

# FARM HOUSE TOURISM IN HARYANA: A SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS OF POLICY FRAMEWORK

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Haryana is a Young state of Independent, formed in 1966, almost 18 years after Independence. Formerly it was a part of Punjab, a state situated in Indo-Gangetic plains. The state hardly has any natural or manmade wonder to boast off at tourism platform. But it has made a mark on tourism map of India with its ground-breaking tourism products and policies. This paper looks forward to analyze the policy framework adopted by the state from a socio-cultural and environmental point of view. Human activities have time and again altered the society, nature and environment for the worst. The human beings are an integral part of nature and lives in well guided and structured societies to survive and prosper, for better tomorrow a symbiotic relationship with the society and nature is a pre-requisite. Tourism being the fastest growing industry and involving products that are major part of mother nature, environment or our societies makes it mandatory to develop sustainably. Judiciously designed products and services can maximize the positive impact while minimizing the negative collision within the society and with the environment; off which humans themselves grow and flourish.

**KEYWORDS:** Tourism, Farm Tourism, Tourism Policy, Sustainable Development

**INTRODUCTION:** Haryana is the 20<sup>th</sup> State of Independent India, which came into being on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1966; initially it was a part of Punjab. It is located in North-western Region and shares its boundary with Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttrakhand, Utter Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan. Chandigarh, popularly called as City Beautiful designed by French Architect Le Corbusier serves as shared Capital of Punjab and Haryana. Haryana has 5000 years old glorious past, it is the land where epic battle of Mahabharata was fought and Lord Shri Krishna sermonized BhagwatGeeta to Arjuna.

Geographically the state has nothing much to offer as a tourism product. It has only one hill station which is located in Panchkula district. Ghaggar is the only river flowing through Haryana. Despite of lack of strategically important tourist destination this agrarian state has made a mark on the Tourism Map of India by pioneering the concept of

Highway Tourism, Golf Tourism and farm tourism. Haryana tourism Corporation has set numerous tourist complexes along the national highways passing through the state, these tourists complexes are mostly named after birds. The annually hosted Surajkund crafts mela has gained an international status and serves the purpose of showcasing indigenous crafts and handicrafts from all over India on an international platform.

In the last decade Haryana Tourism carved a niche into village and farm tourism though the initial attempt in mid 1990s was a complete failure. To satisfy the wanderlust of travelers seeking an experience of farm activities, Haryana offers a wide range of alternatives. The farmhouses in Haryana open the doors of charms and mysticism of simple village life and provide a firsthand experience of agrarian society. The package offers a soothing halt from fast paced city life. Villages of Haryana allow the tourist to dive into a sea of experiences taking them close to nature; fresh air, quiet life, nutritious food cooked with simplest techniques and hospitable locals giving a glimpse of slower and less sophisticated days of human life. Villages have preserved the arts and handicrafts passed on from older generation, farm tourism involve a visit to local artisans. The stay is arranged in huts or simple rooms and the tourist get to participate in the farm activities such as feeding the cattle, milking cows, bullock cart rides etc.

Farm tourism is an integral and inseparable part of rural tourism where Tourism promises to take back the tourists to its roots but at a price. Development of Rural tourism and farm tourism is an attempt to harness the touristic potential of Indian villages and to create an additional source of income for rural economy other than the farming activities. A few philosophers try to compare it with poverty tourism which is not the case as Haryana is amongst the most prosperous states of India. Asper Sachidanand Murthy (2003) points out that these farmhouses are an annex to Delhi's farmhouse culture and the packages are cautiously designed to not to engage the tourists into laborious farming activities but to help them know and identify the basics of farming. The beauty of the concept is in its ability to enable a person to revisit one's roots.

The concept of farm tourism was commenced by the Haryana Tourism Corporation in collaboration with state government in later half of 2003. An initial survey brought to light the already existing farmhouses in NCR region but the ownership was with financially well established people. The process of invitation of applications from interested parties was started after analyzing the capabilities of farm houses to impart a real time experience of farm life. Increasing concrete jungles of city life has enhanced the gap between nature and people. Hi-tech gadgets have helped in building up indoor generation where people try to get happiness out of sophisticated technology. But humans are an integral part of Nature and human brain is intricately linked with nature. Farm Tourism provides diverse activities allowing humans to reconnect with nature. Farm Tourism is a slightly new concept in Indian Tourism Industry. It provides a break from urban mechanized life by providing the experiences of rural farm life. It links rural tourism and eco tourism.

Under a sound policy framework Haryana Tourism Corporation operates 18 FARMHOUSES in six major districts; Faridabad, Gurgaon, Jhajjar, Rohtak, Karnal and Mewat. Guidelines for approval and registration of farmhouses are

clearly stated along with a list of the mandatory and desired facilities to be provided by the owners to the visitors. The policy fails to talk about the maintenance of the farms by directing tourism earnings to the core product i.e. farming; neither has it talked of environmental conservation by safe waste disposal, cautious use of water and electricity nor does it advocate organic and safe farming to enhance the standards of agriculture. The serenity of lush Green farms can be spoilt by unfortunate development of unnecessary infrastructure owing to an urge to maximize economic benefit from tourism activities. Any human activity has significant contribution in deteriorating the surrounding environment. The strategic pointers such as customer problems, carrying capacity of a destination needs careful attention, proper solutions has to be pre designed to overcome all such obstacles. Pollution caused due to increased human activities on the farm in form of soil pollution, waste disposal or air pollution should be forecasted and short awareness programs should be presented to the owners as well as the consumers.

The accomplishments of Haryana in the field of Farm tourism has encouraged the Government of India to spot villages across the country to build up tourism centers. GOI has recognized 31 such villages in Aug 20, 2004 across the country. The tourism activities moves along with its shadows therefore long term, environmental and socio-cultural impacts should be forecasted and futuristic strategies should be developed to ensure sustainable development. Farm tourism has a potential to bring the primary sector close to the service sector and farm tourism has a capacity to absorb the ever expanding tourism sector. Villages of India are full of life as they are still not captured by technological advancement; the slower pace of life provides peaceful experience. The low scale of touristic activity on the other hand has no negative impacts by and large allied with mass tourism. As there are no leakages of tourist receipts on imported facilities and luxuries, the earnings strengthen the rural economy. Unsophisticated Village life is the only USP of farm tourism hence the owners are relieved of the pressure of acquiring machines and equipments. The success of the model has created an urge in the neighboring villages and other states to uplift and develop their villages as tourism products.

A few sociologists and anthropologists have put forward their assumptions of loss of local culture and privacy for local communities as there is wide gap between the living conditions and rituals of villagers and the tourists. For example in many villages of Haryana women are regarded as second sex and some standards exist regarding the attire and behavior of women. Tourists specially foreigners often pay no attention to or are ignorant of these standards. They disregard the customary standards of dressing and appear in revealing cloths. This can breed hostility amongst the villagers for their own traditions and culture. There are chances for commoditization of local culture to suit the customer needs of for the sole purpose of monetary benefits. According to Pera and McLaren (1999) "Tourists' quest for 'authenticity' often leads to a prostitution of the local culture for the demand and enjoyment of the tourists." Modification of cultural expressions by demonstrating the demands of tourists or altering reality represents "staged authenticity". These arguments clearly signify that the negative impacts can have a deteriorating impact overshadowing the positive impacts of farm tourism. Appropriate strategic planning involving the local policy makers the process and proper implementation, control and evaluation of tourism process is imperative. The policy

undermines the need for generating awareness amongst the tourists about the socio-cultural differences and has failed to provide stern guidelines regarding acceptable behavior.

The Tourism Policy of Haryana is focused on areas such as promoting Tourism as an engine of economic growth and employment generation, establishing Haryana as a Tourism destination, to recognize and encourage role of private sector to harness the untapped tourism potential of Haryana, to train and develop human resource required for tourism, to formulate sustainable marketing strategies, and to use technology in fulfilling its goals and objectives. The close analysis of the policy framework leads to recognition of lack of farsighted efforts to combat perceived negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism related activities. The Tourism literature is full of examples of trial and error, so it is the prime duty of policy makers to foresee and lead the development strategically and sustainably while designing a new tourism destination.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The rationale of the paper was to spread awareness about the scope of Farm Tourism and its perceived negative socio cultural and environmental implications which can surface in near future due to prolonged ignorance. The objective isto exert a drawthe attention of policy makers to look further than the diminutive considerations and to shift focus to long term strategic planning to ensure sustainable development along with complete satisfaction to the tourists. This paper has provided an overview of Current situation of Farm Tourism in Haryana and has recommended that a mature policy which is both sustainable and strategically sound should be designed for further development so that the said negative connotations do not float up. Sustainable development shall be the dictum of the policy making. Tourism should not be considered only as a tool for poverty alleviation and expansion of tourism in villages should not be segregated from overall development. The state should design an integrated approach for its development. The central government should make efforts in ensuring financial assistance to the public and private stakeholders because the infrastructural development and intermediaries are under the State Governments. The future challenges that lie with the policy makers are to make optimum utilization of resources for maximum development. Public private partnerships should be developed to up bring a class of professional who are not completely driven by economic benefits but are sensitive towards environment as well. Research should be directed towards developing a new strategic framework as per Agenda 21 given by UNWTO. Comprehensive case studies showcasing finest practices practiced in industry for dealing withchallenges posed due of tourism can aid in sprouting of such a framework.

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