



Recent Trends in Commerce & Management



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14	CHANGING TRENDS IN COMMERCIALS WITH RESPECT TO INVESTMENT AND RETIREMENT PLANNING <i>Dr. Rashmi Maurya</i>	190-197
15	AGRITOURISM: A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL INDIA <i>Mrs. Mayura Sumit Patil</i>	198-209
16	RECENT TRENDS IN MANAGEMENT- CLOUD BASED MIS AND GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF DATA <i>CA Haresh Budhrani</i>	210-220
17	THE INNOVATIVE PRACTICES OF HR IN ENCHANCING EMPLOYEES GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT <i>Mr. Nikhil Shetty Nisha</i>	221-240
18	ELECTRONIC COMMERCE: A STUDY ON BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY <i>Mr. Burhanuddin Khuzema Bootwala</i>	241-249
19	RECENT TRENDS IN MANAGEMENT <i>Asst. Prof. Tejal Mahajan</i>	250-267

RECENT TRENDS IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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AGRITOURISM: A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL INDIA

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Introduction

India is agriculture based country. It is also called agrarian society, traditionally maximum population of India is involved in agriculture and allied activities. The sector comprises agriculture proper, livestock and livestock products and operation of irrigation system.

The economic activities in agriculture proper are growing of field crops, fruits, nuts, seeds and vegetables, agricultural and horticultural, pest control, spraying, pruning, picking packing, and ancillary activities of cultivators such as gur making, transportation of own produce to primary markets etc.. These activities are primary source of income to rural India.

Broad Trends in Indian Agriculture and Allied Sectors

In the early 1950s, in what is termed here as Phase-1 of India's agricultural development, agricultural and allied sectors constituted about 57 per cent of the country's total GDP and 70 per cent of the workers were engaged in these sectors (Table 1). Even though there was acceleration in agricultural and allied sectors growth, particularly in Phase 2 (between 1972-73 and 1992-93) and Phase 3 (between 1992-93 and 2012-13)³, yet there has also been a sharp fall in the share of agricultural and allied sectors in overall GDP due to slower growth in this sector compared to the overall economy.

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

Table 1: Agricultural and Allied Sectors GDP and Employment

Period (TE=Three Year Ending)	Agriculture and allied sectors GDP at constant 2004-05 prices (Rs. crore)	Workers employed in agricultural and allied sectors (Million)	Share of agriculture and allied sectors in overall GDP (Per cent)	Share of workers engaged in agricultural and allied sectors to total number of workers (Per cent)
TE 1952-53	162,112	97	56.5	69.8
TE 1972-73	258,070	126	43.5	69.7
TE 1992-93	406,404	185	29.3	64.8
TE 2012-13	745,385	263	14.3	54.6

Sources and Notes: (1) Central Statistical Office (CSO): Annual Accounts for various years, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, New Delhi

Though, the largest employer is still agriculture. Agriculture contribution to the nominal GDP to be mere 17% and 50% of the workforce.

Problems of Agriculture Sector

Agriculture sector in India has been drastically affected since the very beginning due to innumerable reasons example

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One of the reasons our failed to reduce the % of the population dependent on employment in agriculture sector. More than 50% of India's population dependent on the agriculture sector. Since more number of people dependent on agriculture, there is a decrease in the size of agricultural land holdings.

Indian farmers put so much of manual labour in a small piece of land which is actually a zero sum game. If farms are in much larger scale usage farmers could reap out profit by leveraging technology, but traditional farming marginal land holdings leads to one of the lowest per capita production and income.

Another important problem is India has the world's highest spoilage rate. It is due to lack of infrastructure, there is literally no or very poor supply chain; when it comes to agriculture products. The presence of more number of middle men's results in farmer receiving just 10% to 23% of the price the Indian consumer pays, the difference going to losses, inefficiencies, and middlemen.

Indian agriculture is labour intensive. Large portion is fragmented and small and medium holdings. The Life style aspiration, and investment in future of children, and societal pressure on consumptive spending is taking away rural savings. There is huge problem of rural indebtedness. This makes agriculture less & less input intensive, recreating a vicious cycle of low productivity followed by lower investment.

Most Indian farmers rely on good crop produce during monsoon to earn their living and in order to overcome debts incurred. So Agriculture GDP growth remains subdued.

Agritourism is one of the answer to all these problems.

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Definition

Agritourism is application of tourism principles to agriculture operation. It is defined as travel which combine agriculture and rural setting with product of agriculture operations all within tourism experience

Agritourism is the holidaying concept of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or any agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in activities of the farm or operation. It is generally a practice for attracting travellers or visitors to an area used primarily for agricultural purpose. Agritourism integrates agriculture with pleasure and gives the benefit of agriculture and tourism activities to tourist that deliver economic benefit to concern farmer.

Definition given by Hilleary (1993) is, 'An agritourism enterprise is a business conducted by a farm operator for the enjoyment and education of the public, and to promote the products of the farm, and thereby generate additional farm income'

Evolution of Agritourism

Internationally agritourism is well developed concept. However the development and studies conducted on it is recent. Though the origin of this concept is in North America USA after World War II, however the term Agritourism was coined and used in Italy for the first time. As per Fabio Maria Santucciin (Agritourism for Rural Development in Italy, Evolution, Situation and Perspectives) Italy has a long and diversified experience in the agritourism sector, which since 1985 has been formally recognized with a national legislation, accompanied by regional laws.

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

Agritourism in Europe is one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry in countries like UK, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, and Ireland

Among small American farms who struggle to remain economically viable due to a confluence of global market dynamics, rising costs, and urbanization pressure. Agritourism is an increasingly popular form of alternative agriculture enterprise development designed to expand farm income, generally through fuller employment of existing farm resources.

However in Asia agritourism is nascent stage, only few countries like India, Sri Lanka, China, Philippines, Malaysia have realised the potential of this operation. Also these countries are rural based countries. Agro tourism is one of the most suitable strategies to improve the income of rural communities in the region.

In India too, there have been some beginnings, but is yet to blossom as a mature activity. The seeds of agritourism in India were first sown by formation of Agritourism Development Corporation, India (ATDC, India), and is located at Malegaon, Baramati in Maharashtra. It was founded in 2004 by Shri Pandurang Taware. After first phase of research and an initial pilot programme in a village of Baramati district in 2005, 152 agritourism centres are working across the state of Maharashtra.

While studying Evolution of agritourism practices in India authors Soumi Chatterjee and M V Durga Prasad highlighted how with sporadic emergence from Maharashtra now agritourism is spreading across India. In North Uttarakhnad there is R.O.S.E (Rural Opportunity for Social Elevation) is working with the agritourism model where the tourists can avail homestays amidst the wheat fields and scenic mountain views and indulge in regular

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

work like cooking, harvesting of crops, building of toilets, Also in Punjab and Haryana many agritourism centres have emerged.

In the eastern part of the country places like lower Himalayas in East Sikkim, Zuluk or Dzuluk is a relatively new and offbeat tourist destination. It is example of Agritourism in east.

Coming to the central part of the places like Rawlakaneriya owned by the royal family of Jammian Madhya Pradesh. It is example of Agritourism that encompasses a variety of activities, including farm tours, farm vacations, farm bed & breakfast accommodations, hiking, nature study, cross country skiing, picnics, hayrides, workshops, fishing and more.

Organisation like Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) in southern part of India has come up with a unique concept of agritourism to promote rural tourism and would be showcasing integrated lush green horticulture farms, dairy, fishing, vegetable poly houses having even guest houses for tourists to stay for a couple of days or more and to get exposure to rural rustic life and natural environment and also to rural eateries reminding one of the days of our grandmothers and fathers. Also spice roots in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are famous for Agritourism In Western parts of India Kutch in Gujrat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra are hubs of Agritourism centres.

Basic principles of Agritourism

1. Have something for Tourists to see:

Visual and physical appeal: It should offer the visitors something to see and feel physically, crops at different stages, trees, medicinal plants, domestic animals, birds, ponds, small lake to attract children specially. Apart from these, culture, dress,

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

festivals and rural games could create enough interest among visitors in Agritourism.

2. Have something for Tourists to do:

Participation and involvement : It should offer the visitors scope to participate in agricultural operations, enjoy rural sports, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, cooking and craft making which they can do and enjoy.

3. Have something for Tourists to buy:

Sale counter: The concept of pick your own produce can be explored where visitors can harvest themselves the produce of their choice on payment basis. The sale of products can range from grains, fruits, vegetables, processed foods to clothes, utensils, local crafts, mementoes and jewellery.

Agritourism- asa Business operation:

The term agritourism is new face of rural tourism and rural business. It is rural based business that is open to the public. In simple words, it is farmer operation where with very less or no investment, within available resources, the farmer offers tour their agriculture farms. Here the farmers allow people to witness farm activities like cultivation, harvesting, processing. Also the farmer offers to provide farm fresh cooked and accommodation to the tourists.

Different Forms of Agritourism Business:

Supplementary Enterprise: In supplementary enterprise, agritourism is a minor activity that supports other products of farm.

Complimentary Enterprise: In this agritourism has equal share with farm production mix.

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

Primary Enterprise: In primary enterprise main business is to offers cottages for stay, food, rural rustic services like bullock cart ride in village, visit to rural weekly bazar, visit to tourist spot near-by to village, tree house to enjoy etc. This enterprise might offer tour in operative agricultural farm as part of tourism service. Thus here agritourism is basic business.

Sustainable development:

According to Sustainable Development Challenges of UN 2030, rural development is an important issue. In this agenda it is specified that,

A healthy and dynamic agricultural sector is an important foundation of rural development, generating strong linkages to other economic sectors. Close economic integration of rural areas with neighbouring urban areas and the creation of rural off-farm employment can narrow rural-urban disparities, expand opportunities and encourage the retention of skilled people, including youth, in rural areas.

Agritourism is one of the strategy suggested in this agenda in form of decisions like,

- 1) Provide appropriate land-use frameworks in order to support the establishment of agricultural activities and both agricultural and non-agricultural services related to sustainable rural development, while respecting the rights of rural communities and indigenous people;
- 2) Develop sustainable ways to add value to agricultural products locally, sub-regionally and regionally to generate additional income;
- 3) Support as appropriate, sustainable tourism as a valuable source of employment and income supplement to farming and other primary production activities, as well as sustainable natural resource management;

ELEMENTS OF AGRITOURISM SYSTEM

According to Leiper's Basic Whole Tourism System has five primary elements. Based on this theory, Agritourism system components are:-Tourist, Agri-entrepreneur (farmer), Tourist destination (farm), Tourism region (village area) and then Travel and tourism industry.

TOURISTS OR VISITOR

Tourists not only visit a farm to participate in agritourism to witness fresh produce is grown there but also because they can walk through a farms. People visit for the overall experiences.They seek a connection to a local farm, to understand and appreciate where their food comes from, to gain a better understanding of the farming lifestyle, or to reminisce about childhood experiences on a farm.

Some of the benefits of visit to Agritourism

Education about farming aspects, Routine change, Back to roots pleasure, First-hand experience of rural lifestyle, Closeness to nature, Recreation and entertainment activities on farm, Off the farm site country side visits,Fresh from farm availability of agri-products.All this at less cost

PROVIDER (AGRI-ENTREPRENEUR)

Agri-Entrepreneur is a person who identifies and pursues a market opportunity in the face of risk which may result in new businesses, products or services within the field of agriculture including food, the environment and natural resources. Here he is the farmer who basically engaged in agriculture activity along with providing agritourism service.

Benefits of Agritourism to Agrientrepreneur

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

Expansion farm operations: The small are marginal farmer who are unable to increase the area of cultivation, hence let go opportunity to increase income. They get chance to earn additional income out of this operation

Utilisation of Farm based products in innovative manner: Farmers can utilise the available farm based products for agritourism purpose and add to pleasure of Tourist

Developing new consumer market: Farmers get a chance to interact with final consumer of farm products and also can directly sell their products. Here the percentage margin on middle men get saved and thus both farmer and tourist gets benefit out of it

Increasing awareness of local agriculture product:- Farmers can increase awareness of consumer about local , indigenous products. This act as form of promotion strategy.

Appreciating, improving and maintain agricultural land: In order to enhance tourist satisfaction the farmer continuously try to improve and maintain agricultural land. This benefits further in improving agriculture per hectare/revenue.

Additional income to family members:- Not only farmer but his family members get a chance to generate income

Improved farm living conditions:- In order to offers various facilities to tourist the living conditions on farm are improved.

Development of Entrepreneurial and managerial skills: The farmers get opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills. Also in due course of operating centres farmer learn various managerial skills and functions

Increased farm business sustainability: Due to additional income and focused efforts the farm business sustainability becomes long term.

BENEFITS TO RURAL AREA AND COMMUNITIES

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

The rural areas in which agritourism centres are operated are benefited economically; as well as non-economically. Some of the benefits to areas and communities living there are

Employment Opportunity: Due to new form of business people living in rural areas get an opportunity to work on centres. Thus their income generation opportunity increases too.

Generating additional revenue to local businesses and services: As the tourist visit rural areas the local business and tourist services get chance to earn additional income.

Upgrading of Community facilities: As more and more tourist visit rural areas, the demand for community facilities increases. Hence these facilities are upgraded like infrastructure, revitalisation of monuments is also done.

Protection of rural landscapes and natural environment: To attract more and more tourist, the rural land scape and natural environment facilities are protected and improved.

Preservation and Revival of local art and craft also culture and tradition is done. This is beneficial to attract more tourist and also for local community.

Connection between Urban and Rural areas: Agritourism act as connection between rural and urban people. This improves communication and hence exchange of knowledge and information becomes possible.

People from local area get an opportunity to communicate the about the local products and direct marketing is possible through agritourism. Not only this they can share the real picture about agricultural and rural problems with urban world.

Strengthening of Local economy: The rural economy is strengthen by directly generation of employment and income opportunities in agritourism and other businesses. Also local government their get benefited too.

Promotion of small communities: Agritourism has the ability to put a small town on the map

Recent Trends in Commerce and Management

Thus it can enhance the life of local people in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude Agro tourism is sustainable form of tourism for a destination and people at the destination. Agritourism helps in increase farmers income and the quality of life or rural society, the development of agriculture will provide the opportunity for local farmers to increase income and lifestyle. According to some opinions, Agritourism also educates people and society about agriculture and contributes to the local economy. It reduces the level of urbanization as people work and earn more from agro tourism; it promotes local products and create added value through direct marketing and stimulates economic activities in order to increase benefits in societies where the agro tourism is developed. Agritourism can act as tool; to preserve rural culture and tradition. Agritourism has lots of strengths and opportunities for the improvement of rural areas and rural development.