SCOPE AND POTENTIAL FOR INDIGENOUS TOURISM- AN ANALYTICAL STUDY IN WAYANAD, KERALA

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ABSTRACT:
Tourism Industry has embraced many positive changes in the recent years. The conventional mass tourism centers have made way for new eco-friendly destinations that help sustainable tourism development. Tourism in the state of Kerala is going through such a phase as its focus shifts from the traditionally popular sites like Munnar, Thekkady, Alappey, Kovalam etc. to Wayanad, Varkala, Nelliyampathy, Bekkal, Wagamon etc. These are unspoilt eco-friendly destinations which need careful and sustainable approach to take Kerala tourism to higher levels in the decades to come. Wayanad is such an upcoming tourist destination which has created euphoria among thousands of tourists around the world in the last few years. The lush green nature and the presence of a large number of tribes make Wayanad a very sensitive area in ways more than one. As such, in this study, an attempt is made to unveil the indigenous tourism potential of Wayanad. The study focused mainly on indigenous tourism as a sustainable model for Wayanad. The field study focuses on various small scale community ventures and tribal villages to identify the place specific indigenous tourism products. The experts in the study area were interviewed and the inputs obtained were interpreted through content analysis. The results of the study bring to light the potential tourism market for Wayanad tourism. The experts’ views point out the present tourism scenario in Wayanad and the major challenges faced by Wayanad tourism, especially indigenous tourism.

KEY WORDS: Community ventures, Indigenous tourism, sustainable model.

1. INTRODUCTION
Wayanad, the northern district of Kerala is situated at 700 to 2100 mts above the sea level on the southern most part of Deccan Plateau in the mountain range of Western Ghats. It is bordered by Nilgiris (Tamilnadu) and Mysore (Karnataka) in the east, Coorg (Karnataka) in the north, Malappuram (Kerala) in the South and Kozhikode and Kannur (Kerala) in the West. The scenic beauty, exotic landscape and rich heritage of Wayanad offer several opportunities for tourism promotion. Wayanad’s wildlife, plantations, and cuisine further enrich the tourism potential. The district is best known among nature lovers who search for adventure and novel experiences. Wayanad is a multi-faceted destination with immense potential for Rural tourism, Heritage tourism, Leisure tourism, Island tourism, Adventure tourism, Hydel tourism, Pilgrim tourism, Wildlife tourism, Tribal tourism, Plantation tourism, Spice tourism, Health tourism, Festival tourism, Shopping tourism and Ecotourism.
Being an identified responsible tourism destination by Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, Wayanad tourism needs to be promoted. Wayanad also struggles for their existence and livelihoods. The society treats them as the least privileged affecting their self respect gradually moving away from their culture and traditions. Due to this, the native culture of Wayanad is fast eroding. At the same time, various indigenous communities around the world have successfully positioned their respective cultures as important tourism product attracting thousands of tourists from far and near. Such a new approach and orientation help tribes preserve their culture and traditions for posterity. However, instead of the huge potential for indigenous tourism and the growing interest of the tourists for non conventional tourism attractions, India is yet to exploit this model.

India is emerging as a preferred destination for Heritage, Eco and MICE tourism for international travellers. Tourists are gradually moving towards niche travel like adventure, luxury, ethnic, indigenous, heritage, health and many other such new tourism products. They look forward to experience and to be part of the culture and heritage of the destinations they seek to explore (Divecha, 2012). The travel and tourism industry in India is taking a fresh look at the sustainable development of the tourist sites. The Special Interest Tourism (SIT), a fast growing concept and approach to tourism demonstrates a strong people centered, sustainable model which seeks more authentic experiences enabling closer interaction with host communities. Hall & Weiler (1992) suggests that rewarding, enriching, adventuresome and learning are the four major elements of Special Interest Tourism. SIT products offer customized packages of experiences developed for niche markets (Derrett, 2001). These products provide unique insights into particular destinations, communities or bodies of knowledge. In the realm of SIT, indigenous people are becoming a part of tourism industry now. This segment named ‘Indigenous Tourism’ forms a special interest area for tourists who prefer to experience the authentic indigenous culture and ethnicity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Indigenous tourism –An overview

Indigenous tourism centered on a native community and described by various terms is steadily growing as an integral part of tourism industry. For instance, it is referred to as Aboriginal or Indigenous tourism in Australia; as Aboriginal, Native or First Nations tourism in Canada; and Indian or Native American tourism in USA. It is also referred to as Anthropological Tourism or Tribal Tourism in some nations.

Increased demand for Indigenous cultural tourism experiences is creating new economic opportunities for many Indigenous communities around the world. Tourism is undoubtedly a significant economic, socio-cultural and political phenomenon and has been identified as a basis for Indigenous peoples and communities to develop a better socio-economic future (Ryan 2002; Deutschlander & Miller 2003; Fuller, Buultjens & Cummings 2005; Butler & Hinch 2007).

The term Indigenous or Aboriginal Tourism is used broadly to describe the participation of aboriginal people in tourism either directly through jobs and employment or indirectly through ownership of business enterprises (Tourism, Western Australia, 2006). In the words of Butler and Hinch (2007), ‘Indigenous tourism is a tourism activity in which indigenous people are directly involved either through control and/or having their culture serve as the essence of the attraction’.

In Canada, Parker (1993) defined Aboriginal tourism as ‘any tourism product or service, which is owned and operated by Aboriginal people’. In Australia, Aboriginal or Indigenous tourism is interpreted as ‘a tourism product which is either aboriginal owned or part owned, employs aboriginal people, or provides consenting contact with aboriginal people, culture or
land’ (SATC, 1995). Among the Kuna Indians of Panama, Swain (1989) considers Indigenous tourism as ‘tourism based on the group’s land and cultural identity and controlled from within by the group’. For Smith (1996), tribal tourism at Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico (USA) involves ‘small scale enterprises that are labour intensive for an owner, a family, or a small tribe’.

Therefore, indigenous tourism typically involves small businesses based on the inherited tribal knowledge of culture and nature. Indigenous tourism flourishes when indigenous people operate tours and cultural centers, provide visitor facilities and control tourist access to cultural events and home lands (Zeppel, 2001). According to Smith (1996), the four Hs of ‘habitat, heritage, history and handicrafts’ define indigenous tourism as ‘that segment of the visitor industry that directly involves native people whose ethnicity is a tourist attraction.’ Indigenous tourism is a means for cultural survival for many native communities and it offers a way to overcome social isolation.

### 2.2 Indigenous tourism attractions

Indigenous cultures are of special interest and the primary motivating factor for tourists travelling to exotic destinations, regions, attractions and events. They include native museums and cultural villages, nature based tours, indigenous festivals and events and indigenous art galleries. Indigenous tourism attractions are often located in rural or remote regions with limited infrastructure facilities (Getz & Jamieson, 1997). Cultural, environmental and spiritual aspects of indigenous heritage and traditions form the integral part of indigenous tourism (Zeppel, 2006).

The primary strength of indigenous tourism lies in its ability to draw tourists and arousing their interest to experience local cultures in the most authentic settings. Participation of tourists in interactive activities with aboriginal people is another key strength of indigenous tourism. The preference for this market lies more in offering intimate and spontaneous cultural experiences as there is a strong affinity between the aboriginal cultures and the natural environment. (Peter & O’Neil, 2007) In the Canadian context, ‘aboriginal tourism involves tourists’ visit of cultural attractions (e.g., historic or heritage buildings, sites, monuments, displays; landscaped art or craft workshops or galleries; festivals/fairs; performing arts; and museums) controlled and managed by aboriginal people from the demand point of view. From a supply side, it entails providing opportunities for learning about and/or experiencing local traditions, social customs, religious practices and cultural celebrations. This includes creating opportunities for first-hand interactions with willing aboriginal people. The interactions may even lead to the visitors’ participating in local customs, rituals, and other traditional activities’ (Conference Board of Canada et al., 1997).

Unlike other tourism products, indigenous tourism is place and people centric. The close association of aboriginal people with nature gives scope for indigenous ecotourism and indigenous wildlife tourism. Most tourism organizers consider indigenous tourism, wildlife tourism and ecotourism as separate niches or special interest areas of nature tourism. Indigenous wildlife tourism is referred to as ‘wildlife attractions or tours involving indigenous people and/or indigenous knowledge (i.e. interpretation) of living wildlife’ (Muloin et al., 2001). As such, the wildlife attractions or tours with indigenous inputs are required to meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Employ indigenous people as guides, interpreters or wildlife keepers;
- Incorporate indigenous content in the wildlife tours or educational programmes;
- Regular consultation with indigenous people on wildlife or cultural issues; and/or
- Fully or partly owned wildlife attractions by the host community.

(Zeppel&Muloin, 2008)
3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study aims at exploring the indigenous tourism potential of Wayanad. The study also focuses on the perceptions of the tourists about promoting indigenous tourism in Wayanad. An effort is also made to know the features of present tourism market in Wayanad.

4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is confined to Wayanad district of Kerala. The study is limited to the scope, potential and perceptions of indigenous tourism in Wayanad.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Structured interview is the main method used to collect the views from important persons associated with tourism in Wayanad as well as people who work for tribal empowerment (17 experts). Narrative technique is used to gather their views. The interviews were recorded and interpreted by means of content analysis. The experts’ views point out the present tourism scenario in Wayanad and their views on Wayanad tourism, especially about potential of indigenous tourism.

Participant and non participant observation in the natural settings is another method used for primary data collection. Brief notes were also made based on the observation of the researcher.

Questionnaire study was conducted among 404 tourists to know the profile of tourists visiting Wayanad and to know about their perceptions on Indigenous tourism. ‘Proportionate Purposive Random Sampling’ is the method used for data collection. The four tourist destinations were selected based on the number of tourist arrivals to the site. Tourist sites in Wayanad were ranked based on the tourist arrivals and the first four sites visited by large number of tourists were selected for data collection. The results of the study bring to light the features of Wayanad tourism market.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The responses reveal that 62.1% were domestic tourists and 37.9% were foreign tourists. Amongst 153 foreign tourists majority are from Europe (81%) followed by Asia (8.5%), America (8.5%) and Australia (3.2%). Further among the 88.1% of domestic tourists, 38.6% were from various districts of Kerala, followed by neighboring states Karnataka (17.9%) and Tamilnadu (17.1%). Others represent very less in number and they are from Bihar, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Lakhadweep, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Pondicherry, Rajasthan and North Eastern states like Sikkim, Manipur and Assam. The place of origin of tourists reveals that Wayanad is known as a tourist attraction across the globe. Europe is the major International market for Wayanad. Similarly, Wayand also receives a sizeable number of visitors from other districts of Kerala. Karnataka and Tamilnadu are the other tourist generating regions for Wayanad. As Wayanad district shares boarders with both Tamilnadu and Karnataka, the proximity and easy accessibility for both the people of Tamilnadu and Karnataka seems to be the prime for them to visit Wayanad, among others.

An overwhelming majority of the respondent (358 out of 404) are interested to experience indigenous tours. Though many tourists have an innate desire to experience indigenous tours, unfortunately 371 out of 404 (91.8%) have not experienced an indigenous tour in any of their trips. In their visit to Wayanad, just minuscule 6 tourists out of 404 have planned to experience indigenous tourism in Muthanga Wildlife Sactuary and Uravu of Wayanad. Thus 227 respondents out of 398 are either not visiting any indigenous attractions because of lack of awareness about it or due to lack of time for not visiting indigenous attractions in Wayanad.
tourists). The remaining 126 tourists do not have any interest in indigenous attractions. This phenomenon explains that tourists coming to Wayanad are highly interested to experience indigenous attractions. But there is neither any information nor effective promotion of the indigenous tourism products of Wayanad. It is clear that they would have planned to visit and experience the flavor of indigenous areas if they had known about it earlier.

According to Mrs. C.N.Anithakumari, District Tourism Information officer Government of Kerala, Wayanad, ‘culture is believed to be the major attraction of any indigenous tourism. Unfortunately the authenticity of tribal culture is eroding recently. Alcoholism among few tribals is one of the reasons for the erosion. They are exploited by middlemen. The real benefits do not reach them. A section of the society laughs at the tribal culture. The new generation, especially the youth is unaware of the richness of indigenous culture and art forms. So the main challenge of tourism industry is to bring back the youth towards indigenous tourism. Present day tourists do not want an in-depth tourism experience. The large scale tourism projects including resorts have given a new dimension to Wayanad tourism. Introducing small scale business units for tribes to produce souvenirs with the support of government and other self help groups will be a good idea to empower the indigenous community of Wayanad. Mutual support and cooperation between sectors associated with tourism including agriculture, forest department, NGOs, responsible tourism wing of Government of Kerala etc., are very essential for the success of such projects. The department of Tourism eagerly awaits ‘En ooru’ project proposed in Lakkidi to make the indigenous tourism dream a reality’.

Mrs Prabha Narayana Swamy, owner of Sundaramahal Homestay, Kalpetta, opines that ‘the concept of indigenous tourism has undergone changes in the recent past. The definition of indigenous tourism now relates not only to material expressions such as sites and objects, but also to language and traditions, social practices, rituals, festivals and fairs. They also encompass social values and traditions, customs and practices, aesthetic and spiritual beliefs, artistic expressions, and various other aspects of human activity. The indigenous culture of a land is more difficult to preserve than its physical objects. For a traveller, experiencing different ways of life can have a valuable educational function that stretches beyond tourism. By experiencing the uniqueness of each and the commonalities of all, tourism is a powerful mechanism for understanding other people and places’.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

7.1. Indigenous tourism potential in Wayanad

The district of Wayanad has the largest percentage of aboriginals in the state of Kerala. The tribes are the native inhabitants of the place for generations together and constituted majority till 1940s (about 60% of the population of Wayanad). But by 1971, their proportion in the total population of Wayanad had declined to 18%, due to heavy immigration of people from other parts of Kerala. As per census 2011, tribal population in Wayanad is estimated to be 1,51,443, which is around 18.53% of the total population. They comprise different sects like Paniyan, Mullu Kuruman, Kurichian, Kattunaickan Adiyan and Urali Kuruman. These communities are endogamous. There are differences among the communities in terms of economic activity, level of income, education, culture and involvement in various activities. They can broadly be categorized into agricultural laborers, marginal farmers and forest dependants (IIMK, 2006)

The basic data on tribal communities of Wayanad collected by Kerala Institute of Local Administration at Trissur published in 2011 further corroborates that Wayanad is home to adivasi communities like Adiyan, Kadar, Kattunaykan, Kurichiyan, Paniyan, Ulladan, Tachanadan moopan, Vettakuruman, Mullukuruman, and a few others. Paniyan and Adiyan
7.2 The cultural ethos of indigenous people of Wayanad

Indigenous people or adivasis own a culture and tradition entirely different from other communities. The beliefs and rituals of each tribal group have their own traditional learning passed on from generation to generation. They hold their culture and art forms dearer to their heart and preserve them very proudly. Their art forms and formalities are very simple. The stories, songs, folklore and accumulated native wisdom constitute the real treasure and are emotionally connected to them. Each tribal community possesses their own art forms. Their art forms are closely linked to nature. All their festivals and celebrations are accompanied with dance and music. The adivasi songs are classified into story songs, small songs, ritual songs, lullaby, dance songs and agriculture songs. Kurichiyan’s manpattukal (folk music) reveals their ancestor’s tradition of hunting. Vattakkali, Kolkali and daivamkanal are few common practices and rituals for communities like Paniyas and Kurumans. Daivamkanal is a ritual performed when there is any disease and for a solution to an ailment. Paniya songs and kurathinatakam (folk drama) are very popular. Thira is an important art form of Kurichiya. They sing different songs for different occasions like Harippatt, Mayilppatt, Manga ppatt, Pakshipattu, Nellukuttupatt, Teepattu and Poopattu. Palliyar kali, Vedarkali, Kadarkali, Onakkali and Vattakali are some folk dances of the tribes of Wayanad. Tudy, tavil, Kuzhal Maram and Karivi are few important musical instruments used by them.

7.3 Indigenous cuisines

Adivasis of Wayanad are unique in their food habits also. Now a day they are constrained to change their food habits largely due to the restrictions in collecting forest products owing to the new forest laws and regulations. However, they love their ethnic dishes which are very healthy. In the olden days, adivasis completely depended on the forest for food. Different varieties of tubers, leaves and fruits were collected from the forest and consumed. They also used to eat the flesh of crab, frog, fish, tortoise, and other hunted animals also. Bamboo spurt, bamboo rice and ragi are their stable food. The communities like Thenkurumans consume honey in good quantity. They cook special dishes with wild mushrooms also. The change in the times coupled with new regulations related to conservation of forests brought changes in their food habits. It may be noted that hunting is not permitted now.

The ethnic food of Wayanad tribes is a major attraction for tourists. The ethnic food stalls that spring up during tribal fests and other tourism promotion activities in Wayanad register good sales. One could see huge crowds at these stalls. Sri Vellan who was awarded the tribal ambassador of Wayanad by Kerala Samskarika Samithi has popularised the ethnic food of Mullukuruman by putting stalls at different festival venues. The Kalluppit made of gndhakasala rice, payasam made of bamboo rice, ragi ada, tapioca and fried chicken are some of the popular dishes that enjoy good patronage. These tribal dishes are so popular that some of them also figure in the menu of star hotels in Kerala.

7.4 Indigenous architecture

The architecture of Wayanad also has an indigenous touch. Distinct architectural styles may be seen in the existing tribal villages of the region. The tribal huts are the best examples of indigenous architecture of Wayanad. Each tribal community builds their huts in a unique
fashion. Communities like kurichiyas have huge family house called Taravad which stands as a testimonial for their wonderful planning and designing. Daivapura (an exclusive building to perform pooja) of each community is also constructed in unique style. It is high time that the tribal architecture is preserved as it is fast replaced by concrete buildings. Issues of preservation could be addressed effectively, to begin with, by selecting a few tribal villages and developing them as model tribal villages.

7.5 Handicrafts and souvenirs

A trip to Wayanad is not complete and fulfilling without the visitors buying souvenir items that bear the stamp of indigenous culture. Tourists shopping around, picking up indigenous artifacts is the common sight everywhere at the tourist destinations of Wayanad. Wayanad enjoys a pride of place with respect to the handicrafts made of coconut shells, canes, wood and bamboo. There are many craft shops managed by local women Self Help Groups for selling souvenirs and handicrafts. Bamboo products are found abundantly in Wayanad. Uravu, a nonprofit organization in Wayanad encourages craftsmanship of the tribes by assisting them in promoting and marketing the native wisdom and acumen in making handicrafts. Uravu helps them market these products through their sales outlets at Thrikkaipetta and near the Pookot Lake. The handicraft products include kitchen utensils, ornaments, decorative showpieces, furniture and other office items made of bamboo and canes. Indigenous forest products of Wayanad collected and processed by tribes directly from the forests like wild honey, gooseberry, bamboo rice, wild turmeric and variety of herbs have their own aura and appeal.

Apart from the handicrafts and forest based products, tourists also purchase coffee powder, tea dust of different flavors, spices like pepper, cardamom, natural cosmetic products and herbal medicines.

7.6 Indigenous interpretations

The conservation and sustainability of indigenous people and wildlife are the two areas about which the public needs to be sensitised. Indigenous people cannot be isolated from nature. Forest is the very basis of survival for them. Indigenous people hold different sets of beliefs and traditions. However, the common factor that binds them together is the bond with nature and the environment. Indigenous people and the nature are inextricably linked. Nature, forest and everything in it forms an integral part of their life. They connote aesthetic and spiritual values. Their perception of forest is quite different from others. The knowledge and wisdom acquired through centuries of interaction with wild life and forest contribute to their distinct cultural and spiritual identity.

7.7 Ethno medicines

Ethno medicine or tribal medicine is a system of medical beliefs and practices of tribes evolved in their cultural and ecological environment. Research on tribal medicines reveals that tribal people have very effective methods of treatment for various ailments (Viswanathan, 2008). They collect wide variety of herbal, animal and mineral substances from their habitat to prepare medicines. The person who practices and administers native medicine for various deceases and ailments is called Tribal Healer or Herbalist. Tribal healers belong to different tribal communities like Kurichiyas, Mullukurumans, Paniyas and Kattunayckas and are spread across the district. This knowledge is passed on to the next generation. They consider the medicinal knowledge as sacred. There are generalists who treat many diseases and specialists who treat for snake bite, bone fracture, jaundice, etc. The tribal healers strictly hold the tribal religious dictum. They acquire the knowledge from elder members of the family. Only persons of right character, conduct, and sound mind are trained.
8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The experts' views on the need for sustainable tourism practices for protecting the rich biodiversity and preserving the indigenous culture of Wayanad focus on the conservation of biodiversity which is possible only when conservation activities and tourism development reciprocate each other. Tourism development should be compatible with the eco-system of the place. For instance, encouraging homestay operations in Wayanad will contribute to sustainable accommodation option suitable for Wayanad, which will be beneficial for the local community also.

Training and education on various indigenous arts may be imparted to youth of the region who could carry forward the rich legacy of indigenous culture. The Tribal Development Department of Kerala could encourage and support local tribal entrepreneurship in opening up tribal handicraft centers at major tourist sites. The Government of Kerala and District Tourism Promotion Council should work together to spread awareness among the stakeholders about their role in promoting responsible tourism initiatives. In order to bestow credence to the conservation initiatives and integrated planned development of the area, Government of Kerala may declare Wayanad as a ‘Special Tourism Zone'.

Identifying the indigenous tourism markets and promoting the products responsibly will give a new image for Wayanad as an indigenous tourism destination. Indigenous people graduated in tourism academics who could not pursue any other profession could manage such projects.

Representatives of Indigenous communities should be involved in the process of tourism policy making. There should be strict code of conduct for the indigenous tourism stakeholders in the management, marketing and operational management. Specific criteria need to be introduced for the ownership and management of indigenous tourism products in Wayanad and training and employment of indigenous people without altering their lifestyle.

9. CONCLUSION

Wayanad district is endowed with alluring nature in different forms and the unique culture of the place has always been awe inspiring. But still Wayanad has not been branded suitably and positioned in the tourism market. Monsoon Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Indigenous Tourism and Ecotourism are some of the specific tourism products which may be stressed upon to make Wayanad distinct from other tourist destinations in Kerala. The present tourism scenario of Wayanad is quite impressive. The growing number of tourists is a challenge for sustainability. As such, responsible tourism initiatives of Kerala tourism which have fetched good results may be pursued in Wayanad tourism as well.

The study established that indigenous tourism promotion contributes for the sustainable development of a region. As it is evident that global demand for indigenous tourism experiences is growing at a faster pace, it is high time that Indian tourism is benefitted from the opportunity and needless to say that Wayanad perfectly fits the bill. At the global level, very few nations like Australia, New Zealand, and South America have been effectively marketing Indigenous tourism destinations. A well organized, planned and sustained effort with involvement of indigenous people is essential for the success of indigenous tourism destination. Haphazard and hasty pursuits to develop indigenous tourism sometimes may lead to unwanted problems hurting the sentiments and emotions of the local people. Unless there is a clear policy which respects safeguarding indigenous sovereignty, promoting indigenous tourism in its original meaning may not be practical.
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