 farmers committed suicide between 1997 and 2005 in Maharashtra.

- For running the agro tourism centers successfully they required huge capital for providing the facilities to the tourist like- Farmhouse, water and plant, facilities, Cooking equipments, Emergency medical care with first aid box, well or lake or swimming tank, Bullock cart, cattle shade, etc.
- Promotion of Agro-Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely Ministry of Agriculture and rural development ministry of the state and central governments.

Suggestions -

- Agro-Tourism Centre should be easily accessible by bus/train near to the historical place, near of the dam/lake near of the pilgrimage, away from city.
- Unless our villages are self-sufficient, our nation cannot progress. We must go to villages in order to achieve development of villages. So farmers should come forward for the development of agro-tourism in villages.
- For providing infrastructure facilities to agro tourism centers government should provide funds at concessional rate.
- To attract to the tourists towards agro tourism it is required to employ well-trained staff or funny (comedy) persons with good communication skill to entertain the tourists.
- Government should offer free agro-tourism training programmes to the farmers with the technical and practical knowledge. Then farmers would diversify their products and establish small-holding tourism ventures.
- To promote domestic tourism, thrust areas should develop at district level by establishing rural & district level development centers like Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.
- The migration from village to urban areas, particularly among the youngsters, will have a long-term negative impact on the agricultural sector and rural areas, so development of agro-tourism in villages is the one ways to encourage young Indians to remain or return to their villages and earn a viable living and for social development.
- The main goals of the government programme should have to increase the benefits of farmers, local communities, and tourism enterprises through the development of new consumer markets, increasing awareness of local agricultural products, enhancing understanding of the importance of maintaining agricultural lands, providing farm family members with opportunities for on-site employment so they do not have to migrate to urban areas, and strengthening the long-term sustainability of small farms.
- State has 13 lakh ha. area under horticulture. Maharashtra is now a major horticulture state. Maharashtra has already established as one of the top tourist destinations in the world. Maharashtra is major producer of fruit, spices, medicinal and aromatic plant allowed under Horticulture in India. With the help of this horticulture area, Maharashtra can develop agro tourism centers.
- Government should establish the agro tourism development co-operative organizations like ATDC (Agro Tourism Development Corporation, Pune) because this organization established with an intention to develop and promote agricultural tourism (agro-tourism) as a potential vehicle for diversifying and stabilizing rural economies by creating jobs, increasing community income, providing a broader market base for local business, and attracting tourists to the area, thereby Small farmers can develop their agro-tourism centers on the basis of cooperation .

CONCLUSIONS :-

Maharashtra is one of the major tourist centers in India and there is large scope and great potential to develop agro-tourism. Maharashtra is blessed with nature's gift. Dense forests, high hills & deep valleys, many rivers flowing across the length & breadth of the Maharashtra. It has made Maharashtra nature's paradise. Hence, Maharashtra has a great potential for the development of agro-tourism, because of natural conditions and different types of agro products as well as variety of rural traditions, festivals. More than 45 percent of population is living in the urban areas and they want to

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 this business in the farmer and problem of the finance and proper view in the farmers of the Maharashtra.

Many people now living in cities has spent their childhood in villages. Cold buttermilk in earthen pot, bullock-cart ride, having meal sitting under tree, hurda party, enjoying the evening breeze. But unfortunately, we do not have time to enjoy these things in modern day urban life and if we do get some time, then we do not have appropriate option. Those who have only read stories about village life in books are deprived of a pure joy.

Everyone aspires to experience this joy. More over some people living in the cities do not have relatives in villages and they never visited or stayed in village. These people want to enjoy rural life but there is problem of such type of facilities. Hence, this an opportunity to the farmers for development of the agro-tourism centers and serves them and creates additional income source. So, in Maharashtra, many agro-tourism centers has been developed. These agro-tourism centers are right blend of rural lifestyle and modern need.

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