

Responsible Tourism and Kerala Economy Special Reference to Kumarakom

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Tourism as an industry creates employment on a large scale. It has become an economic activity nowadays. The economic activity of tourism makes huge income to the government. The tourist arrivals from abroad help the government to earn foreign reserves. In 1976, the Tourism Society of England defined tourism as “the temporary, short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they usually live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination”. Several communities and people travelling distant places to spend their leisure time. Tourism stimulates economic growth both national and local levels. We are living in a busy world. For reducing the stress of work, most of the companies promote leisure trips and travels. This helps to earn income for the government as well as helps in development of underdeveloped countries with tourism assets. The phenomenon of tourism also helps in the development of local areas. This helps in improvement of the standard of living of the local people.

Tourism is a labour intensive industry and it provides employment to the public. It is an industry which provides jobs to the public. It is a service industry. Experts call them as “Tourist resources” or “Tourist assets.” Tourism will change the socio, cultural, political environment of a society. If tourism is developed in new areas, jobs come to the local people and no need to go to urban areas in search of economic activity. Tourism is a major source of foreign exchange earning for India. The important tourist centres in India are Tajmahal, Ajanta and Ellora Caves, Golden temple, India Gate etc. The major tourist places in Kerala include Kovalam, Munnar, Thekkady, Wagamon, Kumarakom, Idukki, Silent valley etc.

The present study deals with responsible tourism conducted by collecting primary data from Kumarakom Gramapanchayat. 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 academics, responsible media and responsive tourism industry , provide the state an ideal setting to implement and practice sustainable tourism models in the state. Responsible Tourism (RT) is gaining widespread acceptance across the world today. Pioneering the concept of Responsible Tourism in India, Kerala in 2007, which launched the initiative in four destinations i.e, Kovalam, Kumarakom, Thekkady and Vythiri on a pilot basis. In 2012 the initiative was extended to three more destinations – Kumbalangi ,Bekal and Ambalavayal.

Tourism leads to economic growth and employment generation to large number of local people in Kerala . The state government views tourism as one of the few alternatives available to develop the economy since there is limited scope for employment in Agriculture sector and industrial sector. Tourism is being considered as an agent of social change bridging gaps among nations, regions and people and helping them to open up. Table:1 shows tourism impact on capital investment and table:2 shows Trends in Domestic and foreign Tourist arrivals in to Kerala.

Table :1 Tourism Impact on Capital Investment (2003)

Particulars	2003		2013	% of total Investment
	Capital Investment Value	% of Total Investment	Capital Investment	
India	412.9	7.0	1616.7	7.4
Kerala	18.1	7.8	75.1	8.3

(Source : Tourist statistics, Department of Tourism, Govt. of Kerala)

Table:2 Trends in Domestic and foreign Tourist arrivals in to Kerala

Year	Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists
	Number	Number
2000	5,013,221	209,933
2001	5,239,692	208,830
2002	5,423,000	219,000
2003	5,613,000	230,000

2004	5,809,000	242,000
2005	6,013,000	254,000
2006	6,223,000	267,000
2007	6,441,000	280,000
2008	6,666,000	294,000
2009	6,900,000	309,000
2010	7,141,000	324,000
2011	7,391,000	340,000
2012	7,650,000	357,000

(Source: Tourist statistics, Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of Kerala,2007)

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The ideal approach to tourism is that it should be an industry that acts as an instrument of socio-economic growth while minimizing the negative impacts on the environment. To meet these aims, the government follows the guidelines and the vision of Responsible Tourism which “creates better places for people to live in and better places to visit”. The State government has selected Kumarakom ,Wayand , Kovalam and Tekkady as pilot destinations to implement the Responsible Tourism initiative. Among these Kumarakom has come up with many innovative projects and initiatives which ensure the active participation of local bodies, industries, communities and Kudumbasree units to meet all the goals envisaged in Responsible Tourism. The initiative focuses more on the local participation on tourism than government intervention in the area. Responsible Tourism is an approach to the management of tourism, aimed at maximizing economic, social and environmental benefits and minimizing costs to destinations. Responsible Tourism is the one that creates better places to live in and better places to visit. Responsible Tourism actuates to foster a positive interaction between the tourist industry, the local communities and the travellers.

The responsible Tourism gives local population a central role in the touristic development of their own territory. The involvement of the local community through a participatory democracy and in the decision making process is essential for a sustainable touristic development. It minimizes the environmental impact created by tourists and respects the local culture, by including its essence in the overall touristic development. Focusing on and creating an awareness of the local culture, its traditions, the lifestyle, the local gastronomy, the handicrafts etc. It generates equally distributed economic benefits for the local population and its hosting territory. Responsible Tourism is a branch of tourism which ensures local participation in every field. The Responsible Tourism is very helpful in developing the standard of living and utilizing the local resource efficiently.

The Kumarakam Panchayath in Kottayam District is a place where a major portion of the population is making their subsistence level of income from tourism. This study covers only that part of Kumarakam Panchayath where people largely depend on Tourism and allied activities. It is a picturesque village which attracts foreign as well as domestic tourists. The study tried to find out the people’s attitude towards tourism and the positive and negative impacts of tourism faced by the local community. The study is based mainly on the local people and their respective views towards tourism.

DEPENDENCE OF PEOPLE ON TOURISM

The study shows that a larger population in this panchayath depends on income from tourism, because it has a higher potential for tourism development. The village provides great opportunity for the local people to earn from tourism by utilizing it to the maximum level. The study had proven that about 88% of the local villagers make some or other means of income from tourism and its related activities. There is only 11% of people who depends on other activities. The people not depending on tourism also have indirect impact of tourist activities in their lives.

TOURISM ASSETS

The tourism assets in Kumarakom Panchayats are the resources which create more income and attract people to this place. The tourism assets or tourist attractions to this place include cultural factors and natural resources. Natural resources are the main attractions to this panchayat. The major tourism assets in the Kumarakom Panchayath are natural resources. This include the back waters, lakes, bird sanctuary, handicrafts, picnic spots etc. The cultural activities also attract people to the picturesque village of Kumarakom. The natural beauty of the village attracts people even from foreign countries.

EDUCATION WISE CLASSIFICATION

The study shows that education is not an important factor in tourism in this area. The people who have higher education are government representatives. The people who engaged in responsible tourism activities are literate but not highly educated. In the Kumarakom Panchayat there is only 5 percentage of the people having education level above graduation.

AWARENESS AMONG PEOPLE ABOUT RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Responsible Tourism is an initiative taken by state government, local government and Kudumbasree mission to include the local people in tourism promotion and thereby make them to reap the benefits of tourism field. But many people are not aware about this project even though they are making benefits from it. The awakened people cooperate with the project and they are the important beneficiaries of this project.

CONTRIBUTION OF VARIOUS FACTORS TO RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The responsible tourism project utilizes not only the service of local people, but it needs the support from government, people's representatives, service of NGO's etc. The local people and government are the major contributors of this project. About 68 percent of the labour and capital are provided by the local community itself. The state government also contribute substantially to the tourist development. But it is assumed that the contribution of people's representatives is only marginal.

FIELDS WHICH UTILIZE LOCAL RESOURCES

The responsible tourism project mainly depends on local resources for implementing various programmes. So it uses those services which can be utilized for tourism development in this area. The local people contribute highly to the tourist activities. The contribution of them to transport sector is 34 percent, contribution to recreation is 30percent, contribution to accommodation is 20percent and contribution to handicrafts is 10percent. From this it is assumed that the local contribution is substantial to tourism development.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND FUNDS FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The responsible tourism seeks support and funds from the State government, Kudumbasree mission, local government and many organizations. The major source of fund is the state government which receives maximum income from this initiative. The state government is the major contributor to the funds for tourism development. The local government gives 10 percent of funds and Kudumbasree mission is the largest provider of support measures for the tourism initiative,ie,33percent. The state government and the local government contribute effectively for tourism development of the village.

THE LEVEL OF INCOME GENERATION FROM RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The responsible tourism project promotes tourism as well as local development. The local people make a subsistence level of income for living even though there are variations. During tourism season the average income is very high. But during off season they do not have any income. But most of the people in this area make only a subsistence level of income from tourism and allied activities.

TRAINING FOR CONDUCTING VARIOUS ACTIVITIES UNDER RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

There is an acute shortage of trained persons in this area. The fields like tourist guidance, houseboat services, transportation, environment conservation, food making etc. needs special training activities . But there are only a few people who are engaged in these activities, and are trained for conducting various programmes. There should be more trained and skilled persons for this project. Trained persons are necessary for the effective implementation of tourist activities.About 68 percent of the people in Kumarakom Panchayat who works for tourism development had been given training from the government officials. Only 38 per cent of unskilled labours are employed in tourism promotion activities.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

The responsible tourism project has a noticeable feature which is the largest participation of women. All these projects undertaken by responsible tourism are ensuring women's participation. The projects ensure a good standard of living and a good level of income for all the women participating in these programmes. They are the active participants and encouragement behind this programme. This programme not only helps the local women to earn money by their own but also helps them in supporting the society through their strong determination and willpower. Most of the women participating in responsible tourism are members of microfinance institutions and it helps them to handle money. Around 22 percent of the women participate in the activities of the ethnic restaurant. The Samrudhi scheme ensures 51 percent of the women's participation. About

17 percent of women participate in handicraft making and 5 percent of women participate in the village life experience scheme.

PROMOTION OF CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The traditional art forms of Kerala gets worldwide attention through the responsible tourism programme. The programme is supporting various traditional art forms and helps in protecting and preserving them. The art forms like Thiruvathira, Theyyam, Kathakali etc. are the major art forms which are promoted through the responsible tourism programme. It is an amazing fact that the responsible tourism programme develops socio-cultural, economic, and political fields of this panchayat.

ROLE OF MICRO FINANCE IN TOURISM

The micro finance institutions play a major role in tourism promotion activities. The institutions like Kudumbasree provides financial and material support for responsible tourism programme. Majority of the activities implemented as a part of the responsible tourism programme are financed by microfinance institutions. There are about 65% of the activities done by the funds of micro finance institutions.

THE ROLE OF INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

The responsible tourism programme is aimed at local development with tourism promotion. The responsible tourism programme is helping marketing of locally produced goods, providing resources for growth and many other services. The responsible tourism plays a vital role in the tourism development of this area. The responsible tourism ensures 68 percent of the marketing of local resources. It also provides 17 percent of the resources for tourism development. The responsible tourism ensures development of the transport and communication facilities of the local community.

Tourism is the main employer in the Kumarakom Panchayath. The Responsible Tourism project is the factor which supports local population for tourism programmes. The Responsible Tourism is very important in developing the economy of the panchayath. The main achievement of this project is the large scale participation of women in the project. The project gives employment to women and help to support their family. But the project faces many problems relating to lack of resources. The local people face acute shortage of drinking water in the panchayath. The pollution made the water in backwaters rotten and unusable. The people demands adequate drinking water facility. The government should emphasize on providing infrastructure facilities, which will be helpful for both tourists and local people. The local environment groups should be functioned effectively and it is essential for ensuring sustainability of nature as well as tourism. There should be measures for waste disposal and effective management of plastic in such an environmentally sensitive area. More training should be given for the local people for the effective implementation of Responsible Tourism programme. The local government institutions should ensure that the local resources are fully and efficiently utilized for tourism development. The youth should be attracted towards tourism promotion activities through creating employment opportunities in the tourism field.

The motto of responsible tourism programme is better together. It shows that there should be organized and well planned activities for tourism promotion. The bottom line of Responsible Tourism is economic, social and environmental sustainability with minimum impact. This study shows that Kumarakom has achieved it to a large extent. The Kumarakom Responsible Tourism project has won the prestigious UNWTO Ulysses Award for the excellence and innovation in tourism as well as the National award for Best Tourism project. These all shows that the Responsible Tourism project has a higher potential for growth. It must achieve its aim to encourage conservation of natural and cultural heritage. The project must become an inspiration by enhancing nature, a fascinating culture and the simple easy of rural life. It must explore new areas of development for the local areas. Thereby it can become a tourist destination forever to travellers all over the world. So the responsible tourism demands collective effort from the part of the people, government and all related people to maintain a sustainable tourism. So all the well-wishers of the project expects organized and responsible efforts in the Panchayath for making responsible tourism a grand success.

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