



### AGROTOURISM: A NARRATIVE REVIEW AND THE WAY AHEAD

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#### Abstract:

*Agrotourism has become one of the most dynamic areas of rural development, merging agriculture, culture, and tourism into a unified experience that benefits both farmers and visitors. In India, where agriculture continues to support a majority of the population, agrotourism presents an important opportunity for income diversification, cultural preservation, and rural revitalization. This paper uses a narrative review approach to synthesize existing scholarship and explore how human stories, lived experiences, and community interaction shape agrotourism practices. The review reveals that agrotourism has evolved from simple farm visits to immersive, educational, and community-centered models that promote sustainability, entrepreneurship, and social cohesion. Furthermore, it identifies major challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of training, limited digital presence, and insufficient policy alignment. The paper proposes a forward-looking agenda emphasizing institutional support, technological integration, environmental safeguards, and community empowerment. By placing narratives at the center of analysis, this review contributes to academic discourse by highlighting the human and cultural dimensions of agrotourism, areas often overlooked in economics-centered studies. The concluding section outlines practical strategies and future research directions to strengthen India's agrotourism ecosystem and enhance its contribution to sustainable rural development.*

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#### Introduction:

Agrotourism, also known as agritourism or farm tourism, refers to tourism activities that take place on working farms, blending agricultural operations with visitor experiences. Phillip et al. (2010) describe it as a form of tourism that is “directly connected with agricultural activity and rural experiences.” Globally, agrotourism has become increasingly popular as travellers seek authentic, nature-based, and culturally rich interactions beyond traditional urban tourism. In India, where nearly two-thirds of the population resides in rural areas, the sector has gained importance as a tool

for economic diversification and sustainable development.

The appeal of agrotourism lies in its ability to bridge the rural-urban gap. Urban tourists gain exposure to farming practices, local cuisines, traditional knowledge, and rural lifestyles, while farmers receive additional income and recognition for their work. Over time, agrotourism in India has moved from scattered, private farm initiatives to structured models supported by state-led programs such as Maharashtra's Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) and Kerala's Responsible Tourism Mission. This evolution



signals a broader transformation in how rural spaces are perceived, not merely as agricultural zones, but as experiential landscapes rich in culture, biodiversity, and heritage.

The COVID-19 pandemic strengthened demand for open, natural, and sustainable spaces, positioning agrotourism as a significant post-pandemic growth segment. Visitors increasingly look for meaningful experiences, emotional well-being, and cultural connection, elements that rural farm settings are well suited to provide. This paper adopts a narrative review approach to examine how stories, experiences, and social interactions shape the development and impact of agrotourism in India. The review further explores future pathways to enhance its role in sustainable rural development.

### Narrative Review of Literature:

#### 1. Concept and Evolution of Agrotourism

Early scholarship positioned agrotourism as a form of supplementary farm income dependent on recreation and leisure (Barbieri and Mshenga 52). Over time, this definition expanded to include educational tours, farm stays, agricultural festivals, food trails, and community-based experiences. The narrative element highlighting stories of farming traditions, local knowledge, and cultural identity, has increasingly become central to agrotourism's appeal (Pande and Thapa 24).

In India, organized efforts began with Maharashtra's Agri-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC), founded in 2005. It pioneered cluster-based farm tourism, standardizing services and training farmers in hospitality, which later became a model replicated in other states (Kumbhar 112).

#### 2. Economic Impacts: Livelihood Diversification and Rural Employment

Numerous studies illustrate that agrotourism contributes directly to household income

diversification. Research from Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala reports income increases ranging from 20 to 40 percent after adopting agrotourism-related enterprises (Chandrashekar 61).

#### Additional benefits include:

- Expansion of employment opportunities for rural youth
- Enhanced market visibility for local products
- Growth in micro-enterprises such as handicrafts, organic foods, and traditional culinary services

However, economic gains often correlate with factors like road connectivity, marketing capacity, and proximity to urban centers.

#### 3. Social and Cultural Dimensions

Agrotourism plays a vital role in strengthening cultural identity. Through festivals, storytelling, folk arts, local cuisine, and indigenous farming practices, rural culture is preserved and showcased. Women, in particular, have become key participants in agrotourism managing food services, craft activities, homestays, and farm tours which enhances their socio-economic status (Pande and Thapa 27).

Case studies show that tourists increasingly seek emotionally rich experiences that connect them to rural life interactions that emphasize authenticity, personal connection, and learning.

#### 4. Environmental and Sustainability Outcomes

Agrotourism encourages environmentally responsible farming and conservation efforts. Farms that practice organic methods, water conservation, or biodiversity protection are particularly attractive to eco-conscious visitors (Ndhlovu et al. 4). Examples include Saguna Baug in Maharashtra, which integrates aquaculture, natural farming, and environmental education, and Kerala's Kuttanad wetlands, known for responsible tourism practices. Yet, risks exist: poorly managed visitor flows may



increase waste and resource pressure, necessitating careful planning.

### 5. Business Models and Governance Structures

Agrotourism generally operates through three models:

1. Individual Farm Model – Suitable for entrepreneurial farmers with marketing skills.
2. Cluster Model – Multiple farms collaborate to offer diversified activities; promotes equitable distribution of benefits.
3. Community-Based Model – Villages organize tourism collectively, ideal for smaller or remote communities.

Government interventions—through subsidies, guidelines, infrastructure support, and digital platforms—play a substantial role in enabling these models.

### Analysis and Synthesis of Themes:

#### 1. Agrotourism as a Bridge Between Urban and Rural Worlds

Visitor narratives often describe agrotourism as a restorative escape from urban pressures. At the same time, farmers narrate stories of pride, heritage, and resilience, creating an emotional and cultural bridge between hosts and guests. This strengthens tourism's relational dimension, making agrotourism a shared experience rather than a transactional one.

#### 2. Success Factors Identified Across Literature

Seven broad success factors emerge:

1. Strong infrastructure and accessibility
2. Hospitality and communication skills
3. Digital marketing competency
4. Authenticity and meaningful storytelling
5. Community cooperation
6. Environmental responsibility
7. Consistent institutional support

When these components align, agrotourism demonstrates high resilience and visitor loyalty.

### 3. Barriers and Challenges

Despite its potential, several obstacles hinder scaling:

- Lack of hospitality training
- Limited sanitation and digital connectivity
- Unclear land-use regulations
- Seasonal fluctuations in demand
- Insufficient access to finance

Many farmers face difficulty balancing agriculture with tourism operations, leading to inconsistent service quality.

### 4. Research Gaps

This review identifies the need for:

- Longitudinal impact studies
- Standardized metrics for evaluating agrotourism success
- Comparative studies across agro-ecological zones
- Deeper research on climate resilience in agrotourism
- Greater attention to digital storytelling and technology adoption

### Conceptual Framework: A Narrative-Driven Model:

The narrative conceptual framework synthesizes farmer stories, visitor motivations, cultural identity, and community aspirations.

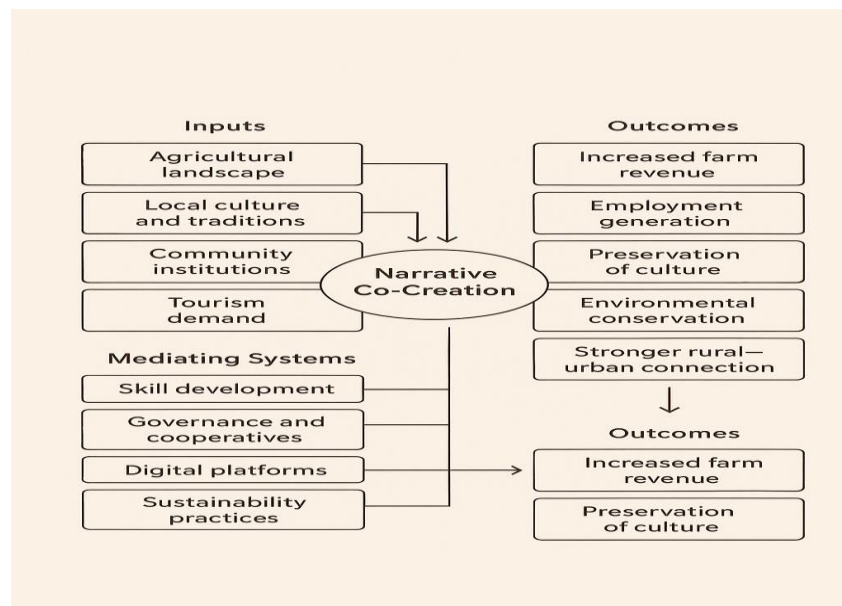
**Inputs:** landscapes, farming traditions, cultural assets, community institutions

**Narrative Co-Creation:** farmer narratives (heritage), visitor narratives (learning), community narratives (identity)

**Mediating Systems:** skill development, governance, digital platforms, sustainability practices

**Outcomes:** enhanced income, higher employment, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, stronger rural-urban bonds.

This model demonstrates why agrotourism thrives when rooted in authentic, lived experiences.



### The Way Ahead: Strategies for Strengthening Agrotourism in India

#### 1. Policy Recommendations

- Develop national guidelines for agrotourism standards, safety, and certifications.
- Provide subsidies for eco-friendly infrastructure, digital tools, and training.
- Align agrotourism with government schemes such as NRLM, PMFME, and ODOP.

#### 2. Capacity Building

- Establish regional training centres focused on hospitality, storytelling, sustainability, and entrepreneurship.
- Create specialized programs for women and youth to strengthen their leadership in rural tourism.

#### 3. Digital Transformation

- Build state-level agrotourism booking portals.
- Promote storytelling through social media, blogs, and videos.
- Introduce virtual tours to expand market visibility.

#### 4. Responsible and Sustainable Agrotourism

- Implement waste management plans and water conservation systems.

- Encourage organic certification and biodiversity-friendly practices.
- Promote farm-to-table initiatives and slow-food movements.

#### 5. Market Development and Branding

- Create region-specific tourism brands such as “Maharashtra Farm Trails” or “Spice Routes of Kerala.”
- Partner with educational institutions, NGOs, and travel agencies.
- Develop thematic circuits, honey tourism, tea garden tourism, vineyard tourism, and millet-based tours.

#### Conclusion:

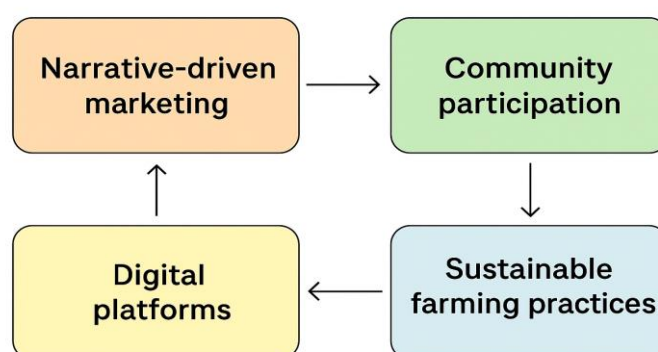
The narrative review demonstrates that agrotourism holds immense promise as a transformative model for India’s rural development. Beyond economic benefits, it nurtures cultural pride, encourages sustainable farming, strengthens rural-urban relationships, and enhances community well-being. What began as basic farm visits has evolved into immersive, story-driven, and environmentally conscious models that offer tourists meaningful engagement while uplifting local communities.



The future of agrotourism in India depends on collaborative efforts of farmers, governments, scholars, tourism professionals, and communities must work together to expand opportunities and address existing challenges. With targeted policy support, robust

training, digital integration, sustainability norms, and culturally grounded storytelling, agrotourism can emerge as a key driver of rural prosperity and sustainable tourism in the coming decades.

### WAY AHEAD



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