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Press

Jenni K. Alex (Ed.)

**Conservation, Development
and Displacement**

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RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: THE NEW FRONTIER OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Suchitra A.*

Assistant Professor

Department of Commerce

Sree Sankara Vidyapeetom College

Valayanchirangara, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

Making our earth a better place to live in is the motto of today's world and the triple bottom line approach provides the framework for ensuring sustainability. Attempts are made by the corporate to ensure responsible and just behaviour towards the society. Similar efforts can be seen in the Tourism industry which had taken up a name "Responsible Tourism". "Responsible tourism is tourism which: minimizes negative social, economic and environmental impacts, generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities. Responsible tourism can be viewed as the new frontier of eco-tourism. The concept is gaining great importance now days and many tourist destinations in Kerala have also realized the need to minimize the negative effects like degeneration of cultural heritage, social inequalities, threats to the environment, no benefits to the locals and unregulated development etc. This has resulted in the application of responsible tourism in the state which will be people-oriented community friendly, participatory and sustainable with more responsible approaches. This paper makes an attempt to understand the concept of responsible tourism and the responsible tourism practices adopted by the tourist destinations on Kerala. The study is based on

* Corresponding Author's Email: suchitraa@sasvcollege.ac.in

secondary data which is collected from the official website of Kerala Tourism and other articles related to responsible tourism and its practices. The study will make an analysis of how the different destinations in Kerala have adopted the responsible tourism practices.

Keywords: *Sustainable Tourism, Sustainability, Responsible Tourism*

Introduction

Tourism Industry is the most important source of income for any country which is blessed by the nature and India is no exception to this. Tourism is the largest service industry in India by contributing to a large proportion of the national income and by providing ample employment opportunities. The importance of this sector lies in the fact it enables the growth of other industries and the development of the local community. When we go through the map of tourism destinations in India, Kerala holds a dominant position in it. Even though tourism brings large amount of income to the state; it had several negative impacts on the socio cultural and environmental aspects. It had resulted in several disturbing issues like degeneration of cultural heritage, social inequalities, threats to the environment, no benefits to the locals and unregulated development etc. All these have resulted in the application of responsible tourism in the state which will be people oriented, community friendly, participatory and sustainable with more responsible approaches.

Responsible Tourism is a broader concept encompassing the approach of triple bottom line. Responsible tourism is any form of tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way. "Responsible tourism is tourism which minimises negative social, economic and environmental impacts, generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities. Responsible tourism is all about creating better places to live in and better places to visit. They are complementary to each other. We cannot offer a better place to visit for our tourists in a situation where we pay very low or do not give employment to the local people. So, equipping ourselves is

important in order to provide boundless enjoyment to the people visiting us. It is possible through the motto of Responsible Tourism "Better Together." The role of each stakeholder is important in ensuring responsible tourism. So, the social relevance of this project is quite high. The RT project had so far succeeded in creating visible benefit to the local community on economic and environmental fronts.

It is evident that the Government was able to initiate various agricultural activities in the concerned destinations through responsible tourism. They were able to solve the problems like lands left fallow and low demand for agricultural produce. They were also able to promote local products by establishing linkages with Hotel Industry in the destination. The local artisans and craftsman were also given an upliftment by the promotion of souvenir industry. Also, the packages in Kumarakom like 'A Day with Farmers' and 'Village Experience at Kumarakom' resulted in the promotion of agriculture.

Shyamala *et. al.* (2014) had studied the emerging trends in Kerala regarding the responsible tourism. They have studied how responsible tourism is implemented in different tourist destinations in Kerala in the early stages and they have also suggested some measures like education, campaigns for creating awareness among the local community etc. They also feel that the empowerment of the local community should be encouraged through the activities of eco-tourism. Chettiparamb and Kokkranikal (2015) had made a case study of Kerala regarding sustaining responsible tourism. The aim of this paper was to discuss the processes involved in operationalising the concept of responsible tourism' within the state of Kerala, India, and analyse some of the projects. They have discussed how the implementation is done in different destinations and the organizational structure of the committee for implementing responsible tourism. They discuss about the role of self-help groups like Kudumbasree and the local government in the success of responsible tourism.

The concept of RT was first proposed in the Cape Town Conference which was organised by the Responsible Tourism Partnership and Western Cape

Tourism as a side event preceding the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The Cape Town Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations was attended by 280 delegates from 20 countries. The conference grew out of the South African work on responsible tourism guidelines and involved delegates field-testing the South African Guidelines on sites in and around Cape Town.

Though the concept of responsible tourism was there right from 1996, it was after the Cape Town Declaration of 2002 that we got a detailed picture of responsible tourism. As per the declaration Responsible Tourism is that which

- Minimises negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;
- Generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social, and environmental issues;
- Provides access for physically challenged people;
- Is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence. A set of guide lines were also developed taking into account the economic, social and environmental aspects in the Cape Town Declaration. The guidelines were regarding economic, social, environmental aspects.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) formed for initiating this in 2007 and it established and managed global sustainable standards with the aim of increasing sustainable tourism knowledge and practices among public and private stakeholders. They have developed a set of common frameworks to

be followed to establish sustainable tourism as a fact. GSTC is a global organization created by the United Nations system and leading global conservation organizations to develop standards for sustainability in travel and tourism.

Framework for responsible tourism in Kerala

Kerala Tourism has developed a classification system known as “Responsible Tourism Classification” which is a means to provide a visible and adoptable platform to all those tourism enterprises which are ready for responsible tourism practices. The criteria for classification were based on the GSTC Criteria developed by Global Sustainability Tourism council. It was customized to Kerala context by incorporating necessary changes.

RT classification

The two models which were developed for responsible tourism was enterprise model led by the tourism industry and the destination model led by the local bodies. Both these model support and complement each other to make the destination sustainable. The RT Classification scheme was the first step for the enterprise model. A committee was nominated by the Government to conduct the RT Classification. The formal decision to develop the RT Certification scheme was taken in the State Level Responsible Tourism Committee held on 16th February 2010.

Criteria for RT classification

Responsible Tourism Criteria has been grouped into 4 key areas viz. Sustainable Management, Socio – Cultural Responsibility, Economic Responsibility and Environment Responsibility. Potential indicators have been identified under each criterion which is quantifiable and measurable. Scores have been assigned to each potential indicator. The properties who would like to get classified need to get a minimum score in each sub-group to become eligible for the classification. The final classification is awarded based on the total score

obtained by the property. Presently the classification is done only for properties like accommodation by hotels, home stays etc. The major criteria used under each sub-group are given below.

Sustainable Management Criteria

The first step towards achieving sustainable business practices is creating a sustainability management system (SMS) that includes transparent, documented policies and procedures, implementation and communication plans. The primary purpose of the sustainability management plan is to guide decision-making, management, and the daily operations of the business in a sustainable manner. Following are the Sustainable management criteria considered for the classification;

- Approvals/Classifications from Tourism Ministry/Department
- Customer satisfaction is measured and corrective action taken where appropriate
- Realistic promotional materials and service delivery
- Information on & Interpretation of nature and local culture
- Personnel Training & Management

Socio-cultural responsibility Criteria

Socio - Cultural responsibility focuses on the efforts of the properties for community development, promotion of local arts and, culture, addressing social issues etc. The following are the criteria included under this head;

- Land procurement and impacts on local community
- Support to Community development initiatives
- Code of conduct for Management, Staff and Visitors
- Code of conduct for visits to culturally and historically sensitive sites

- Policy against Child abuse
- Equity in hiring women
- Promotion of local art and culture
- Attempts to promote local souvenirs

Economic Responsibility Area

Economic Responsibility criteria measure the efforts of the property in contributing towards the economic benefit to the local community including employment. The following are the criteria included under this head;

- Local Employment
- Purchase of local goods and services
- Support of local small entrepreneurs
- Wages, staff welfare, and legal protection
- Economic contributions to protection of natural, cultural and built environment

Environmental Responsibility Criteria

Environmental responsibility focuses on energy and water conservation aspects, waste management, greenhouse gases etc.

- Sustainable sitting and design
- Locally appropriate principles of sustainable construction
- Code of conduct for visits to environmentally sensitive sites
- Environmentally friendly purchasing policy
- Energy Conservation
- Water Consumption
- Waste Management
- Attempts to reduce Green House Gas emissions

Classification Scores

Total score of 1000 has been divided into under four responsibility categories as;

Sustainable Management	200
Socio Cultural responsibility	250
Economic responsibility	250
Environmental responsibility	300
Total	1000

Properties are expected to achieve a minimum score in each responsibility areas to qualify for classification as given below

Sustainable Management	100
Socio Cultural responsibility	125
Economic responsibility	125
Environmental responsibility	150
Total	500

The properties that have scores between 750 – 1000, 600-749 and 500-599 will be classified into Platinum, Gold and Silver respectively. In 2017, another move was made by the Government in this regard by announcing a new RT based new Tourism policy and the RT activities were initiated through Responsible Tourism Mission. The Responsible Tourism Classification Criteria for Hotels and Resorts has also been revised by giving a thrust to the Environmental Criteria, to promote environmental protection and eco-restoration activities through tourism. Again in 2021, Government issued revised order for Responsible Tourism Classification for Hotels and Resorts. The revised 'Responsible Tourism Classification for Hotels and Resorts' classify Hotels and Resorts as:

- RT Diamond
- RT Gold
- RT Silver

The most important revision was the RT Green Classification is the introduction of RT Green which will be awarded based on the score in Environmental Responsibility Criteria. A property which scores more than 80% in this criterion will be given this classification.

Experience of responsible tourism from Kerala tourism industry

In Kerala responsible tourism is practiced since 2007. The pilot launching was done in four destinations- Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Wayanad. Later it was also implemented in Kumbalangi, Bekal and Ambalavayal in 2012. The second phase was launched in Kumarakom again and it was extended to three more destinations. By 2017 the third phase of RT was launched all over Kerala.

RT is implemented in all destinations under the leadership of State Level Responsible Tourism Committee (SLRTC). Three working groups i.e. economic, social and environmental are constituted and along with that other cells like technical support cell, quality cell etc ensure the proper implementation of RT in these destinations. A Price fixing committee was also functioning in the initial stage. The Samrudhi Activity group was operated by Kudumbasree members. Samrudhi has assumed the role of procurement and supply of local produces, perishable as well as non-perishable, to the hotels / restaurants. The farmer groups and homestead farmers were the producers of the supplies and formed the first link in the supply chain. Several new schemes were introduced in this regard by the R T Mission.

PEPPER (People's Participation for Participatory Planning and Empowerment Through Responsible Tourism) is an attempt by the RT mission to establish 100% structured destinations in Kerala. The aim of PEPPER is to explore the destinations which have tourism potential and develop them in to one in a sustainable way. It is a way of ensuring the participation of the public in finding the less known tourist destinations. Another one known as STREET is to be launched in select locations of seven districts in Kerala with an aim of helping the visitors to experience the speciality of each location. Apart from

these several projects are taken up by the RT mission like tourism clubs, accessible tourism, experiential tour packages etc.

RT and Benefits to the local community

The role of RT cell was significant in reaping benefits for the local community. They got the opportunity to make use of their traditional lifestyle and cultural talents to get economically rewarded. The RT Cell was instrumental in establishing units for vegetable cultivation, fish processing, chapatti making, chicken processing, supply of tender coconuts, gift making, pappad making, handicraft and painting, souvenir, and performing groups like Shinkarimelam and other cultural groups. The ownership and participation were different in each of the destinations. Some examples of benefit to the local community from different tourist destinations because of the implementation of responsible tourism are as follows.

In Kumarakom, the RT Cell identified several social issues that 'irritated' the local community like pollution, displacement of local people, conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses by filling paddy fields, denial of local access to the backwaters by tourism properties, tourism related immoral activities, increasing consumption of alcohol and tendency for drug usage and encroachment of backwater shores by tourism properties and addressed to a great extent.

- A sewage plant was set up at Kumarakom is intended to control the pollution of Vembanad Lake caused by the houseboats.
- Ban on use of plastic items was strictly enforced in Kumarakom Panchayat,
- The bird sanctuary area was declared as a plastic free zone.
- Converted uncultivated land back to cultivated land.
- A walkway project provided the tourists and the local residents alike to get access to the lake.
- Guard against immoral activities and atrocities against women.

- Created difficulty in granting of licenses to tourism properties to reclaim and encroach to the backwaters.
- Development of infrastructure.
- A Drinking water scheme, for the benefit of local community was set up with the cooperation of the hotel industry at Kumarakom.
- The street lighting in Kumarakom had improved
- Helped in the development of entrepreneurs.
- Since there is no intermediary, the benefits of RT movement go straight to the local community who produce perishable and non-perishable items for the tourism enterprises.
- Tour packages like "Village life experience" and "A day with the farmer" give opportunities to tourists to experience the village life and it benefited the local community

In Kovalam many social issues were prevailing related to waste management, scarcity of proper drinking water and increased sex abuse of children etc. The introduction of RT helped the region to compact these issues in a better way.

- The tour package Village Life Experience was designed to benefit the community directly.
- "Zero Tolerance" launched in Kovalam under RT was a campaign against child sex abuse.
- The Village life Experience (VLE) tour packages have helped the community to get benefited from tourism directly.
- RT has helped to establish a linkage between the local community and the tourism industry. The local residents including women got more involved in tourism development.
- Vythiri was declared as "plastic free". Alternatives like paper bags replaced plastic bags in the destination.
- Good potential for handicraft units and souvenirs.

- Local community is seen to be benefitted because of the employment provided to them. However, this cannot be attributed fully to RT.
- An ethnic food corner at Edakkal was started which is operated by the Kuruma community. It helped in popularizing the ethnic food culture.
- Promotion of cultural activities of the tribal community and they could earn from their performances

In Thekkady the local community was benefitted with the transfer of knowledge and capacity building exercises targeted at those in the primary sector.

- Training for enabling the farmers in organic farming.
- Members of Kudumbasree units attended training on the technical aspects of bee-keeping.
- The RT initiative in Thekkady organized a health and sanitation awareness programme for the residents in two wards as an effort to upgrade and maintain the quality of environment.
- A package tour to experience the village life was launched in the destination and the local community benefited from this
- Because of RT, the number of Kudumbasree units in Thekkady increased
- The hotels and resorts have engaged residents for cleaning and gardening related works.

So, the understanding of the benefits for local community helps us in recognising the fact that RT can be a boon to us if properly practiced. The other destinations launched in the second and third phase are also very fast in reaping the benefits of RT. Bepore is only a recent RT destination, but it has already completed half of the work of its development plan. The project aims to train about 400 local community members in various entrepreneurship programmes and to develop about 1000 RT units in the area. Bekal as a RT destination focussed on providing the local community training for various production units. Like this all the destinations focus on the empowerment of the society by improving their economic situation through this process. The self-help groups of the destinations play an important role in the activities and thus women

empowerment is an important outcome of responsible tourism in Kerala. The various projects introduced in this help the women community to earn and thrive. Another benefit to be stressed is the positive contributions to the conservation of the nature. Even the rating given to the RT destinations is giving due weightage to the environmental responsibility of the tourist destinations. The introduction of RT leads to reclamation of wastelands in many areas. The agriculture sector got a new life through this mission.

Conclusion

Kerala holds a dominant position in the tourist destination map at global level. The availability of plenty of natural resources, skilled manpower, supportive entrepreneurial community, strong local-self-governments, civil society organizations, multitude of micro enterprises, streams of professionals and academicians, responsible media, and responsive tourism industry. All this provide the state with a favourable atmosphere for tourism. Today practicing responsible tourism had become a necessity rather than a choice. It is necessary ensuring enjoyment for the tourists as well as development of the local community. For India, Kerala Tourism is taking the lead role in demonstrating the power of adopting sustainable practices through Responsible Tourism initiatives it had embarked since last few years. Responsible tourism practices will help the tourism industry of Kerala to remain competent in the global market. The tourism industry has a major role in achieving the sustainability of a destination ably supported by the government, local administration, and the local community.

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Conservation, Development and Displacement

The world has witnessed a cornucopia of discourses and contentions about conservation and development irrespective of the geographic realm. Displacement due to both conservation initiatives and development projects are two sides of the same coin. Various policies for the protection of the environment and biodiversity are currently facing widespread skepticism and several civil society movements are documented, even from indigenous communities. The book 'Conservation, Development and Displacement' adumbrates the need for keeping a balance between development and conservation where in each case displacement is a common factor with cultural and livelihood erosion. This book is useful for academicians, policymakers, scholars, researchers, sociologists, ecologists and people involved in conservation and development excogitations. It is expected that the book will engender the need to prioritize the needs and rights of local communities not only in conservation planning but also in various development projects for ensuring sustainable and equitable approaches to the rights and needs of local communities.

Dr. Jenni K. Alex is Assistant Prof. and Head, Department of Economics, Newman College Thodupuzha, Kerala, India. He has more than 12 research publications and 25 paper presentations on various national and international platforms. He has more than 15 years of teaching experience with specialization in Econometrics, Macroeconomics and Ecotourism.

