

Agritourism and Rural Development in North-East India: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract—With the changing time, the world is changing rapidly and the urge to urbanization is squeezing rural diameter. Economic growth that indulges in the expansion of urban and non-agricultural activities has been felt to be unsustainable. Therefore, a sustainable growth alternative is the need of the hour. In that perspective, agritourism has a strong potential in achieving the balance between sustainability and development. Modern development in rural areas proposes a great deal of sustainability along with the growth process. Agritourism emerges as a sustainable alternative to the conventional growth. In north-east India, though development is delayed but not denied. Development process has gained momentum recently and this has changed the art of rural livelihood. But the richness of natural resources provides a chance to make this place a hub of agritourism. In North-East India, the unique natural ambiance and climatic advantages give this place a huge potential for achieving such a sustainable breakthrough. This paper tries to summarize the possibilities of agritourism in North-East and also highlight the challenges that might create hurdles in achieving the stated goal.

Keyword: Agritourism, Sustainability, Rural growth, Sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Agriculture is an important aspect of any economy as it provides us food and other raw materials. Now a day, as the urbanization is spreading fast, the shape and functioning of agriculture has changed a lot. From traditional cultivation, we have shifted to modern era cultivation with advanced equipment and better knowledge. Modern agriculture defies the diminishing marginal productivity and possesses some bigger opportunities for the new age thinkers. In such case, agritourism is a new concept that revolutionize agricultural sector by interacting with tourism business. It is indeed a good scope to boost development up without creating much pressure upon the environment.

Rural communities have gone through deep changes mainly in the shift of economic activities. (Ammirato & Felicetti 2014). Migration of population to urban areas and the loss of significance of the agricultural sector in production have become significantly important over time. Traditional development pathway has been found to be discouraging for retaining traditional rural life style. Meanwhile, a modern

thought has been developed to retain those cultural heritages with the help of some alternative strategies. In this paper, we are trying to observe the possibilities and difficulties of agritourism as an alternative strategy to rural development.

2. OBJECTIVES:

In this paper, we have following objectives:

- a. To give an outline about agritourism,
- b. To explain its link with sustainability,
- c. To discover its possibilities in North-East India,
- d. To highlight the challenges it might face.

3. DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY:

The present study is of explanatory nature which tries to give a comprehensive analysis to the prospects and problems of agritourism in North-East India. It is based on the secondary data. The secondary data is collected from the published sources like journals, books, publications etc.

4. CONCEPT OF AGRITOURISM:

Agritourism is defined as agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch. It basically means farm stays where tourist visit and enjoy farming environment and sometimes also engage in farming activities. It includes a wide variety of activities, including buying products direct from a farm stand, navigating a corn maze, picking fruits and vegetables, animal rides or staying nights on a farm. An agritourism farm represents the hub of a rural network, the place where agri-food products and tourism services meet consumers demand for relocalization and triggers to motivate further direct business opportunities between tourists and other rural community actors. (Amirato & Felicetti 2014).

Agritourism involves agricultural based activities and attracts tourists to experience the authentic culture of rural societies. It is a unique concept and provides opportunities to the visitors for making a closer look towards the rich culture of rural communities. It has gained popularity in western nation due to

its unique and closer link with natural environment. In India, agritourism has also been emerged as a futuristic strategy towards tourism business. It was initiated in 2005 at Malegaon village, near Baramati, Maharashtra by Agri Tourism Development Company (ATDC). The ATDC is promoting agritourism centers as well as initiating the development of concept of agritourism in Maharashtra. It also caters to the needs of farmers by providing them training regarding skills and technical knowledge required to start and manage this venture at their farms.

5. AGRITOURISM AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

In recent years, the issue of sustainable development in rural areas has been addressed under a holistic approach, which considers the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability. (Matyakubov & Defrancesco, 2018). In India, ministry of rural development allocated 1,12,404 crores for rural development in the year 2018-19. It has been accounted that in the past ten years, the Department of Rural Development has seen an average increase of 8.7% in its expenditure. This process of rural development and the allocation of resources though primarily tries to meet the employment demand of rural population and market provisions for rural producers, it also helps indirectly to achieve the sustainable growth of rural economy.

Agritourism has a great potential in achieving sustainable growth in rural areas. Agritourism provides extra income to farmers and also helps in widening the market for farm products. Tourists who visit agritourism spots or farms pays for letting them enter into the farm and use it. This income from tourism activity provides new opportunities for farmers to involve in better farming and tourism simultaneously. In order to attract tourists, farmers need to maintain the cultural and natural ambience for which tourists travel to those places. This, in turn, leads to a sustainable livelihood as the farmers, along with farming, consciously care about maintaining the social, cultural and natural environment intact.

6. PROSPECTS OF AGRITOURISM IN NORTH-EAST INDIA:

North-East India is a land of undulating hills and plains with luxuriant green cover and exotic flora and fauna. It comprises eight States namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The location of this region is strategically important as it has international borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. This Region is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and each State has its own distinct features.. It is the treasure house of various economic and natural resources. It is blessed with rich culture and ethnic heritage. Tourism has become the one of the most important sector for generating income and employment opportunities in the North East.

Agritourism is a new initiative for the development of tourism industry in North eastern region. It can change the

conventional concepts and views on tourism, and helps in bringing a new dimension in the sustainable development. The urban population which is having roots in villages or even those who never experienced village lifestyle always has the desire to escape from hectic city life and enjoy some moments in peaceful natural environment and learn about diverse culture and heritages from different parts. Agritourism has become the new way to fulfill the desire of this segment of population. North east has hills, wetlands, rivers, river islands and also diverse culture from different tribes and communities. Therefore, it will be easier for attracting tourist to agritourism spots. There are many more things to explore in North-east. Some North eastern states have some seemingly beautiful agritourism spots that are quite attractive and give tourists a natural touch to their busy urban lifestyle. For example, Enchanted Forest farm near Gangtok in Sikkim is providing authentic traditional food and night stay for the tourist in their 18 acre farm area and also providing facilities to explore local environment.

There are lots of possibilities that agritourism can provide to us. Following are some of them:

- a. Agritourism can boost tourism up so that government can raise its revenue from this source.
- b. It can help maintaining sustainability and can act as an alternative to conventional development which is eating up rural lands.
- c. It will be also helpful in improving international relationship of the country as this region shares its boundary with some major Asian countries.
- d. It will provide greater market opportunities for farm products and farmer's standard of living will increase.
- e. Presence of tourists and engagement of tourist in farming activities for recreation will also help in creating awareness about scientific farming and this will prohibit the farmers from using any harmful pesticides or chemicals in their farm.
- f. Agritourism will also provide a market for promotion of north eastern lifestyle and culture to the rest of the country as well as the world.

7. CHALLENGES:

Although North-east has huge potential in the promotion of agritourism, there are various problems associated with it such as,

- a. Lack of Infrastructure: There are various problems in the development of infrastructural facilities because most of the states are located on the hilly areas. The problem of transportation hinders the flow of tourist to these areas.
- b. Restricted Area Permit: under the Foreigners (Protected area) order, 1958, most part of the north eastern region falls under restricted areas for international tourists. Under this, foreigners who are intended to visit north east had to face a long procedure of obtaining permission from

home ministry. This might be a drawback for the region to pull tourists to these places.

- c. Insurgency: The problem of insurgency is one of the major problems for the development of north eastern region. It has hampered all the developmental works and tourists always find it risky to visit the north eastern region.
- d. Ethnic clashes: There is degradation of cultural fabric which results in political instability in this region.
- e. Natural calamities: North eastern states are in the most earthquake-prone zone. The plain areas of Assam are heavily affected by flood during monsoons whereas the hilly areas of other states are often affected by quick floods, landslides and other natural calamities. These unpleasant natural activities sometimes can create hurdles in maintaining agritourism spots suitable for tourists.
- f. Insignificant number of local tourist: In North east, people are started getting urbanized recently so the feeling or desire to live again in a rural atmosphere is not too strong as compared to the people of busy cosmopolitan cities. Therefore, there will be few numbers of north eastern people to experience the delightful time in agritourism spots. So, agritourism will be fruitful if all the states collectively promote to attract tourist from rest of the country.

8. CONCLUSION:

Agritourism activities can provide the additional income necessary to allow for the preservation of small and mid-scale farms and rural communities. Agriculture coupled with tourism business is a relevant and futuristic strategy to attain sustainable growth. It also helps in maintaining cultural diversity and community harmony among different groups and provides sustainable job opportunities for rural people. In the north east, agritourism provides great possibilities as an alternative development strategy. However, this concept is hindered by some difficulties that arise from the locational aspects, social and political decisions and economic ill-practices. If these difficulties are minimized, the concept of agritourism can flourish and provide a new perspective to north eastern states.

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