

## **PERCEPTION OF LOCAL COMMUNITY ON ECOTOURISM PRACTICES AT PARAMBIKULAM TIGER RESERVE**

<sup>1</sup>Ms. Sivakami .V, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Bindu V.T

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Tourism Management, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, Mettupalayam Road, Coimbatore-641 042, Tamil Nadu.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor (SS), Department of Tourism Management, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, Mettupalayam Road, Coimbatore-641 042, Tamil Nadu.

### **ABSTRACT**

The new global environment movement in the year 1970 and the general dissatisfaction towards mass tourism, a new form of tourism emerged generally termed as Ecotourism. Ecotourism is an ideal and alternative choice to the devastating nature of mass tourism in the 21st century and an attempt for sustainable ecological development. The Protected Area Network in the country therefore becomes the most logical starting point for development of ecotourism. Promoting ecotourism through community participation can help conserve the ecology and environment and improve the well-being of local people. Often displaced local communities, especially tribals or others have in any case restricted livelihood options of the original inhabitants left the poor local communities still poorer and often without a viable recourse. Ecotourism can be made a most effective instrument in bringing about the balance where local livelihoods actually benefit from improved conservation measures. Researchers have undertaken a study to analyze the socio cultural, environmental and economic impacts from the perception of local community and the role of Eco Development communities in the development of community at Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, Kerala where Tourism is being managed by Village Eco-Development Committees in six settlements along with the Forest Department.

**Keywords:** Eco Tourism, Local Community, Perception , Sustainable development

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism has emerged as an instrument of economic development and employment generation, particularly in remote and backward areas the world over. It is a large service industry globally in terms of gross revenue as well as foreign exchange earnings. According to the World Tourism Organization (2010), as a result of an ever increasing number of destinations opening up and

investing in tourism development, modern tourism has become a key driver for socio-economic progress through the creation of jobs and enterprises, infrastructure development, and the export revenues earned. In general there is no doubt about the sustainability and the impacts the travel & tourism industry has on a global level. The impacts of tourism can said to be more than the outcome of a certain tourist event or facility. To onslaught the impacts of tourism, A new form of tourism names as alternative tourism which a shift of the priority of government from mere economic gains to preservation of unspoiled environment and consideration of the needs of local people (Krippendorf 1982) . He suggested that alternative tourism aims to discourage the outside influence in the development and lays emphasis on proactive participation of local people. Thus, alternative tourism is a generic term that may represent appropriate tourism, ecotourism, soft tourism, responsible tourism, people to people tourism, controlled tourism, small-scale tourism, low-impact tourism, cottage tourism and green tourism in order to minimize the impacts of mass tourism activities. Thus Eco Tourism is a more sensitive approach to tourism development that strives to satisfy the needs of local people, tourists and the resource base in a complementary rather than a competitive manner.

Ecotourism in simple terms means management of tourism and conservation of nature in a way so as to maintain a fine balance between the requirements of tourism and ecology on the one hand and needs of the local communities for jobs, new skills, income generating employment and a better status for women on the other. Conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity is implicitly and explicitly ingrained in the principals of ecotourism with much emphasis on sustainable use of natural resources and scope for income generation and employment opportunities.

India became a very common name for ecotourism, because of its natural resources and beauty and is one of the 12-mega bio-diverse countries of the world with a rich cultural heritage too. The most significant feature of the ecotourism industry in India is its capacity to generate large-scale employment opportunities, particularly in remote and underdeveloped area. It offers enormous potential for utilizing natural resources like landscapes, mountains, bio-diversity areas, rivers etc for the benefit of people. Ecotourism focuses on Indian local cultures, wilderness, adventures, and environmental protection. In India the movement is gathering momentum with more travel and travel related organizations for addressing the needs of the eco tourists and promoting ecotourism in the country. Ecotourism in India is a niche industry that has mainly developed in the past few years. It has often been the case with the tourist destinations in India where the ecological balance of a fragile area has degraded drastically due to the pressure of tourism. Hence, the country is trying to promote tourism in a manner in which it generates considerable revenue without disturbing the delicate eco-system in the region.

Parambikulam, Kerala located in the southern part of Western Ghats, immediately south of Palghat gap, exhibits mountainous terrain .It is famous for Parambikulam Tiger Reserve. The sanctuary lies between the Anamalai hills and Nelliampathy hills. The reserve is the most protected ecological section of Anamalai sub-unit of Western Ghats, surrounded on all sides by protected areas and sanctuaries of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the reserve is endowed with a peninsular flora and fauna. The altitude ranges between 300m and 1438m above MSL. The region being a major ecological continuum from Peechhi to Eravikulam through Anamalai aids the large viable populations of wildlife.

Parambikulam is the home for four different tribes of indigenous people located in core area has total human population of about 1,100 including Kadar, Malasar, Muthuvan, and Malamalasar, settled in six colonies with their own cultural, Socio-economic and spatial organization. The buffer also has atleast 600 people in different settlements. Tourism is being managed by Village Eco-Development Committees in these six settlements along with the Forest Department. There are 6 presidents of these Eco-Development Committees who report to the Warden.

NAME OF SETTLEMENT	TRIBES
Earth dam colony	Kadar
Kuriakutty colony	Kadar
Kaadas colony	Kadar
Sungam colony	Malasar
Poopara colony	Muthuvan
Anchaam colony	Malamalasar

People from tribal colonies inside the reserve are engaged as guides for treks and safaris, and are provided employment through various eco-tourism initiatives. Parambikulam Tiger Reserve has implemented the participatory forest management scheme (PFMS).The tiger reserve hosts many capacity building training programs conducted by Parambikulam tiger conservation foundation in association with various organizations. The eco-development programs implemented in the past few years have given a new lease of life to the tribes living inside the sanctuary .The programs aim at empowering communities dependent on forests and protecting biodiversity .the tribes were ensured of alternative employment. The forest products collected by them is

processed and made into value added products such as honey ,beeswax balm , handicrafts, paper bags and other souvenirs .These products are sold through Eco shop in the sanctuary .The proceeds from the sale continue to be the livelihood for the local tribes of Parambikulam Tiger Reserve.

The tribes traditionally sold the collected products to the local traders through barter system. This left the tribes in debt. So, an initiative to collect honey scientifically and process it in hygienic conditions was taken up . After filtering, bottling, labeling and sealing, the honey is sold through the eco shops. The tribal community is also trained to make attractive and marketable products from bamboo. Parambikulam paper bags made by the EDC of the Kadar tribe are yet another attraction at the eco shop. These bags are provided at the entrance and other key points where plastic bags are replaced by them. This help control polythene and garbage in the park.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Anil Reddy (2000) holds the view that ecotourism is entirely a new approach in tourism. It is reserving travel to natural areas to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the environment. He reviews various issues and information about ecotourism. Weaver (1999) Ecotourism is a form of alternative tourism which mostly attracts nature and wildlife lovers from the urban, industrial and cosmopolitan centers. Mostly, the industrialized and developed countries have earmarked on special budgetary financial packages for ecotourism projects. People of those industrialized countries are more motivated to visit the ecotourism places as the lives in big cities become restless and stressful. There can be several types such as soft or hard, consumptive or non-consumptive, natural and unnatural and exploitive, passive & active. Ralf Buckley (2009) in his evaluative study on the net effects of ecotourism on the environment examined the outcomes of ecotourism that has been achieved in regards to environmental issues. It proposes an analytic framework distinguishing four types of mechanism: those which can generate positive effects; those which can reduce negative effects; those which can increase negative effects; and contested issues, including scale and mainstreaming. Goodwin (1996) Tourism is now the world's largest industry and it has an increasing impact on protected areas. Our understanding of these mechanisms, their ecological impacts, and our capacity to manage tourism in protected areas lags behind the growth of tourism to protected areas." Unfortunately, this growth of the tourist sector in Costa Rica could be a risk to the protected areas throughout the country. Binu.R (2008) found out that eco-tourism in Kerala is having high potentialities for tapping the opportunities, minimizing the impact of weaknesses and in overcoming threats. Regarding the perception of eco-tourists, they visit for entertainment, the major source of information about the eco-tourism projects being tour operators. Websites constitute the second major source. Majority of the eco-

tourist centers were of causal nature, good visitor management and differences existing in the satisfaction level of eco-tourists in Kerala. Further major dissatisfies of the eco-tourists were inadequate promotion, facilities for education and research, rate charged and facilities for communication. Babu (2010) conducted a study on 'Ecotourism in the Mudumalai Wild life sanctuary' in Tamilnadu. He concluded that ecotourism endeavors to encourage and support the diversity of local economies for which the tourism related income is important. The revenue generated from tourism helps and encourages government to fund conservation projects and training programmes. Stone, (2015) explained that collaboration was a key principle in community based tourism approaches in most developing countries. Participation on ecotourism activities resulted on biodiversity conservation and community livelihoods due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the design planning and implementation of ecotourism projects. Due to the diversity of stakeholders the empowerment of communities using ecotourism is complex. Turner (1986) emphasized on the local population is often willing to enter into an exchange with tourists if they can reap some benefit without incurring unacceptable costs. Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996) discovered that respondents had a mixed attitude towards tourism. It was also found that majority of respondents had very positive perception of the impacts of tourism towards role of women and young adults in the community's social and economic life. Vijayan J. (2007) found that the attitude of local people in tourism centers towards tourism development is positive and tourism has a major impact on the economic life of the destination population. From the study it was found that the tourism officials have not succeeded in bringing awareness of benefit of tourism to the local people. It is suggested that the Government of Kerala should take speedy measures to educate the societal benefit of tourism development through various types of programmes. Further, Government should form cooperative societies of educated and trained youth in destinations and provide support to run various kinds of tourism enterprises.

### **3. NEED FOR THE STUDY**

Host relationship and host development is an essential dimension of community based ecotourism. The relationships among tourism, local people, and biodiversity conservation in the study area must be strengthened for a sustainable development of the area. Hence the study has been undertaken to measure the perception of host community on Eco Tourism at Parambikulam with a view to frame strategies for sustainable development of the study area.

### **4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Tourism development and conservation cannot be compromised for each other .Tourism development will be sustainable only when it involves the local people and contributes for the well being of the locals. Ecotourism is a type of tourism which has the dual advantage of

contributing to the well being of the local people and conservation of ecosensitive areas on which tourism activity is based on. Hence it is important to study the perception of local people on ecotourism activities at Parambikulam Tiger reserve .Perception of local people was analysed from the following objectives.

- To understand the profile of local communities based on Ecotourism at Parambikulam Tiger Reserve.
- To study the role of EDC in the development of community.
- To measure the economic impacts of Eco Tourism Activities on community.
- To identify the demographic factors influencing the eco tourism practices of Parambikulam.

## 5. METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of the study, tribes of the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, Kerala were selected as population. Those who were willing to contribute and be a part of the survey were only approached. Convenience sampling is used for the present study. The sample size of the study was 300 local tribes; the data were collected through a structured questionnaire on five-point Likert’s scale. The fieldwork for this study was conducted in the months of December 2017 to March 2018. Data collected were analysed using SPSS (statistical package for social science) version 23.0 with descriptive statistics such as Frequencies, ANOVA and Z- Test

## 6. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

### 6.1 Findings

**Table 1.1: Demographic Profile**

<b>Demographical factors</b>	<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	123	41.0
	Female	177	59.0
Age	0 - 20yrs	61	20.3
	21 – 40yrs	158	52.7
	41- 60yrs	60	20.0
	>60 yrs	21	7.0
Marital Status	Single	98	32.7
	Married	200	66.7
	Others	2	0.7

Occupation	Self employed	31	10.3
	Business	38	12.7
	Government	42	14.0
	Private	62	20.7
	Retired	10	3.3
	Agriculture	41	13.7
	Unemployed	76	25.3
Level of Education	School	109	36.3
	Under Graduate	135	45.0
	Post Graduate	34	11.3
	Diploma	22	7.3
Annual Income	Below 25000	143	47.7
	Rs 25000-Rs 50000	79	26.3
	Rs 50000- Rs 100000	54	18.0
	Rs 100000- Rs 200000	19	6.3
	Above Rs 200000	5	1.7

From the table 1.1 it is inferred that 41.0 percent of respondents are male and 59.0 percent of respondents are female. 20.3 percent of respondents are below 20 years of age, 52.7 percent under the age group of 21 to 40 years, 20.0 percent under the age of 41 to 60 years and 7.0 percent under the age group above 60 years. Among the locals 66.7 percent of respondents are married and 32.7 percent are single, and 0.7 percent of respondents fall under other category. Among the local people, 10.3 percent of respondents are Self-Employed, 12.7 percent of respondents are engaged in Business, 14.0 percent of the respondents are government employees, 3.3 percent of respondents are retired, 13.7 percent of respondents are agriculturalists, 25.3 percent of respondents are unemployed and majority are private employees with 20.7 percent. When analysed on education level of locals, 36.3 percent have completed school education, 45.0 percent have completed under graduation, 11.3 percent completed post graduation and 7.3 percent completed diploma. It is also inferred that 47.7 percent of locals earn below 25,000 , 26.3 percent between 25,000 to 50,000, 18.0 percent between 50,000 to 1,00,000 ,6.3 percent of between 1,00,000to 2,00,000 and 1.7 percent of respondents earn above 2,00,000. Majority of the respondents live as joint family with 52.7 percent, and 47.7 percent as Nuclear family.



**Table 1.2: Economic Impacts**

<b>Economic Impacts</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Tourism can be source of income	300	3.9333
More tourist will increase the local economy	300	3.5433
Shopping has increased the scope for preserving rural handicrafts and income	300	4.0567
Increased employment opportunity for locals	300	4.0800
Most important ecotourism service(accommodation, food and beverage, transportation and tour operation) are provided by local community people	300	3.7767
Products produced by community people are used in the ecotourism ventures	300	3.9500
The funds have been significantly used to improve basic infrastructure in the community	300	4.1200
Valid N (list wise)	300	

From the above table 1.2 it is inferred that among the economic impacts, significance of funds used to improve the basic infrastructure in the community scores the highest with 4.12 and tourist will increase the local economy scores the lowest with 3.54. Majority of the values are closer to 4, hence it is inferred that above factors contribute to Economic impacts on locals of Parambikulam Tiger reserve

**Table 1.3: Environmental and Ecological Impact**

<b>Environmental and Ecological Impact</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Entry of visitors are regulated	300	3.5233
Tourism Provides environmental education for visitors	300	3.9400
Measures are taken for land, water, noise pollution	300	3.9167
Usage of plastics are banned in the region	300	3.8200



Measures are taken to prevent forest fire	300	3.8933
Solid waste are reused & recycled	300	3.9133
Measures are taken for protection of flora and fauna	300	3.6900
Proper waste management of littering and other ecological hazards has been implemented	300	3.9400
Animal conflict has been reduced	300	3.7900
The park authority has taken a number of afforestation Programmes	300	3.9000
Maintaining the ecology of the park has direct bearing on the existence of community	300	4.0067
Valid N (list wise)	300	

From the above table 1.3 it is inferred that among the environmental and ecological impacts, Maintaining the ecology of the park has direct bearing on the existence of community scores the highest with 4.006 and regulation in the entry of visitors the lowest with 3.52. Majority of the values are closer to 4, hence it is inferred that above factors contribute to the environmental and ecological impacts of ecotourism in Parambikulam Tiger reserve

**Table 1.4: Political Impacts**

<b>Political Impacts</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Equal opportunities to express opinions and ideas	300	3.7967
The views of the community are incorporated in all planning and decision making	300	4.3533
Motivated to make decisions on the ecotourism development	300	3.7400
Valid N (list wise)	300	

From the above table 1.4 it is inferred that among the political impacts, incorporation of views of community in all planning and decision making scores the highest with 4.35 and Motivation to make decisions on the ecotourism development by the locals scores the lowest with 3.74.

Majority of the values are closer to 4, hence it is inferred that above factors contribute to the political impacts on Parambikulam Tiger reserve

**Table 1.5: Threats**

<b>Threats</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Mass tourism activity in the region	300	3.8500
No proper visitor management techniques followed	300	4.1633
Cultural degradation due to tourism and visitation	300	3.8567
Community recreational resources are over used by tourists	300	3.9600
There is high pollution(air, noise, water and land) due to tourism activities	300	3.8200
Migration of local people	300	3.8967
Quality of life has deteriorated because of tourism	300	4.0033
Valid N (list wise)	300	

From the above table 1.5 it is inferred that the major threat to the tiger reserve is No proper follow of visitor management techniques with the score of 4.16 and minor threat is pollution through tourism activities with 3.82. Majority of the values are closer to 4, hence it is inferred that above are threats to Parambikulam Tiger reserve

**Table 1.6: EDC Functions**

<b>EDC FUNCTIONS</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
The functioning of EDC has given socio economic opportunity to me as well as to other community member	300	3.3333
EDC helps in providing financial existence to registered members	300	4.0767
EDC maintains amenable work culture	300	3.9933
Convenient working hours	300	3.8200
Salary is paid on time	300	3.8400

EDC also takes care of other benefits such as insurance, health and incentives	300	3.9400
EDC helps in sustainable and positive interaction of the group with protected areas	300	4.0067
Eco development program has built up an environment of mutual trust and respect between park staff and villagers	300	4.1700
Valid N (list wise)	300	

From the above table 1.6 it is inferred that majority of the local community perceive Eco development program has built up an environment of mutual trust and respect between park staff and villagers with the score of 4.17 and the functioning of EDC has given socio economic opportunity to me as well as to other community member through tourism activities being the lowest with 3.33. Hence it is inferred that EDC provides major contribution on community development in Parambikulam tiger reserve.

**Table 1.7: Influence of Age on Study Constructs**

ANOVA											
		Age		Occupation		Level of Education		Annual Income		Family type	
		df	Sig.	Df	Sig.	df	Sig.	df	Sig.	df	Sig.
Socio cultural Impacts	Between Groups	3	.419	6	.147	3	.209	4	<b>.000</b>	2	<b>.001</b>
	Within Groups	296		293		296		295		297	
	Total	299		299		299		299		299	
Economic Impacts	Between Groups	3	.214	6	<b>.039</b>	3	.327	4	<b>.025</b>	2	.112
	Within Groups	296		293		296		295		297	
	Total	299		299		299		299		299	
Ecological and environmental Impacts	Between Groups	3	.235	6	.077	3	<b>.020</b>	4	<b>.014</b>	2	<b>.003</b>
	Within Groups	296		293		296		295		297	
	Total	299		299		299		299		299	

Political Impacts	Between Groups	3	<b>.031</b>	6	.467	3	.143	4	.458	2	<b>.011</b>
	Within Groups	296		293		296		295		297	
	Total	299		299		299		299		299	
Threats	Between Groups	3	.547	6	.140	3	<b>.035</b>	4	.729	2	<b>.001</b>
	Within Groups	296		293		296		295		297	
	Total	299		299		299		299		299	
EDC functions	Between Groups	3	.298	6	<b>.000</b>	3	.568	4	<b>.012</b>	2	<b>.009</b>
	Within Groups	296		293		296		295		297	

From the above table 1.7 it is inferred that Annual Income and family type has significant contributes to the locals perception on socio cultural impacts on ecotourism activities in tiger reserve .Occupation and Annual Income has significant relationship with the perception of locals on economic impacts from tourism activities in the region .Education level, family type and type of occupation by local people contributes to the locals perception on Ecological and environmental Impacts on the tiger reserve .Age and Family type has significant relationship with the perception of locals on political impacts in the region .Level of education and family type contributes to the perception of locals on threats to the local community from ecotourism activities in the region .Occupation ,Family type and annual income has significant relationship with perception of locals on functions of EDC .Hence it is inferred that type of family majorly influences the perception of locals on various impacts from tourism activities on community and tiger reserve.

## 6.2 Suggestions

- Mode of entry by visitors to the tiger reserve and protection of flora and fauna from pollution should be much more regulated since local people perceive pollution as a major threat to the fragile ecosystem of the tiger reserve.Visitors are allowed to commute in their own four wheeler to the region and there is no restriction in the number of four wheelers permitted inside the tiger reserve .In order to protect the environment from pollution frequent Public transportation service may be provided, so that locals and visitors benefit from the service and also this assures more sustainability to the region on which the local community is dependent for their livelihood.

- Equal Opportunity may be provided for locals in expressing their opinions and views on the ecotourism planning and development, Local people are natives and have in depth knowledge on the features and resources of the region, and also they interact with visitors during various ecotourism activities and understand visitor's expectation from tourism in the region, which may help the tiger reserve authorities in sustainable planning and development of the region.
- Stake holders can introduce more training Programs for locals in handling tourists , which helps in addressing the problem of seasonal employment and upliftment of local community.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Parambikulam located in Palakkad Kerala is the home for four different tribes of indigenous people located in core area .Parambikulam tiger reserve is famous for eco tourism activities in the region .Tourism in the region has attained a tremendous growth with thousands of visitors from various parts of the world. Tourism development will be sustainable only when it involves the local people and contributes for the well being of the locals. Hence the researchers analysed the local's perception on various environmental, economical, socio cultural impacts, threats and functions of EDC. Findings of the study have revealed that in general, locals perceive positive impacts from tourism activities in the region with Pollution and seasonality of employment as predominant factors that need to be addressed immediately by the stake holders. Hence researchers have suggested measures like frequent public transportation, introduction of training programs and provision of equal opportunity in planning and development of the region as measures to address the issue, which helps in the sustainable development of local community and tourism activity in the region.

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