



PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY BASED ECOTOURISM (CBET): RELEVANCE OF CBET FOR THE SUSTAINED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF KERALA, INDIA

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Abstract

Given the excellent tourism resources of Kerala state in India, in the form of enviable natural beauty, vast coastal areas, and comfortable climate, Kerala is often projected as 'God's own Country' before the world so as to lure more tourists. The policies of the Government of Kerala and the supportive measures by the diverse stakeholders have led to steady growth in foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) into the State and hence growing foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) also. These favorable conditions have created an environment conducive for the fast growth of tourism in Kerala. But, there are growing apprehensions about the sustainability of the tourism initiatives in the State in view of the fast degradation of its natural environment. In this context, this paper makes a critical study of the relevance of Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) as a model for the sustainable and equitable economic development of Kerala.

Key Words: Ecotourism, Community Based Ecotourism (CBET), Foreign Exchange Earnings.

Introduction

The immense potential of tourism for faster economic growth and creation of employment opportunities is widely recognized in the literature. In fact, tourism can attract foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) to the host country as foreign tourists spend money for their boarding, conveyance and other purchases. So, most countries of the world, particularly developing nations like India are promoting tourism aggressively for rapid economic development. As a typical developing nation, India has got a special advantage in this regard because India is endowed with excellent tourism resources in the form of extremely rich cultural heritage, world renowned historical spots (like, Taj Mahal), lengthy coastal areas, wide range of flora and fauna along with serene natural beauty and so on. Kerala state in particular in the Indian union is especially suitable for tourism promotion as Kerala's enviable tourism resources range from its extreme natural beauty, vast coastal areas, conducive climatic conditions and so on. As the vast tourism resources of Kerala is still underutilized (Manoj, P. K., 2008)[20] there is good scope for more aggressive promotion of tourism in the State. But, it is vitally important that the State's natural environment is duly preserved and ecological balance is maintained intact. This is because of the severe threats that the State's natural environment is facing, leading to its fast degradation because of an 'ecological overkill' (Oommen, M. A., 2008) [30] arising from over-exploitation and unscrupulous use of natural resources. So, tourism promotion without harming its natural environment alone is sustainable in Kerala in the long run (Manoj, P. K, 2010) [21]. In the above context, this paper critically analyses the scope of Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) in Kerala state as an environment-friendly and sustainable model for tourism promotion in the State, and hence as a tool for its faster economic development.

Relevance and Significance of the Study

In spite of the highest achievements of Kerala in the whole of India in terms of universal literacy, and indicators relating to the progress in social, cultural, health and such other fields; it may be noted that the sustainability of the so called 'Kerala Model' as well as its equity is growingly under threat. Poor industrialization is still a reality in Kerala even after six decades of its formation and this growingly consumerist economy is depending on remittances of migrants from abroad. Slow growth in agriculture is another issue. Though the peculiar features of Kerala is conducive for the tourism sector, sustainability of tourism and other nature based industries is growingly under threat, due to the 'rudely shaken' state of 'equity and sustainability foundations' of Kerala's economic growth, wherein 'Ecological Overkill' (Oommen, M. A., 2008)[30] has become a reality in all development efforts. Due to its basic features, CBET can ensure equitable economic growth; since it can accommodate women and other marginalized groups like the rural poor including the tribal communities and bring them into the mainstream. In this context, the scope of CBET as a tool of sustainable and equitable economic growth deserves a closer study.

Review of Literature

Studies on Community Based Ecotourism (CBET), per se, are rather scarce. But, many tourism studies have examined the economic benefits derived by the local community from tourism and allied activities, need for preservation of environment for



long term sustainability of tourism, etc. The question as to whether the local people are benefited from tourism activities and if so whether the benefits are sustainable in the long run is relevant here. The adverse effects of tourism on the ecology and environment need to be closely studied in the context of Kerala. This is because, 'Ecological Overkill' persists in Kerala leading to issues of long-term sustainability (especially from the environmental perspective) and equity (especially from the perspective of local people and the benefits that they derive from tourism) (Oommen, M. A., 2008) [30].

A research article by Kumar, Yathish (2007)[18] "Tourism Sector and Sustainable Development" has observed that while the basic objectives of tourism include improving the quality of life of respective local community and also offering a good experience to the tourists, it is vital to ensure that the purity of the natural environment is preserved. This is because of the fact that the environmental quality is very important for both the tourists and also the local populace, the long-term sustainability of tourism being dependent on the environmental quality. Based on his study, the author has underscored the utmost need for maintaining environmental purity for long-term sustainability of tourism. Oommen, M. A., 2008) [30] has pointed out that Kerala's economic growth is glaringly characterized by the 'Ecological Overkill' in the form of serious damage to the hydrological cycle, natural systems (like, forests and rivers), disappearing wetlands – the kidney of the economic system', one of the lowest per-capita availability of fresh water despite reasonable good rainfall, etc. leading to destruction of 'beautiful matrix of agro-eco system'. The steady deterioration in the fiscal situation of Kerala as evidenced by growing fiscal deficit, poor debt sustainability as reflected in the declining net availability of funds after the loan repayments and steady growth in per capita debt have been pointed out as indications of losing sustainability. Similarly, declining equity in the growth pattern too has been noted by pointing out the high Gini co-efficient (41 percent) of Kerala which is second only to Chattisgarh (44 percent) in India. Thus, going by the drastic fall in sustainability and equity in Kerala's economic growth pattern (Oommen, M. A., 2008) [30], growth models that can ensure equity and sustainability, especially from the perspective natural environment alone seems to be relevant in Kerala from a long-term perspective.

A macro level analytical study on the sustainability of tourism sector in India with a focus on Kerala's tourism sector done by Manoj P K (2008) [20], 'Sustainable Tourism in India: A Study from a Global Perspective with Focus on Tourism Prospects of Kerala' has analyzed the vast growth potential of India's tourism sector from a global perspective. The case of Kerala tourism and its special characteristics have been discussed in detail in this paper. Based on the findings of the study, the author has suggested strategies for the faster growth of Kerala tourism in a manner that is sustainable in the long run. Another macro level study done by the author Manoj P K (2010) [21], 'Environment Friendly Tourism for Sustainable Economic Development in India', has highlighted the vast growth potential of Indian tourism for the rapid national economic development. This study too have underscored the vital significance of preserving the environmental purity by all tourism initiatives, and pointed out that only environment-friendly ones can be sustainable in the long run.

A book on development of ecotourism in India by Singh, Sarvjeet (2009) [33] has stated that ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism and it provides opportunities for visitors to experience powerful displays of nature and culture and to learn about the importance of biodiversity, conservation and local cultures. Ecotourism concentrates on volunteer tourism, personal growth, and also seeks innovative ways to live on the earth. It involves travels towards locations wherein flora, fauna, cultural heritage etc. are the main attractions. It ensures the active involvement of the local people towards the conservation and education aspects of the process of tourism development. A research paper by Manoj P K (2010) [22], 'Tourism in Kerala: A Study of the Imperatives and Impediments with Focus on Ecotourism', in *Saaransh-RKG Journal of Management*, has studied the Kerala's tourism sector in detail by using the SWOT analysis method. Based on the findings of his study, the author has made suggestions for rapid and sustainable development of Kerala tourism. Sudheer, B (2015) [35] in his report on the UGC-sponsored research project on Responsible Tourism in Kerala – A Case Study of Kumarakom Panchayath' has noted the need for alternative and innovative practices like Responsible Tourism (RT) to mitigate the adverse effects of tourism on the environment and to make tourism sustainable in the long run. Regarding Kumarakom RT project, its positive effects (such as employment to the local populace), empowerment of local women through RT-based jobs (like, providing vegetables, fish, meat etc. all being gathered from local sources), favorable linkage effects on the local community (eg. earnings from the purchases made by tourists) etc. are noted.

World Economic Forum (WEF)(2015)[43] in its report on tourism competitiveness made a detailed study of the competitiveness of various countries of the world, in the area of travel and tourism. This report contains the competitiveness of nations at the regional and global levels using a few well-defined parameters; the global competitiveness of Indian tourism is 52 as against 17 of China. At the regional (Asia Pacific region) level too, there is a huge gap in the competitiveness, as India is the 12th rank as against the 6th rank of China. An empirical study of an ecotourism project in Kerala by Manoj P. K. (2015)(a)[23], 'Prospects of Ecotourism in Kerala: Evidence from Kumarakam in Kottayam District' has analyzed the



prospects of the said ecotourism initiative. Based on the findings the above study, the author has suggested strategies for the sustainable development of ecotourism in the State. Another field-based study done by Manoj P. K (2015)(b) [24], 'Employment Generation from Rural Tourism: A Field Study of the Local Community at Kumbalangi, Kerala' has analyzed the responses of the local community regarding the employment prospects of rural tourism as perceived by them, their own anticipations regarding the suitable interventions by the State Government and so on. The bright growth prospects of employment creation and economic development have been pointed out, subject, however, to the utmost need for improving the tourism infrastructure, primarily through the initiatives of the State Government. WTTC (2015)[45] in its comprehensive report relating to the economic impact of tourism and travel industry has made a detailed study of the relative performance of different nations of the world in the tourism front, along with region-wise performance as well as future projections. WTTC has pointed out that South Asian region, spearheaded India and the Middle East, is globally the fastest growing region in terms of the share of Travel and Tourism sector to the GDP value. India is one of the large and fast growing markets along with China, Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey. It has also been reported that South Asia will be the fastest growing sub-region in its long-run growth to 2025 (7.0 percent) of Travel & Tourism GDP, and that India will outpace China by the year 2025.

A study by Manoj P K (2016)(a) [25], "Impact of Rural Tourism on the Environment and Society: Evidence from Kumbalangi in Kerala, India" in *International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies* has observed the definite positive impact of rural tourism but has warned about the vital need for preserving environmental quality by way of strictly limiting the number of tourists, prohibiting the use of non-degradable materials (like, plastic items), exercising more emphasis on environmental cleanliness, and so on.

An empirical study on the sustainability of rural tourism done in the context of central Kerala by Manoj P. K. (2016)(b)[26], "Determinants of Sustainability of Rural Tourism: A Study of Tourists at Kumbalangi in Kerala, India", in *International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies* has sought to find the factors influencing the sustainability of rural tourism in Kerala and to suggest strategies for its promotion from a long-term perspective. First and foremost strategy is on preserving the natural environment which is of "paramount significance". Others strategies suggested include (i) good service and safety to tourists, (ii) preserving the culture of the local people, (iii) improving transportation and other infrastructure facilities, (iv)enhancing ICT-based facilities. A very recent study by Pradeep et. al. (2017) [31], "Community based Tourism for Sustained Economic Development of Kerala: A Study with a Focus on Ecotourism" in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research Review* has studied the relevance of Community based Tourism (CBT) in the Kerala context wherein the vast growth prospects of CBT in Kerala and also the vital need to preserve the quality of the environment and ecology have been discussed, along with the special relevance of ecotourism. In fact, a conceptual study on CBET in Kerala is one of the topics suggested for exploration in this study.

There are many studies on ecotourism (and its variants) done in the Indian context, including a few studies in the Kerala context too. But, studies focusing on the concept and practice of Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) are very scarce. The only exception is the very recent study on CBT in Kerala by Pradeep et. al. (2017) [31] which suggests ecotourism model for promoting in CBT and also suggests further studies in CBET and allied areas. Naturally, the present study seeks to further explore the CBT study by Pradeep et. al. (2017) [31] and accordingly make a critical and closer study of the concept of CBET and the relevance of developing CBET as a model for the sustainable and equitable economic growth of Kerala, given the State's peculiar features that are conducive for tourism especially CBET.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the scope of promotion of tourism in Kerala for its faster economic development with a focus on Ecotourism, especially the case of Community based Ecotourism (CBET);
2. To study in detail the diverse perspectives on the nature-based tourism models like Ecotourism, and also their origin and growth, with special reference to the CBET model;
3. To suggest broad strategies for the sustained growth of CBET in Kerala, as a tool for faster and equitable economic development of the State, based on the findings of this study.

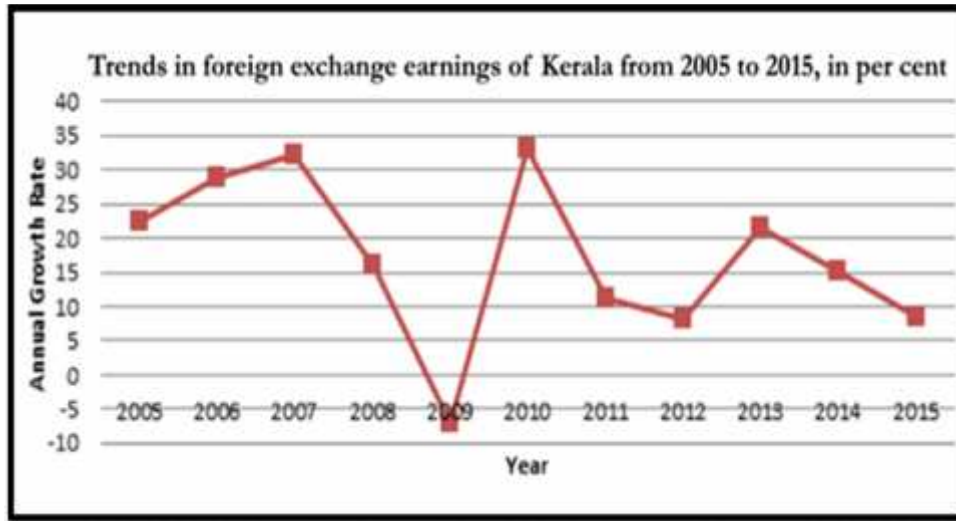
Methodology of the Study

This paper is structured as a conceptual-cum-analytical study that is based on the analysis of authentic secondary data, like, the research papers in the field of tourism by renowned experts, the Government publications like those of the Ministry of Tourism. Being an exploratory study, no hypothesis has been formulated. Common statistical tools have been used for data analysis.



Scope for Promotion of Tourism in Kerala: A Study with a Focus on Ecotourism

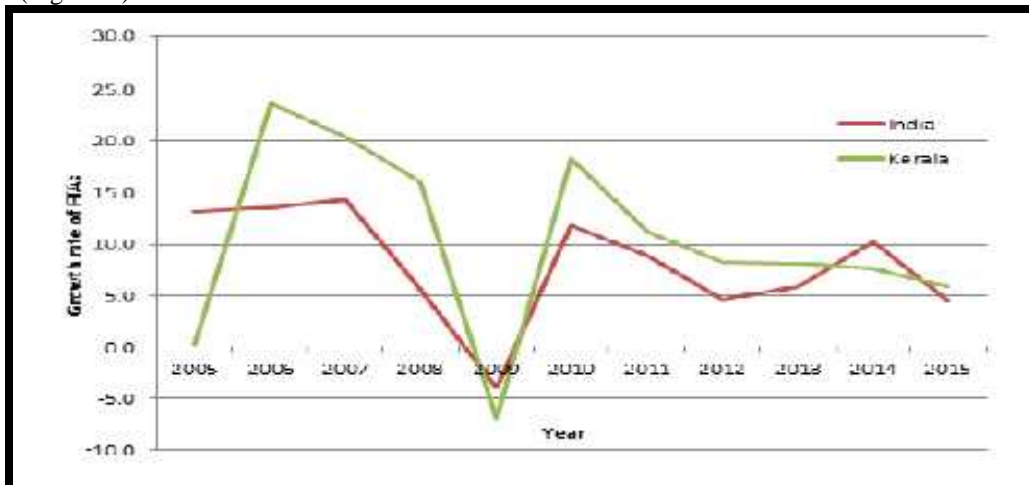
Income from the tourism sector contributes nearly 10 percent of the State GDP (GSDP) as far as Kerala state in the Indian union is concerned. Tourism generates employment, it ensures better earnings including foreign exchange earnings (FEE) and facilitates opening up of the local culture to the rest of the nation and also other parts of the world. Hence, tourism is regarded as a major growth engine of the Kerala economy. Given the high potential of tourism for contributing to the economic growth of Kerala, the Government of Kerala (GOK) has accorded high priority for the promotion of tourism. ‘Tourism’ is the theme chapter for the recent *Economic Review 2016* (March 2017) – a GOK publication, wherein tourism is regarded as growth engine of Kerala economy. Also, it is pointed out that Kerala tourism had a boom period in the 1990s and early 2000s, but the growth rate in tourist arrivals has declined afterwards. In India, the Demonetization (Demo, in short) process has been initiated by the Govt. of India (GOI) on 08th Nov. 2016. The ongoing Demo process too has affected Kerala tourism. So, steps for boosting this sector seem imminent now.



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2017), *Economic Review 2016*, p.402.

Figure I: Kerala Tourism – Trend in percentage growth in FEEs from tourism

Thus, the sector needs to tide over the Demo crisis and also to regain its prominence so that it can contribute significantly to the State’s economic growth. Gradually falling trend in FEEs (Figure I) suggests that some targeted actions are required for the revival of the sector. However, it is worth noting here that growth rate in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) to Kerala has been ahead of India as a whole, rather consistently, over the years during the last decade (2005-2015), except for years 2005, 2009 and 2014. (Figure II).

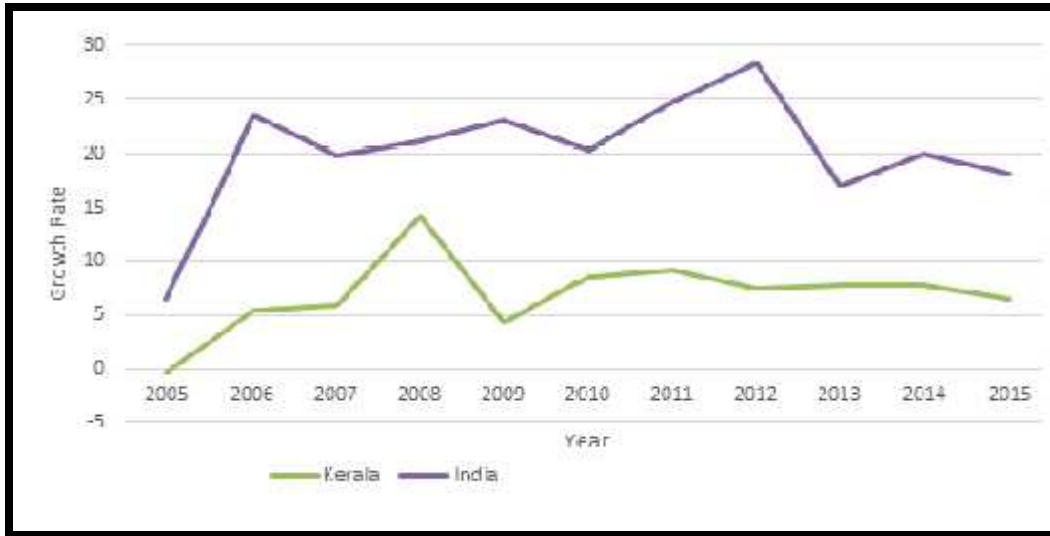


Source: Govt. of Kerala (2017), *Economic Review 2016*, p.394.

Figure II: Annual growth rates in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) – Kerala vis-a-vis India.



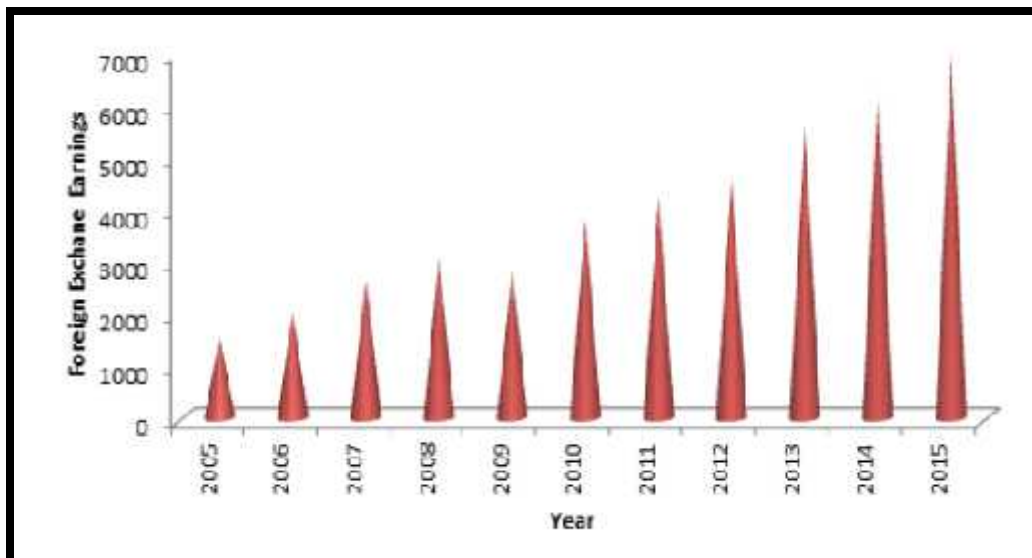
Furthermore, it is noted in respect of Domestic Tourist Arrivals (DTAs) the case of Kerala is definitely lower than that of India as a whole because throughout the last one decade Kerala's growth rates in DTAs have been lagging behind those of India as a whole in a consistent manner (Figure III). Thus, it follows that in spite of the enviable tourism resources of Kerala state in the Indian union, the trend in tourist arrivals into the State vis-à-vis India as a whole, has not been very encouraging over the years, particularly in respect of DTAs. This suggests that focused attention is required for improving the rate of DTAs into Kerala. In respect of FTAs, however, Kerala has had relatively better performance as the State's annual growth rates in FTAs have been better than those of India as a whole almost consistently (Figure II), even though the trend in respect of annual growth rates in FTAs into the State has been that of a generally declining nature (Figure I). This generally declining trend in FTAs might be more or less of a systemic nature, which is applicable throughout the country, rather than something which is specific to Kerala. The comparative trend (Kerala vis-à-vis India, Figure II) and the absolute performance of Kerala state alone in respect of FEEs (Figure IV) reiterate this fact. (Figure I, II, and IV).



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2017), *Economic Review 2016*, p.398.

Figure III: Annual growth rates in Domestic Tourist Arrivals (DTAs) – Kerala vis-a-vis India.

In the current scenario, Kerala needs to initiate measures to improve its performance in respect of its tourism sector, especially in respect of tourist arrivals. Efforts toward increasing DTAs into Kerala appear to be imminent. (Figure III). Similarly, improving the number of FTAs into the State has got a direct bearing on its FEEs.



Source: Govt. of Kerala (2017), *Economic Review 2016*, p.401.

Figure IV: Trend in Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) of Kerala (in Rs. Cr.) (2005-2015)



In view of the above discussions, it may be noted that considering the peculiar features of Kerala economy, like slow industrialization, under-utilized tourism resources and the poor performance of the sector particularly in the current context of demonetization, the falling equity and sustainability of the State's development experience including fast depletion of natural resources, community based ecotourism (CBET) appears to be a meaningful alternative.

As noted in the very recent study by Pradeep et. al. (2017) [31] there is high potential for community based tourism (CBT) initiatives in Kerala particularly ecotourism and other nature based tourism models. The relevance of community based ecotourism (CBET) arises because of the 'vast and relatively unexploited tourist potential' especially in the northern parts of the State. (Govt. of Kerala, *Economic Review 2016*, p.iv). Ecotourism destinations in north Kerala, like those in the Wayanad district which has got the maximum such destinations as well as forest cover also, have high growth prospects, if properly developed. So also are the prospects of many such promising tourism spots which are presently in the process of development as full-fledged ecotourism destinations. It is noted that Govt. of Kerala (GOK) has been taking concerted efforts for promoting ecotourism and allied models like responsible tourism (RT). As per GOK's policy, the simplest way to conceptualize ecotourism is, any tourism program which is (a) nature based, (b) ecologically sustainable, (c) where education and interpretation are major components and (d) where local people are benefited (GOK, 2002). Ecotourism and RT have been high priorities for GOK since the early 2000s. There are 60 major ecotourism spots in Kerala spread across the 14 districts in the State and these are being closely monitored by the Department of Tourism, GOK. Of these 60 destination, as high as 12 (which accounts for one-fifth or 20 per cent of the total of 60) destinations are located in the backward district in North Kerala with sizeable tribal population (1,51,443 as per 2011 Census) as well as the maximum percentage of forest cover (83.30 percent) among the 14 districts in the State. Ecotourism is a nature based tourism model that strives to maintain ecological sustainability. Those who love nature in its original and undistorted form search for ecotourism destinations for the above kind of experience. The number of such tourists is on the rise year after year. So, there is good scope for further promotion of ecotourism, in a state like Kerala with enviable natural beauty and other resources.

Dept. of Tourism of Govt. of Kerala (GOK) has identified more spots having potential for being developed as ecotourism destinations. Such emerging tourist spots are being developed as ecotourism spots by giving due thrust on conservation and environmental education. Ecotourism Directorate of GOK is mainly concerned with planning, granting financial assistance for the setting up of ecotourism spots, developing infrastructural facilities in various ecotourism destinations, developing ecotourism products in various emerging ecotourism destinations etc. Now, given the high growth prospects for CBT and CBET in Kerala, let us look into the perspectives and practices in respect of CBT and CBET.

Perspectives on Natural Tourism, Ecotourism, CBT, and CBET

Regarding Kerala's tourism development experience, the State's competitive advantage lies in the wide variety and extent of natural environments and biodiversity. Thus, the unique positive features of Kerala in the tourism front lies in its ecology and environment. But, the facts are that (i) Kerala's hydrological cycle is seriously damaged, almost in an irreversible manner, its forest systems and river systems are spoilt irreparably, and wetlands are fast disappearing; (ii) Kerala's lengthy coastal system extending to 580 km, mountains and terrains have been fatally modified, and its bio-diversity has been tremendously interfered; (iii) Kerala's rich and extremely diverse natural resources have been damaged and its beautiful agro-eco system being badly destroyed; and (iv) Kerala's growingly consumerist society is throwing out heavy solid, liquid and medical wastes every day making its environment highly polluted. (Oommen, M. A., 2008) [30]. The cases of CBT and CBET, and their special relevance in promoting the faster economic growth of Kerala need to be studied considering the above stark 'environmental realities' of Kerala. Main perspectives on CBT, CBET as well as other community oriented tourism initiatives are briefly discussed below.

Earlier studies have pointed out that ecotourism was expected to grow at the rate of 25 percent in the next 10 years, and would offer potential tour agents and tourist destinations opportunities for capitalizing on the State's rich natural resources (Herliczek, 1996)[15]. But, the fear was that, owing to its popularity, ecotourism could degenerate into a marketing mechanism that could earn profit to the operators but might cause many adverse effects of traditional tourism that ecotourism sought to curtail. (Herliczek, 1996)[15]. For the purpose of this paper ecotourism is defined as, environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature, which has low adverse visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations (International Ecotourism Society, 1991). Since ecotourism was first defined, there has been a general consensus as to its basic elements; its basic elements as delineated by United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP)[38] is as follows: (i) Ecotourism contributes to conservation of biodiversity, (ii) it sustains the wellbeing of local people, (iii) it includes interpretation/learning experience, (iv) it inculcates responsible action by tourists as well as the stakeholders of the tourism industry, (v) it is targeted basically at small groups and small scale businesses, (vi) it needs the least possible utilization of non-renewable resources, and (vii) it emphasizes local participation, ownership and business avenues; and focuses particularly on the rural population.



Just as there are many definitions of ecotourism, there are many interpretations of what the label means to tourism agents and operators. Many have argued over who has the right to use the term in describing their activities, even though there is no legal document outlining these activities (Weaver, 2001) [41]. One document that we can refer to for assistance is the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations (CTDRTD) which was developed at a side event of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The CTDRTD sets forth the following characteristics of all Responsible Tourism (RT) projects: (i) RT minimizes negative economic, environmental, and social impacts; (ii) RT creates larger economic benefits for the local population, it enhances the well-being of host communities, and also improves the working conditions and access to the industry; (iii) RT involves the local populace in decisions affecting their lives and life chances; (iv) RT makes positive efforts towards the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the maintenance of the diversity of the world; (v) RT provides greater enjoyable opportunities for tourists by way of more meaningful interactions with the local people, and greater understanding of the local cultural, social and environmental concerns; (vi) RT provides access for physically challenged people; and (vii) RT is culturally sensitive engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence. (CTDRTD, 2002). Presuming that all service providers follow the RT guidelines (CTDRTD) we can classify the range of ecotourism types by nature of their operation.

Laerman and Durst (1987) [19] refer to the level of dedication of the ecotourists to the experience in terms of the physical rigor involved and the level of interest in the natural attraction. This is done by finding the difficulty level in terms of either 'soft' or 'hard' dimensions. A 'hard' ecotourist may desire to live in a wilderness context with few comforts to 'experience' nature while a 'soft' ecotourist has casual interest in the natural attraction, and may be more lured by a highly mediated experience like an interpretive centre (Weaver, 2001) [41]. Miller and Kaae (1993)[28] have described ecotourism on a continuum related to nature. On the one extreme is the belief that all tourism (including ecotourism) has negative impacts on the earth. On the other extreme is the belief that human behavior is 'natural' and therefore contributes to the natural evolution of life. This view believes that humans are part of the 'natural process' and are literally unable to behave unnaturally. Currently, ecotourism lies somewhere between these two extremes (Weaver, 2001) [41]. It follows that individuals have quite diverse beliefs, desires and expectations on ecotourism and these form a continuum.

Many experts have acknowledged that there are diverse types of ecotourism, but they all have considered some type better than others based on their degree of impact on the environment. Those operations that improve the natural environment are viewed as 'better' whereas those involving the exploitation or damage of the environment are viewed as 'worst'. The ideal would be said to be more neutral and 'passive', where there is minimal damage done to the environment. Just as there are many types and features to ecotourism, there are several aspects to the individuals who utilize the services. Research has shown that ecotourism is a niche market within the tourism industry with a very specific group of individuals, in this case the middle to upper classes of first world nations. Even though ecotourism may seem to attract well educated individuals, it is not considered an elitist market (Menkhaus and Lober, 1996) [27].

Individuals who have typically been considered 'ecotourists' have been grouped into 4 categories: Wealthy, Healthy, Older People (Whoopies); Sensitive Souls; Ego-tourists; and Affluent Southerners (After Panos, 1995) [1]. Whoopies tend to be professional people, between the ages of 44 and 64, are retired or on an extended period of leave, and tend to come from industrialized countries. These individuals search out unique experiences and pristine destinations. Sensitive Souls are members of the middle classes who donate to charities and are eco-friendly. These individuals appreciate the natural attractions in an exotic location and ensure that the communities benefit. Eco-Tourists are financially less well-endowed young western travelers. These individuals seek 'alternative' travel in third world destinations whereas travelers (as opposed to tourists) they hope to gain personal attributes from the experience. And finally there are the Affluent Southerners who are members of the growing middle class in developing countries. These individuals may not be able to afford to travel to 'Western Countries and may be interested in their own cultural and natural heritage (After Panos, 1995)[1].

Many of these businesses see ecotourism as a new label on traditional activities that complement each other. Wheeler (1993) [42] describes these individuals as participants in 'egotourism', are working only for the 'feel good' factor. It is important to remember that even if the desired benefits of development are being achieved, to remain sustainable in the long run, the community, government as well as non-government organizations (NGO's) must keep individuals accountable, as far as ecotourism projects are concerned. From the above, it follows that the State has the responsibility to facilitate and co-ordinate the efforts of the diverse stakeholders so as to ensure the long term sustainability of various nature-based tourism projects.

Community-Based Tourism Initiatives – Recent Developments

In recent years there has been an emergence of diverse models of tourism management. The models can be grouped into three categories: Community-managed, Private Sector/NGO/ Government-managed, and Joint Venture. An increasingly common



approach to tourism management is for communities to hold complete or nearly complete ownership. In the community-based system all management and decision-making is done by communities surrounding the natural areas (Rodriguez, 2004). While a more traditional model is to have the private sector, NGO's, or the government manage tourism within and surrounding a park (Drumm and Moore, 2002). Finally, a model growing in popularity are Joint Ventures between the communities, the private sector and NGO's (Stronza, 2001) [34].

In terms of governance, the community-based model allows the community to have the greatest involvement in the management of tourism enterprises. Community members are provided with opportunities for empowerment, capacity-building, and increased self-esteem by having a vested interest in the proper management (Stronza, 2001) [34]. When enterprises are owned and operated by the government, private sector or NGO's the community participation is quite limited. Community participation is often seen as costly in both time and money, and as such unnecessary (Stronza, 2001) [34]. When managed effectively joint ventures have the potential to be very successful for both the community and private sector. Communities can provide insight that can be beneficial to government decisions, and also gain understanding which can improve decision-making by communities (Stronza, 2001) [34].

In the community-based model, the economic benefits are held at the community level with few leakages. Although it may be difficult for the community to manage the model if they lack the capacity or technical training to efficiently manage such areas as marketing and commercialization (Bushell and Eagles, 2007)[9]. When the system is managed by the government/private sector/ and NGO's the majority of the benefits do not get passed along to the communities and are kept by the managing organization. In some instances the community may benefit by way of direct and indirect employment, and subsidies (Bushell and Eagles, 2007)[9]. In the jointly managed venture, economic benefits are shared via profit sharing, and capacity-building practices that support employment and development at the local level. Revenue opportunities may even be enhanced by partnering local knowledge of the area with private sector expertise and efficiency (Bushell and Eagles, 2007)[9].

No matter which group is responsible for the management of the tourist destinations Boyd and Butler (1996)[7] state that there needs to be community representation at all levels of decision making. The common vision needs to promote self-empowerment at the community level, develop sustainable tourism, and ensure quality of life (Boyd and Butter, 1996) [7]. In many cases the tourism benefits are not only socio-cultural but economic also. Ideally tourism will create jobs in the communities allowing for funds to be reallocated by the government (Aguilar, 1997) [2] Governments often see tourism as a mechanism to replace lost funding through donations, entrance and user fees, concession and rental fees and licenses, taxes on retail purchases by visitors, levies and increased general tax revenues (Bushell and McCool, 2007) [9]. The communities can then benefit from this revenue in the form of infrastructure and educational programs. Communities must be careful to monitor the demand that is put on environmental areas due to increased attendance. Policies must be created to identify which activities can have a fee attached and develop efficient methods of fee collection (Bushell and McCool, 2007)[9]. Traditionally entrance and user fees are collected, but alternatively donation boxes, equipment hire, specialized tours and park guides could also be used (FPATF, 2000) [12]. In many cases it has been shown that fees that stay on site are more accepted by visitors.

These can either be collected directly from visitors or indirectly through the licensing of business that operate on site (FPATF, 2000) [12]. In many cases user fees are set to low because of socio-political factors such as issues of equity and access for all, pressure to keep visitation low, varying levels of services and infrastructures, etc. (Eagles, 2007). Research suggests that by using the concept of 'total economic value' that 'products' of protected areas can be identified as suitable for revenue generation. With proper planning these areas can be accessed repeatedly without reducing their total value (Taskforce on Economic Benefits, 1998), (FPATF, 2000)[12]. There still remains the threat that ecotourism will be used as a 'cloak of green' to tap into the economic benefits and be seen as the commercialization of nature and culture (Figgis, 1999)[14].

In many cases the economic impacts are straightforward and easy to measure, such as the number of visitors or income from park fees. Further analysis is needed though to understand the economic justifications for why funds should be allocated to managing natural areas over other activities (Connor, 2007). Economists can determine the relative economic efficiency based on a number of key concepts such as: Economic Efficiency, Opportunity Costs, Public and Private Goods, and Distributional effects (Emerton and Bos, 2004) [11].

Through the use of economic efficiency analysis, economists are able to direct the use of scarce resources towards those activities that will yield the best returns. To achieve economic efficiency, opportunity costs must be analyzed to determine the level of income that is lost by choosing one activity over another (Emerton and Bos, 2004) [11]. If the government feels that a private firm is unable to provide a good or service competitively, it may choose to offer it through a public agency. In some cases the government may also determine how benefits are distributed, choosing to allocate benefits more to one group or



another based on need. This can be beneficial to underprivileged individuals while leaving other members of the community feeling disconnected (Emerton and Bos, 2004) [11].

In the analysis and mitigation of environmental impacts, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Technology has proven to be useful in connection with ecotourism. GIS technology has proven to be especially useful in providing an integrated view of very large geographic areas that will be traveled by tourists (Dangermond, 1991)[10]. GIS allows data on such areas as vegetation, geology, existing and proposed land uses and routes to be analyzed to determine suitable uses. It can be used to analyze optimum routes, identify the best locations for facilities, and identify sites that need complete preservations (Dangermond, 1991)[10]. When the impact of activities need to be tested, GIS models can lead to better informed decisions. Currently GIS technology is used throughout the world to effectively bring together diverse parties in the decision process proposed for ecotourism (Dangermond, 1991) [10]. While economic analysis is important in determining the viability of a development there are many other factors such as size of the area, existing property regimes, needs of parties involved, potential for investment, settlement history, development trends, and the historical land uses that must be considered. Each site is composed of differing elements, problems and needs that must be considered when analyzing ecotourism projects (Yoder, 1998). One must remember that the ‘eco’ in ecotourism does not just stand for the economic aspect but also for the ecological (Wheeler, 1993) [42].

When considering the environmental impacts of ecotourism we must accept that there is a dimension of transportation involved. The travel component has been shown to occur at three distinct locations. First is the use of transportation from an individual’s home location to the destination. Ecotourists tend to originate in western counties such as North America and Europe while ecotourism often occurs in developing countries (Boyd and Butler, 1996)[7]. Since air travel has been identified as an important contributor to climate change and worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, it is important that measures are taken to mitigate the impact of long distance flights (IPCC, 1999) [17]. The second component of travel associated with ecotourism, is that which occurs between various sites and operations (Boyd and Butler, 1996) [7]. To help curb the energy use associated with ecotourism, travel distances between sites must be reduced. Boyd and Butler (1996) [7] recommend that a regional approach be considered where tourists stay longer in one region or another before moving on. The new rule of travel seems to be to “go slow and savour” – meaning visitors do fewer regions, but in greater depth (Boyd and Butler, 1996). The third and final travel component is that of transportation directly associated with the ecotourism experience (Boyd and Butler, 1996)[7]. It has become evident that many tourist activities require some form of motorized transportation. Research has also shown that nature-based ‘tourist activities’ are considerably more energy intensive on a per visitor basis than more urban-based ‘tourist attractions’ (Becken and Simmons, 2002)[4]. ‘Ecotours’, in particular have been found to be built largely around taking visitors to natural assets by various types of motorized vehicles. It is recommended that locations be constructed with a combination of both energy intensive activities such as wildlife watching and low-energy activities such as visiting a visitor centre (Becken and Simmons, 2002)[4]. Recent report by IBEF (2017)[16] on Tourism industry in India has pointed out the high growth prospects of the industry in India and the case of Kerala tourism with its unique distinction of having ‘Thenmala’– the only planned ecotourism destination in the whole of India, growing trend in tourist arrivals and tourism revenues etc. A very recent study by Pradeep et. al (2017) on the relevance of CBT for the sustained economic development of Kerala and the case of ecotourism has been specially highlighted.

Promotion of CBET for the Sustained Economic Development of Kerala: Some Strategies

From the foregoing analysis, it follows that if the negative effects of tourism are controlled by suitable governmental initiatives by putting in place regulatory measures to control the number of tourist arrivals and their activities, their movements within sensitive spots etc. the long term sustainability of tourism can be ensured. Such measures can minimize the adverse effects of tourism on the ecosystem and can help to maintain the integrity and vitality of the tourism spot. This in turn can make ecotourism and other nature-based tourism models viable for the economic development of the state of Kerala. For this, however, all the key players must work in tandem right from the planning stage till the implementation and follow-up review of tourism projects. The following strategies have been suggested for the purpose of promotion of CBET in Kerala:

1. Concerted efforts by the Governments, both at central and state levels, and also local authorities, and all other stakeholders (like, developers and operators, NGO’s, scientific and research institutions, visitors, local community, etc) have to be ensured since inception on an ongoing basis. Each stakeholder has to be mindful of the local environment and local traditions and abide by the set of guidelines laid down by the respective governments.
2. CBET projects are very relevant in tribal settlements associated with or in the vicinity of ecotourism destinations (like, Vazhachal near Athirappally ecotourism destination, Periyar Tiger Reserve, etc.). Support and co-operation of Vana Samrakshana Samiti (VSS) in such destinations should be ensured while implementing the CBET projects.



3. The livelihood and other benefits should be ensured for the local community, since their courteous behavior to the tourists is vital for retaining and attracting tourists, especially the foreign tourists. Attracting more tourists is essential for enhancing the tourism revenues.
4. While efforts for attracting more foreign tourists are required for enhancing the foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) of Kerala, equally important is the added thrust for attracting the domestic tourists, as the State's performance is consistently lower than national average.
5. Less known tourist destinations be promoted so as to broad-base the tourism infrastructure and also to bring the tourist arrivals in more reputed destinations within sustainable limits.
6. Events like Kerala Travel Mart (KMT) and Champions Boat League (CBL) be promoted more aggressively to project the brand of Kerala within and outside the country.
7. As the long-term sustainability of tourism of any kind, especially the nature-based models like CBET, utmost care should be accorded for protection of the nature by following a 'Nature first, Development next' approach. This is particularly true in a State like Kerala regarding which there are serious apprehensions regarding environmental degradation.

Concluding Remarks and Scope for Further Exploration

In view of the vast potential of tourism for supporting faster economic growth and employment creation, the same needs to be promoted in a State like Kerala which has vast tourism resources. CBET can ensure balanced and equitable economic development and can accelerate rural development. As an exploration of this study it seems relevant to study the tourism policies at the international and national levels, and to design the individual local level tourism projects by aligning with the former. Other tourism types which are especially relevant in the Kerala context, (like, medical tourism) may also be studied critically vis-à-vis the tourism policy of Kerala State.

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