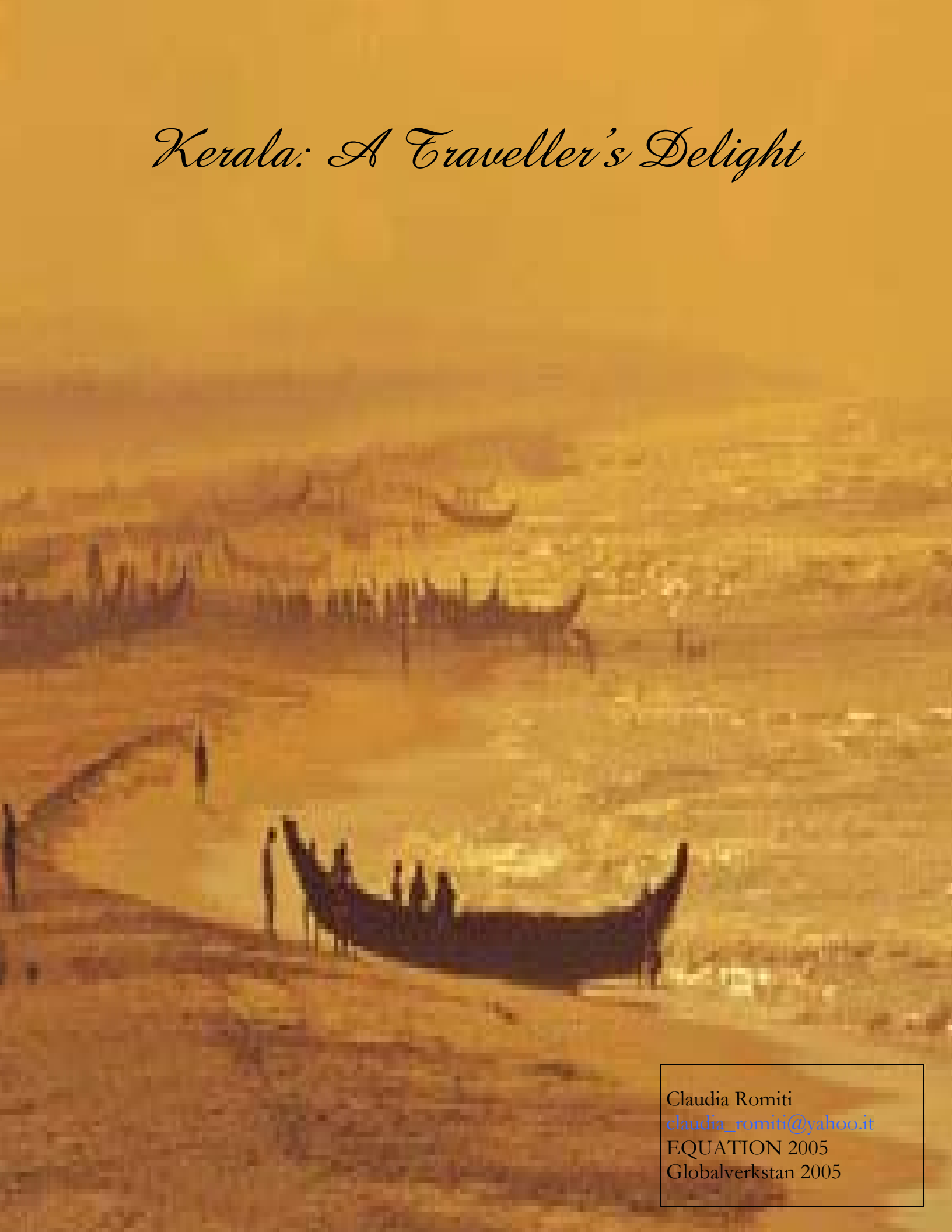


Kerala: A Traveller's Delight



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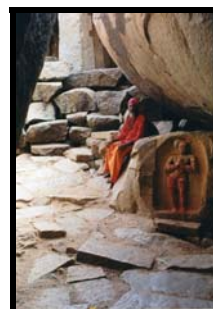
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Introduction

My interest in sustainable tourism arose when I was reading an article in an Italian magazine about a project on sustainable tourism in Gambia (operated by RAM an Italian organization), after which I started to ask myself some questions - How important is tourism in the production cycle of a country? How much and why does tourism modify the culture of the local people? Do tourists respect the traditions, value systems and ethos of the destinations they visit? How effective is the policy to keep the environment at tourist places in order and do such policies exist at all?

In the search for answers to few of these questions, this report gives an overview of tourism and how it influences the economic, ethical and environmental fabric of a locality by analysing its consequences on economy and society. The specific case study chosen for this analysis is the state of Kerala in India, one of the country's most popular tourism destinations. The report also attempts to highlight some of the civil society interventions to ensure sustainable tourism in the state by elaborating one such campaign that was launched in the small tourist town of Bekal. The content of this report incorporates the research that I have done supported with some of my own experiences during my visit to Kerala, which was a confirmation of all that I have read and researched.

I am thankful to Equation NGO in Bangalore, to my family, Globalverkstan, Anoop&Vidya and all my friends around the world!



TOURISM: WHO IS THE TOURIST?

Opening the dictionary we glance at the word 'tourism', it is defined in a simple and clear way as - "commercial organization-operating in holidays and visit places of interest¹". If we consider it in from the etiological point of the view, it comes from French noun, "tour", meaning, "trip". At this level the word does not imply anything negative, on the contrary it expresses relaxation and a carefree aspect. The reverse of this is expressed when we consider its economic, cultural and political meaning. If we considerer these 3 elements we can identify the contrasting aspect of tourism.

The Americans were the first people who started to use this service nearly at the beginning at the 60s followed by the European, Japanese and Australian and lastly coming up to the less well to do countries of India, Brazil and South Africa.

According to WTO (World Tourism Organisation) people who travel around the world are about 7 billion – that is to say that worldwide population moves every year at least once from its residence. As for these statistics we can easily deduce the economic/ social importance of the service within the internal policy of the country. Tourism is the main element of the world commercial exchange, more important than the electronics, motorcar, and steel sectors. It generates 35 billion global turnover, 6% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the planet². But we must pay attention to this question: Who is the tourist? What pushes the single tourist together with the mass of travellers that follows him/her to move from their armchair? Maybe it is to understand new cultures? Or is it a sense of adventure?

Human nomadic nature comes from the exploration and socialization. We can locate forms of tourist typologies: organized massive tourist,

¹ The Oxford Concise English Dictionary

² WTO barometer 2004

individual massive tourist, the explorer and the vagrant who avoids all tourist organization and searches for direct contact with the local communities. Normally the destinations, chosen by the tourists, reflect their social standard, their virtues and habits.

TOURISM IN THE WORLD

Tourism is a principal export earner for the 83% of developing countries and it is ranked third among the major merchandise export sectors for both developing countries and Less Developed Countries (LDCs)³. According to the study of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), we can have a global overview of how the global tourism is developing in overall. The trend of the international tourist arrivals, after having dipped due to geopolitical tensions due to the Iraq conflict and SARS attack, now shows a steady growth of income_of international tourists - especially in America, Asia and Pacific. Asia is one of the regions of the world with a majority_of_arrivals coming from outside the region. From the monthly data of the World Tourism Barometer (WTO), we can see the trend of the different areas in all over the world: with a decline in North-East Asia (-9%), but South Asia (+17%) came back after 2 difficult years and the Caribbean (+8%) also saw a significant increase. If we focus our attention on one specific area - Asia and Pacific, the sub region of South East Asia shows negative results with Indonesia (-21%), Singapore (-19%) while the South Asian destinations by contrast look back on a rather prosperous period - Sri Lanka (+24%), Nepal (+22%), Maldives (+16%), India (+15%), and Bangladesh (+14%).⁴ The differences of the results maybe are due be the SARS attack but the positive results are clearly influenced by the positive economical and political stability of the countries, especially of India.

³ Pro-Poor Tourism info-sheet (PPT), 2004

⁴ World Tourism Organization 2004

TOURISM AND ECONOMICS

AN OVERVIEW OF THE INDIAN ECONOMY:

The region of South Asia includes Malaysia, China, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Pakistan Indonesia, Thailand and Bangladesh, India. India is the

Total GDP 2003

Ranking	Economy	(millions of US dollars)
1	United States	10,881,809
2	Japan	4,328,444
3	Germany	2,400,655
4	United Kingdom	1,794,858
5	France	1,747,973
6	Italy	1,465,895
7	China	1,409,852
8	Spain	836,100
9	Canada	834,390
10	Mexico	626,080
11	Korea, Rep.	605,331
12	India	596,966
13	Australia	518,382
14	Netherlands	511,566
15	Brazil	492,338
16	Russian Federation	433,491
17	Switzerland	309,485
18	Belgium	302,217
19	Sweden	300,795
20	Austria	251,456

country with the second highest population having a big geographical area. Referring to the statistics with the World Bank in the year 2003 it is situated in the 12th position of the Gross Domestic Product 2003 preceded by Japan (2nd) China (7th) and Mexico (9th)⁵ showing good possibility of development with an

increase of the 8.4% in growth of GDP in 2003-2004 as against 5.2% of the last year⁶. The Indian economy is becoming increasingly service-based and tourism is an important sector of the economy. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) in its the third report of Tourism Satellite Accounting Research (TSA)⁷ gives a clear message - *‘during 2003, India's Travel & Tourism Industry is expected to generate 2.0 % of GDP and 11,093,100 jobs, while the broader Travel & Tourism Economy is expected to total 4.8 % of GDP and 23,839,800 jobs. Looking ahead, the forecast for Travel & Tourism Demand is expected to total 7.4 % real growth in 2003, and 8.8 percent real growth per annum between 2004 and 2013.’* The Indian currency – Rupee, continues to be strong against the US dollar and this makes the foreign investor look positive to invest in the country. Slowly India is coming to occupy an important position in the international

⁵ World Development Indicators database, World Bank, September 2004

⁶ Government of Kerala “Economic Overview 2003”

⁷ World Travel Tourism Country “The 2004 The Travel & Tourism Research”

economic scene. In fact, according to one the famous tourist guide, Lonely Planet, India is been voted among the top 5 tourism destinations after Thailand, Italy, Australia and New Zealand. This position can be explained because India is one of the countries in the Asia not to be damaged by the terrorist attack and SARS epidemic.

KERALA ECONOMY

One of the Indian regions that have seen a real increase and importance in tourism is the State of Kerala. Kerala is situated in the South-West of India and if we travel through the region we will pass mountains, hills and beaches that indicate the possible natural beauty.

During the early 1980s and the first half of the 1990s the state had a financial crisis that affected almost all the state-sponsored developmental activities⁸. But it was the tourism sector that enabled the state to come out of this crisis and improve the economic position.

Anyway during the 1990s the growth rate (of Gross State Domestic Product) is estimated at 5.9%. Demand growth in Kerala is the highest in the world and is projected to increase by 11.4 % per annum over the coming decade. The economy of Kerala is based on agriculture and livestock. The plantation industry including tea, coir and rubber is one of the important sectors in Kerala especially and is practised in the hilly regions of the state bordering Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The livestock sector is showing a decline especially in the cattle breeding and in the production of milk and eggs. However fishing is increasing both in quantity

⁸ Richard W. Frank Barbara H. Chasin “Kerala: development through radical reform” 1992



and in exporting (12 %). The tourism sector contributes 3.7 % to the state's GDP but the tourism economy has a larger share of 7.7 %.⁹

With regards employment, the scenario in the formal sector is quite bleak with a high rate of unemployment about 20.77 % of which the 13.5 % are women. The statistics of the Kundumbashree Group shows that the women are participating in the non-traditional areas like technology, biotechnology and service units. Especially in the service sector the population are opened to cover self-employment and new forms with an adequate social security and health assurance. Within the services sector, tourism directly and indirectly employs 6.6 % of the state's labour force. Of late, the state government has taken some important initiatives in financial management like the Kerala Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Kerala Ceiling on Government Guarantees. However some sectors of the national industry don't seem to be in a good situation especially Coir and Cashew. The only sector that has been showing an incredible rise is the tourism industry with a record growth of nearly the 30 %.

Tourism: a leading sector for Kerala

Contribution to State GDP

Direct – 3.7% : Indirect 7.7%

Contribution to State Employment

Direct – 3.0%: Indirect – 6.6%

Contribution to Exports

16.6% of all export earnings

⁹ WTTC Kerala Tourism Satellite Account

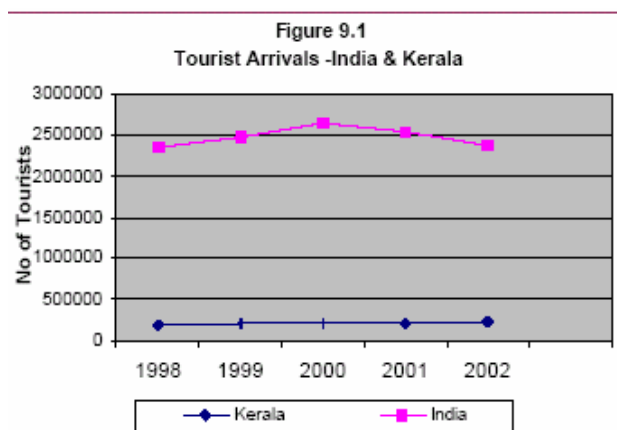
Importance of Tourism to the State Economy

The above statistics indicate that tourism is a significant sector of Kerala economy and is growing at an encouraging pace. The total earning estimated is going up from 91.314 million € in 2002 and 11 million € in 2003, an increase of 20.42%. The foreign exchange earnings from the tourism during 2002 were of 13 million and it was 18 million of € during the 2003 registering an increase of 39.35%. The result was that a record of 5 million of foreign tourist have visited Kerala in 2003 while the arrivals up to March 2004, as compared to the same period 2003, is up by 20.13%.

Comparison with the rest of the country

If we want emphasize the important role of the leadership of Kerala in this field, I want underline a comparison between the arrivals of foreign tourist between Kerala and India. Kerala receives 10.70% of all foreign tourist arrivals to the country. The growth rates of tourist arrivals from 2002 to 2003 is 16.5% for India but 26.68% for the state of Kerala indicating that the state's potential is very high.

Relative stability when compared to the rest of India



After 11th September 2001, the global tourism saw a significant decline, but Kerala saw only a marginal decline of -0.53 % of foreign tourists inflow that was rising of 11.37 % during 2002 until 26.68 % during the 2003. The table also indicates that

tourist arrivals in the state have been stable and steady when compared to the fluctuations for the country as a whole.

Seasonality of Arrivals

The Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala had registered that maximum number of foreign tourists arrives is in December-January with a proportion of 14.20% and they keep coming till February which is the peak tourist season while the domestic arrive is in December with a proportion of 9.76 %¹⁰. Many domestic tourists also arrive for Onam celebration during August and September and the usually rainy months of June-July sees the lowest number of tourists.

Novel Tourism Product

Apart from its natural beauty and cultural splendour, the popularity of ayurvedic medicine is also positive factor for the tourism economy because the tourists began arriving during the traditional off-season months. This means that they can enjoy cheaper prices at hotels and resorts and have more relaxing holiday thereby increasing the income of the state during the period.

Important sources of International Tourism

Statistics show that a large percentage of international tourists coming into Kerala are from Europe – France, Germany and the United Kingdom. But a recent trend has been the increase in tourist arrivals from Southeast Asian regions like Maldives and Singapore. In fact the Commerce Minister of Singapore has decided to improve the destinations towards Kerala of Singapore Airlines¹¹. Also the Arabian Airlines is expanding the connections with the State to increase the tourist traffic from the Gulf regions to the state. In overview of that the Director of Kerala Tourism has decided to make a “revolution” in the hotels and restaurants and shopping areas with the introduction of Arabian style.

¹⁰ Government of Kerala “An overview 2003”

¹¹ *Singapore to Invest in Kerala Tourism*

Policy Directive

The Kerala Tourism Vision Document 2025 has also outlined an important role for the tourism sector in the economy. The policy plans drawn up to achieve the 10% in earnings from the tourism so as to create 10.000 job opportunities every year. The Minister of the Tourism, want especially invest in pollution control facilities and recycling waste. In fact the 14 million € of the Budget will be direct towards the Tourism Vision 2025 and the promotion of Kerala as a tourist destination. Another salient feature of the economy include involving the private sector more effectively in sustainable tourism development.

New Initiatives

The government is heavily focussed on improving the tourism infrastructure of the State. Concentration will be given to the development of roads, drinking water supply, and sanitarian and transport systems. Special tourism zones will be created and the institution for the human resources developed. Unfortunately most of the seafood is exported and so it is nor available for the local tourists. A strategy could be an improvement of a better catering and culinary that will be positive attraction.

Conclusion from my experiences

Driving along the landscape I understood that the main resources in this State are tea rubber and coir cultivations and near the sea paddy field and fishing. I interviewed a local farmer who ran a family industry with not so high incomes if these were to be compared with the people that work in the tourism sector. It does seem therefore that tourism gives the local people high seasonal incomes with which they manage for the rest of the year.

In the plantation industry, especially in tea cultivation, that covers almost all the mountains bordering with Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, people working are mostly from other states because they will ask less money than the Keralities. I was interviewing a labourer in a rubber industry which comprises 300 trees which they use to produce 10 rubber sheets per day and their income was 0.92€ all the work was made manually to save money from the electricity. Some labourers have to supplement their work in rubber cultivation with something else- for example one of them used to run a haircut shop earning 0.37€ from each cut. The price of the rubber has lately come down due to the influence of the Global Market affecting the incomes of these labourers. From this we understand that global processes have important impacts on local economies and may be this is one of the reasons that people are looking to tourism for more income.

This income is nothing if we compare it with that of a resort employee or people who as boat drivers in a houseboat. One such boat driver told me that he was a member of a union, Alappuzha District Boat Owners Driver Union, with which he shares each day his income. His annual work can be divided in two semesters - from March to September working in the paddy field and from October until March as a driver boat. During the high season he can earn around 400€.

These experiences conformed for me the fact that tourism is an important income-earner for the local people. Especially if we compare the income of people employed in tourism as against other forms of traditional employment, the difference is big. My experiences also confirmed for me that there were a lot of international tourists in Kerala who came into the state as a continuation of their beach hopping from Goa.

TOURISM AND ETHICS

Mass tourism can provoke adverse social and cultural impacts. In fact majority of tourists will look for travel to allow for their dreamed disobediences, which they can never practise at places where they are currently living. An example of this is the phenomena of sexual tourism and paedophilia. Sex tourism first became popular in countries like Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Central America and Africa and is practised by both women and men. The attraction for the female tourists might be out of a need for exotic fashion or sex gratification. Often they are accompanied by gigolos or beach boys to whom they give financial help to start a business by using youth prostitution to start a business for themselves - they rent out houses (Ex. Varkala) among the tourist. On the other hand male tourists marry young girls, stay just for few months and then abandon their families and come back when they feel like.

Sexual tourism also perpetrates the trafficking of children¹². According to the study of UNICEF, in 1999, the trafficking of children is increasing in Africa and in Asia. In Asia they are especially girls from Nepal who are taken away from their families and brought in the main Indian cities like Mumbai, Calcutta and Delhi. Most of the girls are paid less than 1€ (50 rupees) a day. According to a local NGO in Kerala Makawanpur the children are forced to work in inhuman conditions in the circus and are often sexually exploited.

Another concern is the high consumption of drugs and alcohol that tourism brings. If we go back through history, drugs were used by the travellers of the 1800's also. The big boom was during the 1960s with

¹² T. G. Jacob tales from Tourism from Kovalam



hippies who had their favourite destinations like Goa, Bali, Mexico (Peyote) Ethiopia (Kat's levees). Now there is also a New Age culture that is based on soul-searching where drugs are being used as a medium of attaining spiritual salvation in regions like India, Nepal and Amazon.¹³

Tourism is often seen as a way of escaping from one's own society and life where everything is organised. Local people living in tourist destinations have the idea that western people have so much money to spend but have no sense of morality.

On the flip side, there are nearly 30 million tourists who go to places where there is the high risk to get infective diseases as malaria and hepatitis. These people are generally misinformed and therefore do not take adequate vaccinations. An example of this is the increasing incidence of malaria and hepatitis in Europe due to mostly tourists returning from Africa. That could be happened also because the costumers are not well informed by the big tour operator or travel agency. The bottom line therefore is that to prevent adverse impacts of tourism on local communities and on tourists, a prior knowledge of the tourist destination is crucial. Tourism must be undertaken in manner whereby tourists are conscious of their surround culture and environment, and not in a vacuum. When these principles are not adhered to, tourism can have significant social and cultural impacts.

Cultural impacts are caused from insensitive tourism, which violates the human rights of the local communities and indigenous population. Commodification of culture that results from not respecting local traditions has also been experienced. Some example: Bali, where the tourists want to participate in all tradition events without respect (taking pictures) or Sulawasi, Indonesian island, where the local people have seen their particular houses (sculpted in the wood) changed in "tourist objects". In some cases local communities have been denied their rights to fishing and

¹³ Duccio Canestrini "Andare a quel paese." Feltrinelli, Milano 2003

to even conduct religious ceremonies as it might disturb the tourists. One such example is in the state of West Bengal in India, where Sahara Indian company¹⁴ plans to launch a Mega tourism Project in the Sunderbans (one of the world's largest mangrove forests and fishing regions). The plan includes hotels, Spa and golf park project which will undoubtedly affect the local fishing economy.

TOURISM AND ETHICS IN KERALA

The culture of Kerala

The culture of Kerala has persisted through the ages precisely for the reasons of antiquity, unity, continuity and universality of its nature. In its widest sense it embraces the highest achievements of the human spirit in every sphere of life. Thus, in its totality, it represents the quintessence of the collective achievements of a people in the fields of religion and philosophy, language and literature, art and architecture, education and learning and economic and social organisation.

The name of this small plot of land in the south west of India comes from *Kera*¹⁵, which means coconut. The ancestors of this country have chosen this appropriate name because of the wonderful and exotic trees that rise towards the sky elegantly, sometime resembling drawing curves and cover the majority part of Kerala's territory. The tourists consider the coconut tree as a tropical, dreamy and relaxing palm tree but it is one of the important elements for the economy. The Regional Research

¹⁴ Equation report 2003

¹⁵ R. W. Franke & Barbara H. Chasin "Kerala: development through radical reform" 1992



Laboratory of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research has identified 700 potentially uses for this tree: from food to health uses. The people extract from it coir, oil, soap but also alcohol and soft drinks to sell. In the South of Kerala transportation is mainly through the waterways. The local people build huge boats called kettu vallams, useful to carry up truckloads but also is used to burn coconut oil in their vilaku, or religious lamp.

Traditions of Kerala

The country has a rich cultural heritage. This region is a mix of Hindu, Muslim and Christians, and this is one of its biggest attractions in all of India. The Hindu religion, based on myths and legends where the sacred concept is important, highlights the mystical aspects with temples and shrines adorning streets, houses and parks.

Hindu festivals are celebrated almost everyday. They are celebrated nationally or in communities, centred on temples. The colourful and lively ceremonies are one of the elements of attraction in this country. Kerala has not only religious events it is rich with old traditional theatre and dancing, as example is *Mohiniattam* (woman enchanter dance) and the *Kathakali*. *Kathakali* is an old dance that represents the ancient mythology based on Lord Krishna and the performance is characterised by the facial expressions of the artists that are at times aggressive and at times passionate. The characters include *Naraka* (demon), *Minukky* (the demon changed in a beautiful girl) and *Pacha* (Warrior). The make up of the actors is made of natural vegetable dyes: white (from the rice), yellow, red, black and green. Usually one of the actors start to explain the body language to give a major idea to the audience and the musical instruments accompanied the movements of the hand and of the face muscles.

Commercialisation of Culture

As a part of the tourist marketing, cultural events and art forms are promoted as tourism attractions, commercialising of religious events could give rise to some concern among certain section of the population. The government is taking provisions to reduce the performances of the dances of *Kathakali* and the Elephant March parade. Elephants, which considered sacred in the Hindu religion and occupy an important place in temple rituals, and are usually taken out of national parks and the wild to be exploited for tourism.

The *Gaja Mela*, Great Elephant March of India, was once such tourism attraction. It was held in January every year, where hundred tuskers, were decked up in festive style and presented and paraded before tourists in Trissur and Kovalam. There were seen as opportunities for tourists to try *Elephant rides* and *Elephant feeding*. Boat races, cultural shows and martial art performances were added to this. There was a wide campaign against this *Gaja Mela* even by the foreign tourists as it resulted in harassment to the animals. This had forced the Department of Tourism to stop the Mela. This example goes to show that tourism can create situations of exploitation of human and animals.

Sex, drugs and tradition¹⁶

Kerala that has one the most beautiful beaches in the world where million of tourists swarm especially from Europe and America. Such mass tourism is breaking up the traditional family life style with insensitive behaviour like nudity and other forms of sexual liberty. Also, nudity and sexual liberty is one of the conditional elements, that together with drugs is a part of mass tourism: a problem, brought by the hippies who professed the motto 'PEACE & LOVE'. They had provoked a deep impact on Indian society, which is still based on the caste system. The caste system

¹⁶ The Coast is dangerous for women!

in Kerala is still considered as a part of tradition and is based on concepts of purity and pollution.

In Indian newspapers often we can read like: “Spanish woman found dead at Varkala”¹⁷ or walking in Allepy beach (my experience) will be not so difficult to find somebody asking to the foreigner to buy drugs or meeting *gigolo* to sell their body for a small amount. The availability of a variety of hallucinogenic drugs has become an inalienable part of the tourist culture and economy. Lot of Western tourists are coming in India to abuse several drugs (organic and chemical). The importance of the use of natural drugs (ganja) exists locally, especially in the Ayuverdic medicine or during the celebration of some religious celebration and tantric rites. We should not forget the rule of heroin that in some Indian areas, like Uttar Pradesh and Rajathsan, is produced in big quantity. The commercialization of the drugs most of the time is done by foreign people provoking corruption in the state: an example was in Idukki and Thoduzha - where a British couple was arrested because they were carrying hashish and ganja. The assistance of the embassy had helped influencing the Court. The drug problem, unfortunately, is in sight of the high political authority damaging the local society, increasing the risk of the crime. But also in the poor villages, the “rich white man ” has the easy availability of the “green paper” in form of tips, which is increasing the prostitution and the local “mafia”.

The Condition of Women

A lot can be learned about the traditional position of women in Kerala society from the caste system. The higher castes were rich, more powerful, and pure. The lowest castes were powerless and so polluted that the higher castes considered them literally untouchable. Based on the caste that a

¹⁷ The Hindu, online edition, 29.10.2004



person belongs to, can be determined who can marry, what kind of job can be carried out and which religion the person can profess. From this it can be understood that society is very complex, where the woman is still subjugated and the men still served.

The woman in India, even if she is loved in veiled beauty and mystery, of elegance and dignity, has a scarce social importance in the daily life. She supports the weight of the family not only on the duties that normally are assigned to her in the home's managements and child care, but also co-operating in the family's income by doing heavy and underpaid work. Even though she contributes to the family's economy, she is economically dependent on her father, her husband and her children. Staying at home with an Indian family I got a chance to better understand the condition of women in society. The bride was spending almost all the time in the kitchen, cooking food for the guests and at the end eating alone and only after having served and cleaned the kitchen. In particular, her condition and her prospects are determined by the persistence of the dowry institution (the money paid by the father's bride to the future bridegroom) a very heavy economic weight for the most of families and a considerable deterrent to the development of the woman's condition on the whole.

Decisions regarding marriage are taken by the groom and not the bride and a lot of importance is given to the horoscope, a little yellow book, written from a guru when they born. From her birth she tests the injustice's weight that it regulates herself to the margins: she proves not only a clear disappointment in knowing that the new born is a daughter, but also in an increasing number of the female infanticides diffusion and the daughter's development.

The concept that the woman is an object to be exploited is still strongly rooted in many areas of the world. Therefore in such areas it is considered admissible to sell a daughter to help the families' financial situation. We

are not amazed that sexual tourism is the latest fashion and it constitutes the greater attraction in many Asian countries.

This is no different in Kerala. In the tourism industry, especially in the big resort in Kumarakom women are hired as 'Thalapoli Holders' to welcome their guests. These women who earlier worked in the fields have shifted their focus from their traditional occupation (as house keeping, masseurs, cleaners, gardeners and guides) to such activities. The resort people usually prefer "girls with good looks" for the ceremony and this has freed them from working in hot sun at the paddy fields. During an interview with a boat driver in Allepey, I learnt that nearly 10% of all the houseboats there were rented for prostitution by foreign tourists – mostly English, German and French.

Child Sexual Abuse and Tourism in Kerala

In India, a study-performed on behalf the State Management Agency analysed the situation of women, but also the situation of the children in prostitution in three cities of Kerala - Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode. The study¹⁸ identified 825 child prostitutes of which 355 were boys and 470 girls; 770 were 14-18 years old, and 55 were aged below 14. The reasons for entering prostitution include poverty, illiteracy or a bad upbringing. A questionnaire prepared by UN revealed that the children approaching the prostitution areas arranged meetings both on the beaches and roads with tourists, some of them made it clandestinely out of the sight of the authorities.

The attitude of the tourists adds to the problem as they always search of ways and means to save their own money. According with an article in a newspaper of Kottayam, the tourists, instead of spending 9.25€ for staying

¹⁸ UN "La venta de los niños, la prostitución infantil y utilización de los niños en la pornografía" 10.08.200

in big hotels, spend only 5.4€ so that they can hire houseboats with the same amount and have a 'different' experience.

On the contrary some children accompany clients on extended journeys and their experiences of these trips vary from being given gifts and money to being gang raped and short exchanged. In Kozhikode, young boys reported that they were demanded by women as well men practicing pedophilia and homosexuality. Most of them did not make use of any kind of contraceptive measures, consciously aware of endangering the boys with infectious diseases like HIV-AIDS as a result the 52% of the boys have been infected.

Conclusion about the ethics in according with my experience

The behaviour of a tourist it is not simple especially while travelling in a country of the Third World. Sometimes the impact could be so strong that taking decisions will be not so easy. Always the local people think that the Western people are rich trying to feel sympathetic for their economic situation especially due to the exploitation during the colonization of the last century. I was discussing a lot with my father arriving to different points of view based from our generation. For me it is hard to understand the condition of women, so closed and some time cut from the society and considered from the man as a symbol without any right to freedom. For my father, it was more easier also because in Italy the woman started to get some right after the second world war with the passing of legislations during the 60s that granted her access to all kind of professions, during the 70s with the recognition of the divorce and with the protection of the working mother and of the family law. Reading Indian Constitution there are two articles (art. 14 and art .15, 1949), which states that there is no discrimination among "*race, religion, caste, sex or place of birth*". But this is not followed especially in the civilization where the woman has to be still under the orders of the men. The dilemmas come out also to make a simple photo or during a walk in a big city and especially in a rural village.

The curiosity sometime doesn't respect the privacy of somebody. I was stopped by a smile of a woman covered by the sari and by the choice if to give money or simple bubble gum during the visit in the rubber cultivation. This is also some part of the ethics of the sustainability tourism to respect the local culture trying to leave to our back our own culture



TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENT

In 1972 the Stockholm Conference of States took a decision to be more sensitive about the natural resources in the world. The Stockholm Conference was not the only one but it was followed by UN Conference Environment and development (UNCED) and during 2002 in Johannesburg where Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, identified five sectors, which must be protected to ensure a better living condition. These were - Water, Energy, Agriculture, Bio-diversity and Health (WEHAB) the first letters of each word that stood for 'WE habit the Earth'¹⁹. An important focus was given to bio-diversity that has been deteriorating implying the destruction of the ecosystems of the Earth both marine and terrestrial. During the conference the premiers gave their word to discuss possible modalities for the safeguard of the environment, with a major focus on sustainability.

India is one of the countries of the world with an enormous variety of ecosystems and this factor has made it an important tourist destination. There are many protected areas in the country, which attract tourists including Rathambhore (Rajasthan), Gir (Gujrat) and Periyar (Kerala), which are popular destinations with a majority of domestic tourists.

The environment and tourism have a symbolic relation; environment includes air, water, flora, fauna and people, their creations and social, cultural and economic conditions that influence their lives. Tourism thus encompasses the complete system of the nature. The whole system require environmental and ecological preservation which can be expressed as:

$$(N+W+M) EE = \text{Tourism}^{20}$$

where N=nature, W= wildlife, M=man and his activities and EE= ecological and environment. From that we can understand more how much these two aspects are well correlated between them. If tourism is

¹⁹ Speech of Kofi Annan "Toward a sustainability tourism," New York 14 May 2002

²⁰ Negi Jagmohan (1990) "Tourism Development and Resource conservation Metropolitan", New Delhi

developing in a fragile environment it can destroy the quality and the resources that originally attracted the visitors to them. Dr J. Negi did a discussion on ecology and tourism in Kerala- the importance of the only remaining evergreen forest in India- the Silent of Valley is highlighted with the threats that²¹ it is facing at present.

KERALA ENVIRONMENT

The beauty of Kerala includes its climate, religious harmony, cultural heritage and several natural attractions. It has become an irresistible attraction to nature lovers and travellers. Lush forests, hills, beaches and backwaters characterized the landscape.

According with statistics of resources of the Government of Kerala lately the Environment has shown significant loss in its biodiversity. At the present rate Kerala could have a population of 60 millions by the 2003²² signifying increasing population pressure on the resources. By then it is also estimated that 1/3 of the bio-diversity would be extinct.

Both the catchment areas and coastal areas are ecologically sensitive. Some highly critical areas are Agasthyamada, High Ranges of Idukki district and Wayanad belt in Malabar. The Mangroves forest with almost 14 different species distributed along fringes, backwaters and estuaries, are important for prawn and fish production. Today their size has reduced to less than 50km² from the original 700 km² of mangroves, which reportedly existed in Kerala earlier. Also the coastal areas have become cesspool of pesticides and toxic materials discharged from agricultures operations.

²¹ Tourism Development Resource, Op. Cit.

²² Overwiev 2003, Government of Kerala

In the wake of all this, the Kerala government is adopting a Biodiversity Conservation Plan that would establish a model for the sustainable utilisation of resources of livelihood and equitable benefits. Measures to preserve the forests and mitigate human wildlife conflicts with appropriate methods and to minimize the impacts of the mass tourism and pilgrimage tourism are important points on the agenda.

The role of Tourism

The environment and tourism are closely linked in Kerala, as tourism is heavily dependent on the environment for its sustenance. The forms of tourism popular in Kerala – ecotourism, beach tourism, backwater tourism and coastal tourism are all heavily dependent on the environment and its resources.

There are several aspects that differentiate the sustainability between the developing countries and advanced states emphasizing the existing difficulties and exacerbating the need for intervention to overcome development problems. The problem of the distribution is more dangerous in the undeveloped countries especially in the rural sphere where the conditions of subsistence are often joined to the natural resources. Their destruction could put the local poor habitants in several difficulties for their maintenance²³.

Tourism contributing to Environmental Decay

These problems are visible in the big cities of Kerala but also in the rural village near the National Park and along the coast where there is a major concentration of the tourists. There are different cases that point out the violent constructions of big resorts and hotels near the beaches: *Samadura Hotel* that had a concept that the tourists should be able to step

²³ For this subject: M. Natale, "Economia e popolazione", Milano 1994

²⁴ T.G. Jacob "Tales of the Tourism from Kovalam", 1998

down from their rooms directly to the sea!²⁴ The project was left incomplete along with the big amounts borrowed from the banks.

This is in spite of the regulation that prohibits any construction and activities in the coastal zones that stretches 500m from the high-tide line²⁵. All these procedures were catalysed by the protests that they haven't a big importance because the buildings of hotels, resorts, and junkie joints, multinational and so on involving a big consequences to the fisher folk which doesn't have right to live in their houses and forced to leave their houses on the coast. They are the habitants of the coast and their sector has been in turmoil since the last many years. There are many unions that group the fisher folk to get help. An example could be the Swatantra Matsya Thozhilai Union. The situation of fisher folk is becoming quite difficult since the Government has given the permission to the foreigners to approach to Kerala Sea even though this is opposed by several protests from the local people.

Air pollution

Another crucial point of the environment in Kerala is the pollution of the water and the air due to urbanisation. According to the report of the Government of Kerala²⁶, Cochin is one of the more polluted cities because it is one of the main cities in the state and a point where the international tourists arrive before moving to the other parts of the state. The big hotels that are located along the beaches cause incredible pollution, not only leading to the destruction of natural resources but also causing waste disposal problems. An example could be the *Samandra Hotel*, which dumps all its garbage into a huge open pit of its property. This has caused a further problem by animals spreading the rotten waste around into nearby areas and also polluting the air with unpleasant smells.

²⁵ Coastal Regulation Zone Act, 1991

²⁶ Economy review 2003

Sometime the pollution in Kerala is not just due to tourism but also from the multinational company as Coca Cola that has exploited the water of the Palakkad districts, the company was “*causing shortage of drinking water in the area through over-exploitation of ground water sources.*” And more “*Water samples from these wells analysed have revealed hardness, chlorides and concentration of total dissolved solids (TDS) beyond tolerable levels for drinking water.*”²⁷ The article continues to give some more detail about the reclamation of wells creating several problems to the local people especially on the health side.

Quarry pollution

Kerala also is full of quarries famous in the entire world. The problems of quarrying are not only the exploitation of the natural resources but also - how many workers are employed with an unpaid salary? How many woman and children are involved in this kind of work? A common picture of Kerala is the women and children working on the streets and breaking big rocks into smaller pieces for the construction of the luxury houses or big hotels without any working budget. That is not the only pictures that you can find but also woman that have to walk for kilometres to bring water to their families in contradiction to the big hotels that build swimming pools or golf courses that require litres and litres of water for their maintenance. Water is one of the first needs for the human being and the green house effect doesn't make the situation any easier. In Kerala 10 years ago, the climate was milder and now during the summer season with the raising of the temperature the drought is more visual. People are waiting for the tank full of water to fill up their water cans. Also the cost is rising as it was earlier 1.40€ but now is 3.2€.

²⁷ Coca-Cola: Continuing the Battle in Kerala by Surendranath C, India Resource Center
July 10th 200

An example of this is the case of the Villayani Lake, Thiruvananthapuram that was considered as a fresh water lake²⁸. Although the Ministry imposed restrictions on construction of houses, these were violated by the tourism industry. Many private tourist cottages have mushroomed in these areas preventing the flow of water in from other smaller streams into the lake. The lake is also a main source of drinking water for Vengoor, Ksalliyoor, Pallchal, and Thiruvallam. The insecticides sprays in this area have polluted the field and backwater fishes died. But the irresponsible tourism could provoke an increase of pollution of the toxic and that was closed to the free trekking. The problem of solid waste also forced the Forest Department to prevent tourists for going into the forests for long treks.

Conclusion

Pollution in India is one of the negative aspects that characterises this mysterious country. Driving through it will be easy to find air, water, and noise pollution especially in the big city. Of course when I left Bangalore and arrived to Cochin my ears were savouring just the few cars and the silence. Silence is one element of the nature that is broken by the violent urbanization of the little villages and garbage lying everywhere not only because of tourists but also local people who sometimes throw waste in the canals and forest. Maybe a better campaign from the Government could be useful to save Mother Nature who is being so hospitable to us and as we want our guests to bring us respect why should we not respect her first?

We can arrive to a conclusion that the mass tourism or an irresponsible tourism can provoke heavy damages to the natural resources. The government should be adopting a process planning of the tourist offer that assures its sustainability in long run. In order to make this happen the Government has to develop a politics with a major investment that can be fused with maximization of the profits but at the

²⁸ Mathrubhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram, 04.07.2003

same time can guarantee the integrity of the cultural and natural resources. The evolution of the tourism industry towards a determinate development model depends in particular on the preferences of the customers; knowledge of sustainable tourism to the tourist is therefore one important element. This should involve the national and the international communities in order that the concept of responsible tourism could increase in the future generation and contribute in a concrete manner to the natural and culture resources of our world.



CIVIL SOCIETY ATTEMPTS TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM

- CAMPAIGN AT BEKAL-

The town of Bekal is situated in the Kasaragod district of Kerala and is known for its architectural monuments, splendid beaches and quiet countryside. Its economy is based on agriculture and fishing but most of the people are employed as fishermen. Fishing is the main resource for the economy and Bekal has the distinction of having the maximum number of woman directly involved in fishing activities²⁹.

Bekal as a Special Tourism Area

Bekal is a little-known tourist destination, mostly visited by travellers on-route to other nearby, more popular places like Coorg or Mangalore. Its foray into intensive development of tourism began in 1992, when the Indian Government, through the Tourism National Development Plan, identified 5 regions of the country as Special Tourism Area (STAs) of which one was Bekal. STAs were to feature tourism projects approved only by the Central and State Governments. Added incentives like tax holidays, financial and technical assistance, cheap resource availability and a strong infrastructure base were an integral part of the concept of STAs. The concept of the STA was to develop a new economy where the involvement of the private sector was encouraged not only through tourism policy but also through the New Industrial Policy of 1991. The concept of intensive development of tourism through STAs in India was akin to the development of mass tourism destinations in Indonesia and Thailand.

The Main Features of the Project

In execution of the plan to convert Bekal into a Special Tourism Area, two authorities were constituted - the Bekal Development Authority (BDA), for the administrative supervision of the project and Bekal Resorts

²⁹ Equations, "Report of the coastal zone watch program", March 2000

Development Corporation Ltd (BRDC) to develop the area as an international standard “*Beach Tourist Destination*”. In 1996, the government approved a plan supervised by the BRDC and proposed by two architects from Australia and Manila who presented it as a sustainable tourism project (socio-economically and environmentally) that would increase the benefits to the local people through increased international and local arrivals.

The Executive Summary of the Bekal Tourism Project, prepared by the BRDC indicates that Bekal was chosen as a good potential destination in South Asia for unexploited beaches and for its good connectivity with others cities in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The project area fell under the territorial jurisdiction of 4 panchayats³¹ of Chemnad, Uduma, Pallikere and Ajanoor. The project involved the development of the region by building hotels, setting up recreational facilities (golf, aqua sports, tennis) and cultural facilities (demonstration halls and auditoriums for the traditional arts). An essential component of the project was building infrastructure as the project itself was conceived as an “*Urban-restructuring Plan*”. This included improving roads along the coast, setting up new water supply systems by utilizing the water of Chandragiri and Kari Cheri rivers to set up waste management systems with the main users being hotels and the household.

The Impacts of the Project

The negative economic impacts that the project would have had on the local people can be understood in terms of the loss of livelihood opportunities through displacement. Development of the resorts and other facilities would involve displacing entire villages whose populations were involved either in cultivation (of paddy and tobacco) or fishing. This would

³⁰ Panchayat is an institution in the rural areas and it is constituted in every state with a population not exceeding 20.000 habitants (Constitution of India)

lead to direct unemployment of 10,000 fishermen and farmers but would also severely impact the livelihoods of other who are dependent on these industries like fish merchants, ice planters and casual laborers, thus violating the fundamental right of the citizens conferred by the Constitution of India. Although the fisher folk said that they have no objection to tourism, they were clear that they would defend their right if anybody would try to take away their traditional fishing land. Another direct impact could be the reduction in the fish catch resulting from the construction activity and water sports and other rigorous activity in the ocean and backwaters. ³²

The fear of adverse socio-cultural impacts of the project were equally alarming Local people began to fear that the place could change into other beach destinations like Goa and Kovalam bringing related problems of the commercialization of the sex, drug addiction plus the sexual exploitation of the children. Voicing the reasons for protesting mass tourism in Kerala, Kumari, a local woman stated the following – “*We don’t want the infiltration of this type of foreign culture*”³³. At the time, Bekal was already experiencing that such fear well not unfounded. Newspapers were reporting news about how the local people forcefully sent back two foreign tourists because there were walking semi-nude on the beach and in another case detained a youth who was found carrying 4 kilos of ganja. The commercialization of rich local culture and tradition was also an important element of this fear.

Alongside this, environmentalists had established that the construction of a resort inviting mass tourism, with all the infrastructures could provoke serious environmental problems not only disturbing the existing ecology but also due to the pollution wastage of water and the use of the pesticides and insecticides to maintain the golf courses. Most importantly, the project was envisaged and construction carried out in blatant violation

³¹ Letter written by Sree Kurumba Araya Samajam to Chief Minister of Kerala, Member of the Parliament and to the District Collector, 26 February 1992.

³²INSAF, Newsletter, June 1995, (Woman unite against the tourism organization).

of the Coastal Regulation Zone Act of 1991, which classified certain areas of the project as falling under the sensitive zones of CRZ I and CRZ III³⁴. The development of the resort would displace 3 villages (Chettukundu, Kappil and Kanneel) in violation of the Act which states that only uninhabited regions can be developed, also the construction of facilities inside the area of the Bekal Fort, considered as a protected monument was also in violation of the Act.

The Role of Civil Society in the Campaign

In protest of this ludicrous plan, a mass campaign was launched against the Bekal International Tourist Project, supported by civil society organisations. The campaign involved sending letters of protest to project officials questioning the rationale and specifics of the project and to government officials including the Prime Minister of the country emphasizing the negative impacts of the project especially on the fisher folk. Many organisations were instrumental in this campaign including – Bekal Samrakshana Samithi and Bekal Fort Action Committee, Sharjah and non-governmental organizations. There were other grounds for opposing the project - the Ezhimala Naval Academy, located 40 km from Bekal a strategically important defence base of the country, opposed the project for the possible risk to the national security as the project was situated too close to the naval base and could provoke spy activities.

The contradictory statement issued by government officials itself is an indication that all were not consulted and not in favour of the project. For example, the Kasargod District Collector said *“I am not expecting any foreign tourist to come to Bekal once the project materialises.... It’s the*

³³ The Act classifies coastal region into four categories: ecologically fragile areas as Coastal facilities as CRZ-I, develop urban area with infrastructures facilities CRZ-II, tidier-developed Rural area as CRZ-III and coastal stretches in the Andaman and Nicobar Island, as well as Lakshadweep and other small island except when they are not otherwise included in CRZ-I, II or III as CRZ-IV.

*loneliness of this place which attracts foreigners to Bekal; once the tourist village is built that attraction will be over forever*³⁴

If one is to assess the situation of the Bekal Project today, one can notice that the campaign has significantly changed the attitude and objective of the developers. The BRDC has changed its program and has shifted focus to sustainability with safeguarding the fisher folk and the farmers, preventing the commercialisation of the cultural and art values and respecting the rules of the CRZ. However, Bekal continues to fast develop into a large tourist destination with many new hotels and resorts in the pipeline. Probably was reflects the aftermath of the Bekal campaign and its impact today is the statement of the State's Chief Minister who said in an interview regarding the Bekal Project - *"I am proud to be here, but not happy as I feel this should have happened five years ago...but unfortunately, delay has been crippling development activities in the State."*³⁵. The wish of the politicians to make Bekal into mass tourism destination is clearly present.

³⁴ Express News Service *Bekal tourism center running into fresh row*

³⁵ Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 131, July 2004



CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report was to focus on development along three axes – Economics, Ethics and Environment using the tourism sector in Kerala, India as a case study. My conclusion after this research is that tourism can have significant positive impacts, especially economically, but sustainability of tourism would require consideration of its possible negative impacts on society, culture and the environment that are sometimes forgotten due to the nonchalance of promoters. I also understood that civil society can play a proactive role in ensuring sustainability, preserving democracy and safeguarding human rights - as was highlighted by the campaign at Bekal which was launched against an utterly unsustainable tourism project.

I conclude with some questions regarding the development paradigm and the role of civil society in it, based on my research and experiences of the tourism as a development tool in Kerala, India which I place for debate

Ethics - At an international level, can we not aim towards socio-cultural sustainability tourism by making tourists themselves more sensitive and responsible rather than going through international agreements? Who is more important – the tourist or the local person? (especially in the context of calamity relief)

Economics – This research has reflected the extent to which a service based on leisure activities, such as tourism, can be pursued and promoted as an ‘industry’ leading to consumerism and corporatisation. How can we analyse and critique this trend of globalisation that goes beyond the tourism sector alone.

Some days ago in the South of Asia almost of 150.000 people lost their lives in a massive natural catastrophe, of which a part of the deaths were of tourists from foreign countries. This is a good example to consider in the context of the globalisation of tourism trade, which draws tourists into different parts of the world. However, when there is a natural disaster of

this kind, which wipes out entire tourism economies (like has happened in coastal Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka) how will local economies ever be able to rise from such devastation? Is tourism a sustainable livelihood option in such regions?

Environment- It is not only tourism that is causing environmental degradation, but also multinational companies like Coca-Cola, that are polluting the waters of Kerala. For this reason, and because these large companies influence in a large way the employment structure of the local population is it not essential that they recognise their corporate social responsibilities and work on them?

NGOs- Are NGOs democratically communicating with the society and local people and working in unison with the people or are the two processes of people's development and civil society movements running parallel to each other without meeting?



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