

Talk by Mr. S.K. Misra (Chairman ITRHD)
Guest of Honour
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGRI TOURISM
On the occasion of 14th World Agri Tourism Day
15-16 May 2021

Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister and Distinguished Ministers of the Maharashtra Govt,
My eminent fellow Guests of Honour,
Mr Pandurang Taware and team,
Distinguished participants from India and abroad,
Ladies and gentlemen:

I feel honoured to be invited to speak on the occasion of World Agriculture Tourism Day.

Tourism has been close to my heart throughout my career, and I have been privileged not only to have introduced the concept of Highway Tourism in India's State of Haryana in the early 70's of the last century, but also to have been given the responsibility of shaping the policy at the national level in the eighties. The earlier emphasis was on heritage and culture which no doubt were major attractions. During the course of my tourism postings, and after retirement with two NGOs in the heritage field, however, I became increasingly aware that many foreign tourists felt that by moving from one five- or four-star hotel to another in the course of their travels, they were not experiencing the real India, which lives in our rural communities and villages.

The need therefore was felt to give a new dimension to our Tourism Policy and a beginning was made to promote Rural Tourism. Unfortunately, in the earlier stages success was limited as adequate attention had not been paid to the criteria for selection of the target villages. Learning from past mistakes the Government of India then came up with a more well thought out policy, which included providing incentives.

It is heartening to find that now private sector efforts in this field have given hope for the future. Pandurang Taware who is the moving spirit behind this conference may rightly be considered as the prime mover and torch bearer for farm tourism in India, an important aspect of rural tourism, and deserves our hearty congratulations and gratitude for his leadership.

Tourism has many linkages, to tangible and intangible culture, crafts, cuisine, heritage and history, nature and wild life. It has now been demonstrated that Agriculture also has a key role to play by tapping the farm sector. This includes horticulture and tea and coffee plantations, for our farms provide not only food, but other things as well, all the while affording glimpses of the real and authentic India. Agriculture policy therefore must not ignore its potential in bringing about a dramatic change in the lives of farmers by mounting the chariot of tourism. It is very heartening to find representatives here of countries where Farm tourism has taken off --these including Philippines, Italy, Greece, Uganda, South Africa, Scotland, USA, and Thailand. We can certainly benefit from their experience.

Farm Tourism provides farmers with alternate sources of income. The community is motivated to take care of their assets, attractions, and heritage, whether tangible or intangible. Environmental pollution is kept to the minimum, preservation of the local ecology gets priority, organic farming is promoted, the impact of global warming is better understood, and opportunities are created for small business to flourish with the influx of tourists. Other benefits include improvement in health care facilities and civic infrastructure, and with economic benefits the general quality of life improves, which eventually leads to a fall in migration to urban areas. In fact, a reverse trend holds out possibilities with many persons, particularly absentee farmers, wishing to get back to their roots and traditional occupations.

Indirect, but equally important results are that local culture and traditions gain greater respect and are thus sustained. Fairs and Festivals are celebrated with greater gusto. Local pride develops, as residents see the appreciation of visitors.

Gandhiji had a vision for rural India based on an integrated programme of rural development covering all aspects of rural life. Unfortunately, the policies pursued immediately after independence focussed on industrial development to the neglect of the rural sector. This thinking fortunately is changing and the time has come to promote rural tourism in a big way as it can be a true catalyst for rural development.

It goes without saying that for tourists to have a meaningful and comfortable experience, the necessary infrastructure must be developed. Minimum requirements are accessibility, pleasant surroundings, proper garbage disposal and sanitary conditions, home stays and other facilities, and trained people. The experience is greatly enhanced with exposure to vibrant craft and performance traditions, heritage monuments and sites, traditional vernacular architecture, and activities in which visitors can participate. If all these are taken care of, then the net result would be general rural development, bringing in its wake greater employment opportunities, better incomes, and women's empowerment and their involvement as equal partners in development activities.

I would like to cite an example. Ten years ago, with a number of like-minded colleagues, I established a new NGO -- ITRHD -- The Indian Trust For Rural Heritage and Development. Our focus is on rural areas with substantial heritage assets -- tangible or intangible. We work to enhance and ensure the viability of the heritage, and help the communities explore their heritage as a resource for overall development.

For instance, at the request of the community, a primary school has been set up in a village with a strong classical music tradition. Instead of getting teachers from outside -- not an easy task -- we were able to identify a number of young local women who had done their graduation, trained them, and then appointed them as faculty for primary classes. They have acquired a new found respect, both in the village and in their families, and now are involved in many decision-making activities. In fact, they were strongly involved in designing the new school building. The community does not regard them as outsiders, and they set an inspiring model for their young female students.

In many fields in India women are in the forefront, and Farm Tourism can provide opportunities for them to assume significant new roles. I am glad to note that there are a number of women entrepreneur speakers from different countries who will be sharing with us how women's participation in activities has contributed to the success of their ventures, as well as the initial problems faced, and the challenges met. We shall certainly benefit from their experience.

Building on their traditional skills, women are ideally suited to management in the hospitality sector – such as organizing and running home stays and guest houses. Their expertise in cooking, arts and crafts, cultural activities, rituals and festivals – all these have great potential for tourism. Agri-tourism opens new vistas for these skills – such as packaging of produce for sale to visitors, demonstrations and selling of traditional craft products, acting as guides and teachers for their guests. When the women of the family and the community become active partners in the venture, and contribute to the new sources of income, their empowerment immediately increases.

In the rural sector, in most cases, the major and sustaining activity is farming but many do not find it productive enough to ensure a decent and comfortable life. Agri-tourism offers the opportunity for farming to become a huge asset, by creating an environment which offers new exposure and new income, thus bringing about a welcome and desirable change in their lives. Maharashtra has shown the way. In addition to Pandurang, and two of his colleagues from Pune, I am glad to see that we have a participant from Punjab as well. I look forward to their presentations, and hope that they can help provide inspiration for other areas in India.

I would hope that a concerted effort could be made at the National level by building partnerships on a long-term basis. Partnerships initiated by private parties should be supplemented and given full support by Government, particularly at the State level, and with financing institutions like banks, NABARD, and the Tourism Finance Corporation of India. Professional advice from academic institutions like Agriculture Universities can be very helpful. And what is most important, from the very beginning, is the total involvement of the local community and local bodies such as Panchayats. Adopting farming techniques based on our well tried out systems with organic farming will bring in better returns and for the tourist it would provide a new insight.

It would be advisable for the Ministry of Tourism to set up a separate Directorate of Rural Tourism with two wings; one responsible for Farm Tourism and the other for Heritage and Culture Tourism in rural areas. A standing steering Committee to provide guidance and monitor progress with representatives of private sector and other concerned interests would inspire confidence. The Finance Ministry and State Governments should every year have a Budget allocation primarily for infrastructure.


A word of advice before I conclude based on our experience at ITRHD, the NGO that I have actively been involved with for the last 10 years. I would like to stress that Farm tourism which is aimed at promoting rural development must include in its programme conservation of our heritage whether tangible or intangible, and support the preservation of the

traditions which provide meaning to all our lives. These would have a lasting impact on the minds of the visitors, and enrich their experience immeasurably.

I have every hope that this Conference will spur us on to renewed efforts and our association with friends from abroad particularly those attending this Conference will be mutually beneficial. I wish your deliberations all success.

On the occasion of



**14TH WORLD
AGRI TOURISM
DAY** 

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGRI TOURISM (VIRTUAL PLATFORM)

**Rural Women Sustainable Entrepreneurship
Opportunities through Agri Tourism**

15TH - 16TH MAY 2021



For virtual conference registration please visit
www.worldagritourismday.com





Virtual Opening Ceremony of INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AGRI TOURISM

15TH - 16TH MAY 2021, 10.00 AM IST



Hon. Mr. Aaditya Thackeray

Cabinet Minister of Tourism and Environment
Government of Maharashtra



Hon. Mr. Dada Bhuse

Cabinet Minister of Agriculture, Ex Service Men Welfare
Government of Maharashtra



Hon. Aditi Sunil Tatkare

Minister of State for Industries, Mining,
Tourism, Horticulture, Sports and Youth Welfare,
Protocol, Information and Public Relations,
Law and Judiciary, Government of Maharashtra



Hon. Ms Valsa Nair Singh

IAS, Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture,
Government of Maharashtra



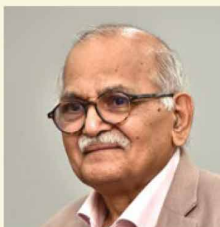
Hon. Mr. Ashutosh Salil

IAS, Managing Director MTDC,
Government of Maharashtra



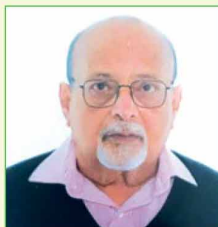
Hon. Dr. Mina Gabor

Ex Principal Secretary Ministry of Tourism,
Government of Philippines Initiated
Philippines Farm Tourism Policy



Hon. Mr. S. K. Misra

Chairman, ITRHD
(Indian Trust for Rural Heritage and Development)



Hon. Dr. Harsh Varma

Ex Director Technical UNWTO Spain



Hon. Dr P Chandra Shekara

Director General, National Institute of
Agriculture Extension Management Hyderabad



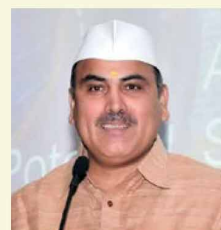
Shri D Venketesan

Regional Director
Western & South Region Ministry of Tourism
Government of India



Hon. Dr Dhananjay Sawalkar

Director Department of Tourism
Government of Maharashtra



Mr. Pandurang Bhagvanrao Taware

Convener, International Conference on Agri Tourism
14th World Agri Tourism Day

Mr. Avinash M. Jogdand

Co - Convener

Mr. Pankaj Mahajan

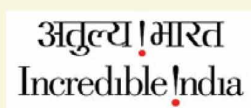
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Hawaii Agritourism Association



Mini Murrah Farm - Thailand



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Uganda Agritourism Network



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Agritourism Gatherings



Karmayogi Babaraoji Jogdand College of Agriculture, Amkheda - India