

Sustainable Development: How Responsible is Responsible Tourism (RT) in Kerala?

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Abstract—Kerala emerged with an open heart to the outside world projecting tourism as an industry only in 1980's but the few decades which followed saw noteworthy & progressive growth in terms of international & national tourist arrivals to diverse attractive destinations, branding of state (Gods Own Country) and development of numerous tourism products (eco-tourism & medical tourism etc.) by the successive governments. Consequently, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) accorded the status of 'Partner State' to Kerala in recognition of its potential in the tourism sector. It is widely accepted that tourism industry is a multi-billion, multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional global phenomenon which is steadily increasing and arguably tourism has serious socio – economic – political and cultural implications. This consciousness led to the development of Responsible Tourism (RT) concept, which is mainly conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed as the 'triple bottom-line' economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility which pertains to all forms tourism and it tries to minimize negative economic, environment and social impacts and supposed to generate greater economic and overall welfare of local communities. The question now arises how responsible is responsible/ sustainable tourism in the Kerala Model? or is there a Kerala tourism development model worth replication at all? What are the features of the Kerala tourism policy and does that have any bearing on the communities who are at the receiving end. The State government's policies on tourism are factually perceived to have a homogenous effect across the destination communities and this makes the case more precarious as given the context as laid above. This paper will reflect upon the broad understanding of tourism development situation in Kerala using secondary sources and review of literature available to argue that there are more contentions, contradictions and challenges from/to the tourism industry to the local economy rather than its contributions to the economy in the context of RT.

Keywords: Tourism, Sustainable Development, Policy

1. SETTING THE CONTEXT: MULTI - SECTORAL LINKAGES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

Kerala surfaced as an important tourism destination only during the late 1980s, but since then its market share is steadily increasing¹. In the recent years, Kerala has seen

¹ The State accounts for 11-12 per cent of international tourist arrivals were around 24 lakh in India and domestic tourism was around 56 lakh during the year 2002. Being a service industry, tourism has higher potential to generate

remarkable levels of growth in tourist arrivals and the state has now become one of the important tourist destinations in the world. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) have accorded the status of 'partner State' to Kerala in recognition of its potential in the tourism sector. The government and the bureaucracy now project tourism as 'an engine of growth'— an excellent source of foreign exchange and employment— to revive the local economy. (T.T Sreekumar and Govindan Parayil, 2002) Although, healthy growth of this sector, however, depends on the proper development of what is called tourism infrastructure and provision of adequate skilled human resources. Tourism infrastructure includes mainly transport, accommodation, reception, catering and services like repairs, banks, currency exchange, medical services, communication, water supply and sewage facilities. This implies that the tourism sector has very strong linkages with other sectors and hence, can be relied upon to develop these sectors also.

Co-operation between departments of tourism and of planning could encourage tourist-driven development which also benefited the local community—improved water supplies and drainage schemes for whole areas and not just individual hotels, planting to improve the surroundings of a tourist site and reduce erosion, monument conservation. The improvement of services in the older areas of towns must be accompanied by planning controls or else the rise in land values will encourage destructive redevelopment. (Sarah, 1988)². Thus, planning process needs to be inclusive of the destination community voices and a balance has to be struck between active involvement of NGO's and academic scholars specialized in such topics so as to minimize the negative implications of tourism.

employment for local population. In 2003, this sector generated direct employment of 3.8 lakh and an estimated total employment (direct plus and indirect) of 7.8 lakh and they respectively account for 3 per cent and 6.2 per cent of total employment (Economic Review, 2003).

² NID's plan for Fatehpur Sikri, commissioned by the department of tourism, shows what could be done, but at present there is neither the will nor the mechanism to implement it, and only the hotel—the part which brings immediate profit—is being built.

2. SOCIO - POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF TOURISM

According to Caroline Ashley et.al, 2000, benefits to the poor from tourism depend on whether and how they can participate economically in the industry – though the non-economic impacts discussed below must also be considered, such as, human and financial capital of the poor particularly important skills in tourism which include language, and an understanding of tourist expectations training for small scale tourism often has to begin with ‘what is a tourist?’, because being a tourist is such an alien experience for the poor.³

Similarly, financial capital is critical for the poor to be able to expand informal sector activities within tourism. She argues poor entrepreneurs have generated their own capital over time, by starting small and reinvesting profits over several years. Social capital and organisational strength – will increase where the poor have access to dynamic and flexible forms of social capital, in such a given situation the potential for participation may be greater. (ibid)

The service nature of the industry and high proportion of low-skill domestic-type jobs increase accessibility to women. Often women are most involved in informal sector activities, particularly hawking (Shah, 2000). The gender quotient; i.e, the percentage of tourism jobs filled by women varies from over 60% in some countries such as Bolivia, to under 10% in some Muslim countries (UNED, 1999) but from inferences of statistics in literatures shows that south asian region is the least gender sensitive regions of the world.

Mapping the existing livelihood strategies and aspirations - tourism is generally an additional diversification option for the poor, not a substitute for their core activities. Whether tourism clashes with or complements the seasonality of agriculture, livestock management or fisheries is often a key issue. But risks involved are not towards the lower side. These risks are greater where land ownership and tenure are out in the hands of giants of tourism industry and not in the hands of community members. Community people tend to sell their land holding to outside speculators and often end up as workers in the industry and thereby gets reduced to a position where they are in no power to be part of the decision making process.

Policy and Planning gain is the resultant situation where the poor lack rights to negotiate directly with tourism companies and this paves way for government authorities to promote their interests in an undemocratic way. For instance, control over planning approval can be used to require or encourage investors’ commitments to benefiting local communities. Regulations and bureaucracy - tourism regulations covering tourist activities, qualifications of workers, or service standards are often geared to the more formal sector

enterprises and may impinge most on those lacking contacts and capital.

Tourists often stay in accommodation that is owned by outsiders and local élites, and spend time at attractions from which local poor people – for instance, suppliers of goods and services – are excluded. Access to the tourism market is most constrained where ‘enclave tourism’⁴ and all-inclusive packages develop. Often the only option for local people then is hawking, either at the enclave entry and exit points or at roadsides. (Caroline et.al, 2000)

Formal sector tourism enterprises can provide a market for the labour and products of the poor but often labour and luxury goods are imported from outside the locality. Tourism segment and type of tourist - community tourism is often thought of as the main avenue for the poor to participate in tourism (for example through community run lodges, campsites or craft centres, which are often supported by NGOs). However, poor individuals engage in all types of tourism through self-employment (e.g. hawking, or small enterprise) and casual labour. There is a lack of data on how participation of the poor varies by market segment, but emerging trends indicate the importance of domestic/regional tourism, the need to assess participation of the poor in mass tourism, and the vital role of the informal sector in any segment (ibid).

Apart from the above mentioned aspects, the environmental impacts must also be assessed by the state through the cycle of touristic operations – considering both planning and designing phase. Programmes are needed to spread awareness to all stakeholders on using resources sustainably and thereby reduce waste and over consumption. Capacity building process need more boost of all stakeholders to ensure that the best practise is followed and expert guidance is sought in each aspects of managing natural diversity, respecting integrity of vulnerable eco-systems and protected areas. If these practices are missing while promoting tourism, then there are many other serious challenges that are hidden en route to development.

Tourism development has serious implications and they are closely related to issues such as eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equity and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. (Kelly S. Bricker et.al, 2012)

³ <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/2861.pdf>

⁴ Organized markets, particularly at prime sites, can greatly facilitate local sales to tourists. For example, women craft-sellers have sites within some parks in KwaZulu Natal (South Africa), while at Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, one of the demands of local communities is for a market at the Park entrance.

3. CHALLENGES TO TOURISM (DEVELOPMENT) MODEL IN KERALA

A review undertaken by Jithendran & Tom (2007), of Kerala's experience in tourism HRD and the available literature brings up a number of issues in education and training for rural tourism development. They include:

- Limitation of financial resources
- Lack of awareness among the rural community members about the potential opportunities that tourism development entails.
- Lack of necessary basic knowledge and skills, e.g. low levels of literacy, which limits the ability of the rural community members to participate in tourism HRD
- Lack of educational infrastructure
- Lack of trained trainers - which seem to be a universal problem in all communities where tourism is a relatively new activity.
- Lack of entrepreneurship - there is certainly an urban/rural divide when it comes to entrepreneurial attitudes and abilities, in that, compared to urban communities there is a shortage of entrepreneurial activities in the rural communities, which could be due to lack of awareness and resources.
- Under-utilization of available infrastructure - in spite of the general infrastructure deficiencies, rural communities are likely to have at least some elementary educational and socio-cultural infrastructure.
- Lack of coverage of tourism within the general education.
- Lack of quality control - When tourism is newly introduced in a community, the likely sense of euphoria would generate a lot of interest in tourism as a vocation, which, as the Kerala experience show, could spawn training institutions and
- Cultural prejudices in taking up employment in tourism. The traditional rural communities are likely to have strict and rigid attitudes about employment in fields such as tourism.

Apart from the above points, on the one hand people or the local community is not given much importance and not much awareness is generated among people regarding any forms of rural tourism and hence the contribution of the local community to rural tourism is less. (Jubin Joy John et.al., 2010) Vinay. R Raj (2012) argues that it is important for the local community to understand the nature of different trends in market to evolve strategies to boost up the tourism sector and by identifying these factors it will help the community to design the short term and long term agenda to develop the tourism programme.

On the other hand, all over the world the development of tourism is considered beneficial, and government bodies are set up to encourage it. But it can be more disruptive to the whole of society than any other industry, and even without

government encouragement there is often no shortage of non-government groups ready to promote it. Tourism will not be stopped (at least not in a free and democratic society), out judicious planning laws-negative controls and positive incentives-can help to control where tourists go, and spread what is bound to be an increasing tourist load. The success of a government tourism department should be measured not, in terms of tourist numbers or revenue from tourism, but in the way it has integrated tourism into the existing communities and used the investment generated to benefit those communities as well as the tourists. If the local communities are themselves aware of all that tourism development can mean, then they can help to make tourism work for them. (Sarah, 1988)

4. CONTENTIONS AND DISCONTENTS

On World Tourism day (27th October, 2007), a group of women (Theeradesha Mahila Vedi – women wing of Kerala Independent Fish workers Federation) forwarded a mail to the Union Minister of Tourism and Culture protesting against the one sided and biased discussions and celebrations held on the same day by Indian tourism, governmental and inter - governmental agencies under the theme of “tourism opens door to women”. Among other issues they mainly noted that tourism is not only insensitive of gender issues but also situation of marginalized communities such as Dalits, Adivasis and fisher folks is much worse.

Subsequently, again, on March 22nd 2008 people from communities of fisher- folks, Dalit, women and youth who were supported by civil society organizations, the academia and the intellectual circles protested in a huge way against the non-participatory nature of the International Conference on Responsible Tourism held from 21- 24 March 2008 at the Le Meridien Hotel in Kochi under the banner of Kerala's and India's tourism departments and the Indian section of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT). The protesting group after the street protest, gathered at Achutha Menon Hall for a ‘Convention on Irresponsible Tourism in Thiruvananthapuram’.

Similar repeated events seemed like the culmination of suppressed anger of disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of society which had lost confidence in the government's policies and practices such as tourism's encroachment on shorelines and forests, displaced, disempowering and dispossessing from their livelihoods, environmental degradation and commercialization of culture. At the same time as a contradiction we also see accolades showered on the Responsible Tourism concept initiated by the government of Kerala. This initiative was first implemented at four destinations including Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Wayanad as a pilot venture. Among these destinations Kumarakom was honoured by Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India for the best Responsible Tourism initiative in Kerala and it also bagged the national award for rural tourism and later in

2013 won the “UNWTO Ulysses award for innovation in public policy and governance award”.⁵

5. RESPONSIBLE TOURISM (RT) CONCEPT INITIATIVE

The ‘triple bottom – line’ concept i.e. economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility are the foundation principles on which Responsible Tourism concept had been envisioned. A detailed picture of RT became clearer with features and aims only after the Cape Town Declaration of 2002, though the concept of RT first originated in 1996. RT seeks to generate greater economic and over all well being of the destination communities whereby reducing the ill effects of tourism impacts.

The question now arises how responsible is responsible tourism in the Kerala Model? If the implementation part addressed all the issues that the local community is facing then why is there so much discontent and hatred against tourism programmes and conferences among the people of Kerala? What are the aspects of the Kerala tourism policy those have so much negative bearing on the communities who are at the receiving end.

Public outcries and concerns are not a thing of past, even today we see group asserting their voices against non-inclusive tourism development and these reveal that tourism’s impact on social relations, gender discrimination and power relations have never been the focal nor even peripheral points of discussion whereas the only agenda was to blindly promote tourism as an economic mainstay and to increase the foreign exchange. Whereas it is ironical to see lack of social equity and inclusion based approach towards development when the Kerala state minister (Shri. A. P. Anilkumar) for Tourism also hold charge of Welfare of Scheduled Castes & Backward Classes from 2011. Also to be noted here that, any opposition to large-scale tourism projects by environmental and labour activists is often dealt with through undemocratic means. (TT Sreekumar, 2002)

A survey of state government legislations shows there has been few anti - people legislative interventions in the tourism sector in Kerala such as Kerala Tourism (Protection and Conservation of Areas) Act, 2005 which jeopardize the decentralization process and hugely reduce the scope for local participation at the decision making and implementation levels of tourism projects bestowed through amendments 73 & 74 of Indian Constitution of the Local Self Governments.

On one hand, Kerala’s Tourism Policy (2012) document verbally aims to encourage and assist local bodies to form Tourism Working Group in tourist hot- spots and as per the Panchayath Raj Act, the sole power for regulating the development activities is vested with the local bodies. And one the other hand Master plans, Detailed Town Planning

schemes and Kerala Municipal Building Rules (KMBR) are the tools used for controlling and regulating the development of any area and impinges serious limitations on destination community people’s options.

Other provisions such as Town and Country Planning Act for declaring any area with special character as special zones and controlling its development with special guidelines prepared for that particular zone. Departments in association with Town and Country Planning Department along with local bodies will have to identify tourism important areas for its conservation and preservation, and prepare and implement special guidelines considering its carrying capacity. Town and Country Planning department is responsible for the preparation and implementation of Area Development Plans for the areas of tourism relevance.⁶ These mechanisms are used to restrict the local community getting empowered through the amendments 73 & 74 of Indian Constitution of the Local Self Governments.

Along with this it is also pertinent to mention that the Kerala tourism department played an important role in projecting tourism as a growing and revenue building industry to government in short span of time and this rapid growth of tourism represents an economic boon or a mirage of it. Tourism in Kerala is projected as one of the best source of foreign exchange but in reality its contribution to overall state’s economy is minimal. But administratively the benefits of tourism and its contribution in Kerala is highly inflated without proper analysis. (T.T Sreekumar and Govindan Parayil, 2002) In any case, the government have started rampant replication process of Responsible Tourism ventures in new areas and they include Kumbalangi in Ernakulam, Vythiri and Ambalavayal in Wayanad and Bekal in Kasaragod.

Here, it is important to analyse the impact on livelihood caused by tourism development and in this regard it is inevitable to look at the issues of land alienation, denial of access to resources, violation of forest rights acts and resultant encroachment, loss of traditional occupations, lack of employment opportunities in the formal tourism industry, forced movement of labour to the informal sector. The possible effects of the tourism policies are that communities have been evicted from their traditional lands. Their control and access to their traditional homelands has been compromised. They have suffered social degradation brought about by foreign influences and commercialization of their culture. And in the name responsible tourism and eco – tourism projects leads to violation of forest rights acts and results in mass scale of forest encroachment. For example, in the tourism hot – spot (district of Wayanad) there are numerous cases of hunger death cases reported.

⁵<http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/thiruvananthapuram/Top-UN-Award-for-Kerala-Tourism/2014/01/28/article2023989.ece>

⁶<https://www.keralatourism.org/Kerala%20Tourism%20Policy%202011.pdf>

6. CONCLUSION

In many societies tourism still seem to be rated poorly as a profession, especially when it comes to employment for women. Though such attitudes undergo drastic changes as time go by and when tourism become strongly entrenched in the local economy, they are detrimental to tourism development and local participation during the initial stages of tourism in a community. (ibid, 2007) Therefore, the voices of discontent arising from the local population hint something similar in the context of Kerala.

Therefore, in the larger context of liberalised trade regimes, the opening up of national economy, new economic policies and globalization - the middle class and the upper class of society hailed the changes, the question remains what these changes meant for the indigenous people, Dalits, Adivasis, women, coastal communities and the other weaker sections of society. Did the neo- liberal policies with respect to tourism aim to address or redress the economic, social and cultural entitlements of marginalized communities? What are the measures adopted for the protection of livelihood of the local community – do they benefit from tourism’s influence or not? Do they have greater access to healthcare, adequate housing, sanitation, education and employment? Did they have any influence in any of the development decisions? Did they have any involvement in decision making? And are their natural resources (which they were dependent on) protected etc are intriguing questions to be raised for research in future. These few questions are the centrifugal aspects upon which the true intent of Kerala model of tourism rests and does it actually stand true to its ‘responsible/sustainable model of tourism’ so as to be replicated elsewhere.

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