

**LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO WOMEN AT BEKAL FORT REGION IN KASARAGOD, KERALA,
INDIA**



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ABSTRACT

The tourism sector is always deferred with a huge potential for growth, and thus become crucial not only for the nations, but also for the entire international community. The tourism proved to be one of the most effective means of job creation and the economic development of local communities. Tourism has shown that the potential for the creation of jobs and the promotion of income-generating activities in favour of the local and regional authorities. Certainly tourism offers many gateways for the employment of women and the possibilities of job creation independent of the small and medium-sized income generating activities, the creation of railway undertakings after the removal of the poverty of the women and of the municipalities in the developing countries. Tourism provides employment opportunities in a large number. Today, millions of women are a part of the tourism industry, both directly and indirectly. The tourism industry has contributed positively to the empowerment of women in India and throughout the world. The presence of women is seen in all sectors of tourism industry such as hotels, airlines, tour operator and travel services. Tourism development aims at improving the lives of people living in the local surroundings through responsible tourism. Studies show that in Kerala, the participation of women in tourism development activities is increasing and this has resulted in the overall development of the local community.

This study includes a detail view of the participation of women in the tourism development of Bekal Fort area and understanding the problems faced by women in this sector. The researchers have used both primary and secondary data to evaluate the role of women in tourism in the study area. A self-structured questionnaire was distributed among

100 local women who are residing at the Bekal Fort area to draw the conclusions. It is revealed from the study that the participation of women in tourism in the study area is pretty less compared to the other sectors of the economy.

KEYWORDS: Women Participation, Tourism Development, Employment, Social Development.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism in India is the largest service industry, with a contribution of 5.9% to the national GDP and this creates 8.78% of the total employment in India. According to the statistics published by Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of India, India received 6.58 million foreign tourists in 2012 against 6.29 million in 2011 with a growth rate of 4.3%. Our foreign exchange earnings from tourism has reached to USD 17.74 billion in 2012 with a growth rate of 7.1% annually against USD 16.56 billion in 2011 and this is expected to increase to USD 37.55 billion by 2018 at a 9.4% annual growth rate. In spite of all these facts, India's share in the international tourist arrival is 0.64% and India ranks at the 41th position in the world tourism scenario.

Until the early 1980s, Kerala was a relatively unknown destination, with most tourism circuits concentrated around the north of the country. Aggressive marketing campaigns launched by the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation the government agency that oversees tourism prospects of the state laid the foundation for the growth of the tourism industry. In the decades that followed, Kerala Tourism was able to transform itself into one of the niche holiday destinations in India. The tag line Kerala- God's Own Country was adopted in its tourism promotions and became a global super brand. Government of Kerala (2006). Among the fourteen districts of Kerala, Kasargod is the northern most district bordering the

neighboring state of Karnataka. The district of Kasaragod, blessed with high tourism resources, is trying its level best to develop its potentials in order to position itself in the tourism market.

TOURISM AND LOCAL PARTICIPATION

This study on understanding the extend of local community participation, mainly women will be of high relevance, particularly in a district like Kasaragod which has developed over recent years by utilizing its tourism potentials to the core. Local community participation in tourism is one of the important factors leading to the growth of tourism projects in Kasaragod district. This study will be beneficial to the stakeholders of the tourism industry, including the investors, employees, government, etc. This study will bring out the changes that have brought into the lives of people in Kasaragod district through the various tourism projects both economic as well as social.

Kasaragod being the northernmost district in the state has been facing ignorance in all the development projects and budgets of the government. The various projects that have been established in the district are a boon to the Kasaragod to achieve overall development.

Government of India in an effort to develop potential beach locations, which could be developed as international standard beach destinations had the western coast, surveyed in 1990. The survey identified

Bekal the village in Kasaragod district in the northern most part of Kerala as potential locale for the development of beach resort destination. The Bekal coastal area has been declared as the India's first planned beach destination. In 1992 the Government of India declared, Bekal as 'Special Tourism Area' for integrated resort development. Thereafter Government of Kerala entrusted a multidisciplinary team consisting of planners, landscape architects, urban and transport specialists, structural consultants and tourism, leisure industry experts with the preparation of project of project blueprint for the development of Bekal. In 1995 Bekal Resort Development Corporation was formed for the implementation of the Bekal Tourism Project.

The Bekal Project envisages setting up of an integrated beach destination at Bekal, with the objective of developing tourism including social infrastructure in the region. BRDC conducted systematic surveys of the region through CESS (Centre for Earth Science Studies) and has developed 76 hectares (189 acres) of land that is ideal for setting up resorts. Many new hotels and resorts of large groups have been established in the district in and around the Bekal area as well as on the beach sides. The development of various tourism products has been highly beneficial to the local community and these people living around the destination has shown a positive approach towards these development projects.

This study is confined to selected areas of the district of Kasaragod which is blessed with many tourism resources which are being developed rapidly in order to attract large number of tourists. As there are only limited studies being conducted on this aspect of women's participation in tourism,

this paper is expected to obtain a result which would be beneficial to all the stakeholders of the tourism industry. The study mainly focuses on women's involvement in the tourism sector and the benefits they receive by involving in the activities of the tourism industry.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✍ To understand the present scenario of tourism industry in general;
- ✍ To examine the role of local community involvement in general and women's participation in particular in the development of tourism;
- ✍ To evaluate the extend of women's participation in tourism development and
- ✍ To suggest measures to increase women's participation in tourism development.

METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data were used to attain the objectives of the study. Primary data are collected to obtain the direct opinion of the people in the study area. This helps in understanding extend of women's participation in tourism development of Bekal region.

Primary data were collected by distributing questionnaires to women in the area of study and interviews with the local people. A study is done among various families in and around Bekal area. Sample area selected for the study were various Panchayaths of Kasaragod district, namely Uduma, Pallikkara, Ajanur and also 2 Wards in Kanhangad Municipality. Questionnaires were distributed among women in selected families in the area to know if they involve

directly or indirectly in tourism development activities of Kasaragod district. The population in this area mainly constitutes of the people living in the coastal area.

Questionnaires were administered in local Language (Malayalam) for the better understanding of the sample group involved in the study. Questionnaires were distributed to 100 households in the study area to be filled by the women to know their interest and involvement in the tourism sector and survey was conducted during a period of one week in March 2012. Information was also collected from the local people through interview method.

The researcher depended on secondary data to gather conceptual and theoretical knowledge about the local community involvement in general and women's participation in the tourism sector in particular. Secondary data were collected from various sources such as websites, brochures and magazines. Various abstracts based on local community involvement in tourism were also referred to get secondary data. A simple description of the facts in terms of frequencies and percentages has been used for the purpose of the analysis.

At the end of the study, the researchers have drawn out the following major findings based on the empirical evidences collected through the various methods.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The local women population mainly belongs to Hindu and Muslim community
2. The involvement of local community in tourism development activities is less in Bekal and people are involved in other jobs such as fishing and agriculture

3. It is found that the local community of Bekal is not aware of the benefits tourism development can bring into their lives and the local community as well and this makes them less interested in participating in tourism development activities

4. Many of the women in Bekal are not going for any job and are happy as homemakers, and a negligible number of women out of the few who go for job are only involved in tourism related jobs.

5. The women's community of Bekal are not well educated and are not aware enough to do any tourism related job. Local women in Bekal believe that tourism related jobs provide enough safety & security to women and are suitable for them as well.

6. Though the women in Bekal know that Bekal is a major tourist attraction of India, they are not interested in knowing how the local community can be benefited through tourism development.

7. Women working in tourism related jobs in Bekal are mainly doing unskilled jobs such as a housemaid at the resort or in the small shops near to Bekal Fort. Almost all the skilled or technical jobs related to tourism development are handled by men, among whom many are from Kasaragod district itself.

8. Family restrictions and lack of time are the major reasons behind women in Bekal not participating in tourism development activities.

9. People of Bekal believe that tourism development has increased employment opportunities for both men & women to a certain extend. Women working in tourism related jobs are highly satisfied with their work environment and this job is the main source of family income for many of them.

10. Families living very close to the Bekal Fort are unhappy with the activities of the BRDC (Bekal resort Development Corporation) as they do not allow these people to do any construction work on their own land or even for the renovation of their houses. This has led to the grievance of the local community against BRDC.

11. Women staying nearby the resorts are supplying various products to resorts such as vegetables, flowers and milk, which helps them in earning a good income.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Government needs to take steps to educate the women in Bekal about the benefits tourism development can bring to the local community and thus create a desire within them to take part in tourism development activities. Special talks and lectures should be organized for the local women by bringing successful women entrepreneurs in tourism from other districts of Kerala.

2. Participation of women in the tourism development of Bekal region can be increased by providing more employment opportunities to the women. Government should provide financial assistance or subsidies for the women who are interested in starting their own tourism related business. Women in the area should be encouraged to start Home Stays by the assistance of BRDC in its promotion

3. The local bodies in the area should give more care in involving the local women in tourism development and a special committee must be formed to monitor the participation of women. The employers also need to take special interest to recruit their staffs from the local community itself

4. BRDC needs to take steps to solve the problems faced by the local people due to the stay imposed by the Government on their property.

5. Seminars should be conducted for the students in the local schools to increase their knowledge about the importance of tourism to the local community thus ensuring increased participation by the future generation.

6. Activities of women's organizations such as Kudumbasree should be strengthened by focusing on involvement in tourism related jobs such as opening of a restaurant or home stays.

7. There is a need to change the mentality of the local people towards tourism and the women already working in tourism can do this by describing their own experience and the benefits they have received from the industry.

8. Women can also engage in various jobs from their home itself, such as preparing homemade snacks and pickles and supplying to the nearby shops.

9. People in local area need to give more attention on improving their language skills and also learning about the history of Bekal by which they can work as tour guides.

10. More students should be encouraged to do courses providing specialized, in tourism, which would ensure them a high profile job in their locality itself.

CONCLUSION

Bekal is India's first planned beach destination and Government of India has identified Bekal as a potential site for an international standard beach destination. In 1992, Government of India declared Bekal

as a special tourist area and since then Bekal is getting much attention in tourism development. It is proven that tourism is one of the most effective means to drive job creation and economic development in local communities and no tourism development activity can succeed without the support and cooperation from the local community. This research study was aimed to understand the involvement of local community women in the tourism development activities of Bekal region. It is found that the participation of local women in tourism development in Bekal is less and women in this area do not show much interest in the development of tourism in their area. There is a need to educate the women in the Bekal region about the importance of developing tourism and the benefits it would bring to them. The researchers thus conclude that more support and participation from the side of local community women should be ensured in order to achieve the goal of developing Bekal as an international beach destination.

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