

The Dawn of Agrotourism in India: Reflections through Case Studies & Experiences

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Introduction

Agrotourism is a business venture located on a working farm, ranch or agricultural enterprise that provides an ‘experience’ for visitors while generating supplemental income for the owner. It is one of the fastest growing segments of agricultural direct marketing which allows farmers to diversify their core operations and keep farmland in production while presenting scenic vistas and maintaining farming traditions. By providing authentic farming experiences, agrotourism helps to educate about the importance of agriculture to a community’s economic base, quality of life, history and culture as well.

The term ‘agri-tourism’ was initially used in the US, but it originated from an Italian National Legal Framework passed in 1985. This law promotes overnight farm stays to diversify the incomes of Italian farmers and support the landscape of farming operations. The seeds of agri-tourism in India were first sown by the formation of

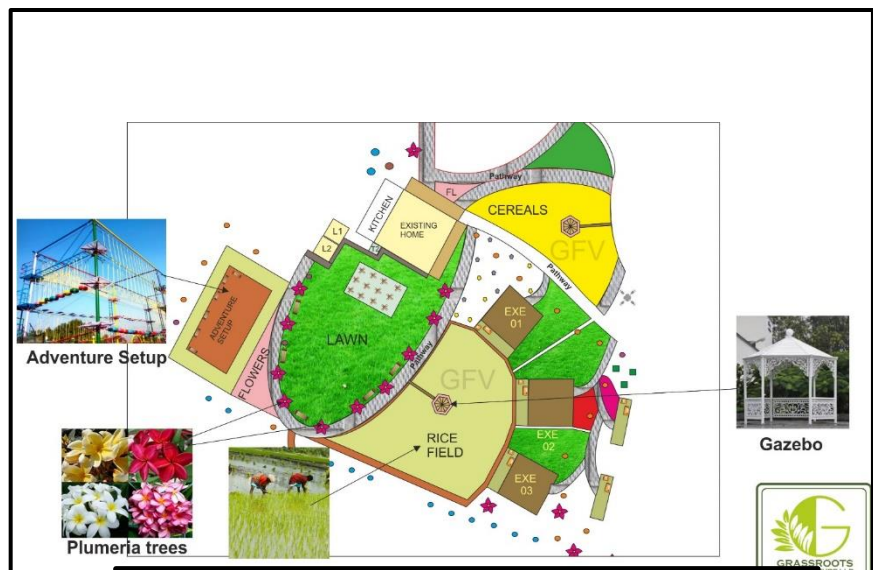


Fig 1: Layout of Working Agrotourism Model

the Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) located at Baramati in Maharashtra This paper will definitely serve as a platform for diverse stakeholders such as agrotourism practitioners, farmers, agripreneurs, policy makers, researchers, academicians to understand the concept of agrotourism, objectives, state policies, models of agrotourism, prospects and challenges.

The term “agritourism” is often used interchangeably with “agri-tourism,” “agrotourism,” “farm tourism,” “agricultural tourism,” or “agritainment.” Many young agrotourism practitioners and research scholars were invited to speak about their research and field experiences in the field of agrotourism. There are numerous hidden potentialities of agrotourism sector in our country and it is needed to underline about various prospects to farmers by taking several active examples of agrotourism models existing in our country.

Case 1: Shri Panduranga Taware- Pioneer of Agrotourism

Shri Panduranga Taware who is fondly called the change maker in Agrotourism. He is the founder and managing director of Agrotourism Development Corporation Pvt. Ltd., Maharashtra and serves as a resource person for policy changes and developing agrotourism models across the country. His initiative on agrotourism policies and procedures across Maharashtra laid as a foundation stone across the country. He remarked that “It is interesting to observe that 43% of urban population did not have any relative left in village and around 97% of urban population wants to experience the rustic beauty of village life.” He discussed about the eligible components required for setting an agrotourism model, binding criteria and facilities needed to be provided at the unit under Maharashtra tourism policy. The need for a responsible, safe and sustainable agrotourism model was the crux of the presentation. Various government benefits and procedures for training and guidance were also emphasized. He also elaborated about the application process required for registration especially for the new practitioners. Besides the formal procedures and guidelines to be followed, he told that “an agrotourism unit just need a story to tell, a clean farm, clean villages, conservation of environment, culture and traditions and sustainable livelihood for rural folks.” The steps required for setting up agrotourism model for prospective farmers are delineated here.

Step 1: Mapping of resources by agricultural officers and prospective farmers

Step 2: Conducting a sensitization workshop including all resource persons in district

Step 3: Conducting a minimum three day residential programme with progressive farmers deriving direct contrived experiences



Step 4: Develop a work plan work plan according to guidelines and policies developed by state government.

Case -2: Cow tourism model- Back to Roots

The next practitioner was Dr. Anuj Singhai (Founder, SajaiviCo India Pvt. Ltd.) who developed a cow tourism model. He is a social change maker working on a cow -centric approach for preserving native breeds- malwi and niwari in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Besides offering a handful of services like cow tourism, cow therapy, panchagavya therapy, kitchen garden, pashu ayurveda, organic agricultural training, diverse alternate organic products have been sold at their unit. Cow tourism is basically an extended part of agrotourism, contributing to 10-12 units of vertical diversification.

Another popular practitioner was Dr. Kishore Indukuri (Founder & CEO, Sid's Farm, Hyderabad). From conducting school visits, arranging campsites and homestays, it provides the unique and relishing experience of milking the cows, milk testing facilities, visits to fodder grass farms and water harvesting systems. He is a pioneer in setting up the vision of a new benchmark in the milk industry with superior quality dairy products, a sustainable ecosystem and a thriving relation with farmers.

Case-3: Hachiko tourism

Mr. Manoj Hadawale (Founder of Hachiko tourism) outlined about the tourism industry and contribution of agrotourism towards tourism sector of India. "Tourism for Inclusive growth" was the theme for World tourism Day (27 September, 2021) whereas "rural and community centric tourism" was the theme for National Tourism Day (25 January, 2022). Studies reveal that by 2028, annual growth of agrotourism sector will be 6.9% which will be 9.9% of total GDP. He gave a brief description about the tourism and hospitality industry in our country. In his words, "people have different reasons for setting up agrotourism and best part is to set your own trend rather than going with the trend". Various facets of tourism like niche tourism, post-covid tourism, experiential tourism, responsible tourism, tangible and intangible benefits and trends of tourism were discussed. Trends of agrotourism include farm recreation, hospitality, good communication and involvement of cooperatives. He mentioned that experiential tourism is the core of every tourism sector and cultural identity coupled with sustainable tourism enhances socio-economic development of nation.

Case-4: Farm of Happiness- The Rustic beauty of the Konkan



Rahul Kulkarni (Director, Farm of Happiness, Ratnagiri), a vibrant agrotourism practitioner exposed his journey from advertising sector to being an agripreneur. The pillars of agrotourism revolved around what kind of agrotourism, why agrotourism and who caters to the need of agrotourism. Agrotourism offers tangible benefits such as growing profitable crops, selling value added products, and creating employment opportunities. Intangible benefits include establishing one's own identity, gaining respect in society and aesthetic value. Entertainment along with education gives added meaning to agrotourism. Responsible tourism must be given the main thrust and he is a visionary working towards better and better concept rather than bigger and bigger concept which makes him a unique agrotourism practitioner. He further added that lot of entertainment takes away the essence of agrotourism. Hence each aspect of agrotourism must be dealt with utmost caution.

Mr. Dattatray Shelke (Unique Path, Pune) is another agro-tourism practitioner. He discussed about the entrepreneurial development through agrotourism in rural India as well as strengths and weaknesses of the industry. The farm stay offers multiple services like camping, trekking, sightseeing, boating activities and serves as a venue for many social and corporate ceremonies. His vision of setting the farm was basically to motivate peer farmers to go beyond the traditional cultivation of crops.

Case-5: Green Commandos-The paradise of East

Another vibrant practitioner was Mr. Samir Bordoloi (Founder, Food Forest, Sonapur). He initiated 'Green Commandos' who are the green tribe of people who believed in the principle of local food, local people and local economy. They in turn conserve, consume and commercialize local food wisdom so that one can protect farming profession. He stressed about the importance of 'compassionate farming' and importance of going back to the roots of our tradition. He persistently envisions the world where naturally organic farming and sustainable agricultural practices are the basic ruling factors. Through the Green Commandos, Mr. Samir is building a farming movement that substantially lowers input costs and reduces ecological damage by employing natural farming techniques. This is being done by reducing jhum cultivation, using existing land, that has already been burnt. Through the use of bamboo forests and groves, the Green Commandos are helping to create natural carbon sinks, reducing the impact of global warming. The adverse impact of monocropping is being reversed by creating edible food forests, using existing forest land, rather than destroying and replanting. Summing up, he is the pioneer of the social agripreneurs and local



food advocates- the green commandos and urges to practice low-cost ecological farming and constantly look forward for an inclusive, sustainable and equitable farming.

Case 6: Deva Giri Farm, Kolhapur

Yet another practitioner from Maharashtra was Mr. Sukhadev Giri (Deva Giri Farm, Kolhapur). He briefed about the activities and services provided at his natural resort. It gives an exotic experience of rural ambience and pleasure of exploring field activities as well. Environmental sustainability should be the sole criteria of agrotourism. He added that there is no dire need of infrastructure nor huge investment for agrotourism, instead passion towards agriculture is just sufficient to explore this venture.

Conclusion

The concept of agrotourism which is still in its infancy stage in our country. Different dimensions of agrotourism have to be learnt through case studies and potential agrotourism practitioners from across the nation. These insights will definitely serve as a starting point of hosting several workshops in near future for mobilizing extension workers to develop further core competencies in relatively new area of agrotourism.

