

## **ROLE OF ECOTOURISM IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PARAMBIKULAM WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, PALAKKAD DISTRICT, KERALA**

**\*Dr.Rajani.P, \*\*Dr.Vasanthakumari.P**

\*Assistant Professor, PG Department of Commerce, Sree Narayana College, Alathur

\*\*Associate Professor & Head, PG Department of Commerce, N.S.S College, Ottapalam

### ***Abstract***

Ecotourism is a new concept in tourism. It is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. Any tourism program which is: nature –based, ecologically sustainable, where education and interpretation is a major concept and where local people are benefited can be called ecotourism. Ecotourism differs from other forms of tourism through its dependence on the protection of natural ecosystems so that they, and their associated cultural values, can be visited and interpreted. Ecotourism has been recognized as the backbone of economies of many countries. Success of ecotourism development project depends on participation of local communities in all phases of planning and implementation. The growth of ecotourism has occurred simultaneously with an increased recognition of the need to implement biodiversity conservation. Ecotourism is increasingly presented as a formula for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Ecotourism stands for the management of tourism in such a manner that man derives maximum benefit from nature without disturbing its innate balance. Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary is a well protected ecological portion in the Nelliampathy – Anamalai landscape of the Southern Western Ghats in India. It is one of the biodiversity hot spot in the world supports diverse habitat types and endemism. Considering its biological richness, abundance of wildlife and landscape beauty makes Parambikulam Tiger Reserve is one of the most attractive places in the entire stretch of Western Ghats. This study throws light on various resource management strategies and ecodevelopment programmes adopted by Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary to meet the sustainability of the protected area.

**Key words: Ecotourism, Biodiversity, Sustainability**

## Introduction

Ecotourism is a growing sector of the global tourism industry. It is making important positive contributions to the environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being of destinations and local communities around the world. Ecotourism provides effective economic rewards for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity by offering market linked long term solutions. It also helps to protect the natural and cultural heritage of our planet. Ecotourism is also an effective agent for enabling local communities around the world to fight against poverty and to achieve sustainable development by increasing capacity building opportunities. India is one of the 12 mega bio diverse countries of the world. Ecotourism in India has developed currently. Ecotourism industry in India has the capacity to produce large scale employment opportunities

especially in remote and underdeveloped area. It provides immense potential for utilizing natural resources like landscapes, welfare of people.

Kerala tourism chiefly aims on the conservation of ecology to reduce the negative impact of tourism on the environment. It also focuses to promote development of tourism based on the carrying capacities of the destination.

Ecotourism projects include the concept of sustainability in tourism. It simply means, the need of today's tourists should not be met at the expenses of future generation. Ecotourism project which is based on internationally accepted principles will help to infuse the sustainability concept to other tourism ventures outside the area of ecotourism. Kerala is now 'going green' to make sure that its beaches, backwatering and other famous spots do not suffer from the bad effects of mass tourism.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To study the resource management strategies followed by Parambikulam Wild life Sanctuary to meet the sustainability of the protected area.
2. To study the eco development programmes adopted by Parambikulam Wild life Sanctuary

### **Research Methodology**

The study was descriptive in nature. Secondary data were used for the purpose of the study. Secondary data were collected from journals, magazines and internal records of the Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary.

### **Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary**

Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary , a part of Annamali sub unit of Western Ghats is one of the protected ecological wonders of Kerala. The sanctuary is enwrapped by

number of protected areas and Sanctuaries in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It is an abode of peninsular fauna and flora which are excellently preserved due to total protection and minimal human interferences. The sanctuary is a part of an ecological continuum from Peechi to Eravikulam through Annamali. A myriad population of wildlife and a multitude of indigenous human races co-exist harmoniously in the lap of mother Nature. There are 34 biodiversity hot spots in the World and Western Ghats is one among them. Parambikulam with its incredible and attractive Natural richness stretching around 285 sq.kms is the crowning glory of Western Ghats. The sanctuary is aptly revered as 'Natures own abode'



### PARAMBIKULAM WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

#### Resource Management Strategies

With an aim to make a judicial use of natural resources and preservation of endemic flora and fauna Parambikulam Tiger Resreve has implemented innovative resource management strategies. The authorities have incorporated management strategies that will bring economic benefit to all the local community members including tribals and landless communities. There are two essential scientific conservation and management programmes envisaged to meet the sustainability of the protected area.

#### Zonation

With a view to esure constructive management, the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve has been divided into three prominent zones based on biodiversity indices, improvement in vegetation profile and ease of management. The major zones are, core zone, buffer zone and tourism zone.

#### Core Zone

Core Zone aims to protect and maintain it as peaceful natural habitat, which guarantee overall protection against all forms of biotic interferences. The scientific studies and research activities are sanctioned ensuring

that there are no harmful sampling techniques involved. Activities are carried out under the watchful eyes of authorities concerned.

### **Buffer Zone**

Buffer Zone's aim is augmenting the habitat under strict protection and restoring the natural floral and faunal diversity. After achieving the desired level of diversity buffer zone will be upgraded into core zone. In this area a natural regeneration of degraded natural moist deciduous and dry-deciduous forests is made possible. The area is open to local tribal population for fuel wood requirements and collection of small quantities of Minor Forest Produce sustaining their hamlets.

### **Tourism Zone**

Tourism Zone as name indicates provides educative experience pertaining to Nature and Wildlife conservation to sensible tourists. Various ecotourism activities are

organised here to provide livelihood opportunities to the dependent tribal communities.

### **Ecodevelopment Programmes**

Eco-development is essentially an elevation of long -term sustainable use of resources while caring biological and cultural diversity. The Forest Development Agency (FDA) has several Eco-Development Committees for organising ecotourism and ecogeneration programmes. They plan and promote multiple income generation activities among the community members by imparting skill and awareness programmes for them. They also make sure that these activities are economically feasible and ecologically workable. It is important to note that while engaging in such multiple activities they never overlook the need for establishing a peaceful and successful co-existence of man and wildlife. There are allocations for facilities and improvements in existing land use pattern.

The following are key eco development initiatives.

### **Bamboo handicrafts**

The tribal and local community members of Parambikulam are trained to produce excellent utility articles by the Forest Development Agency. The artifacts, which are sold through ecoshops, help in improving the standard of living of the tribes and local communities.

### **Beewax balm**

Beewax, a derivative of honey fabrication can be used to make wonderful balm. Parambikulam beewax balm, an initiative to support primitive Malasar tribes of Parambikulam, is made from the bee wax gathered from fallen honey combs from the buffer and fringe areas of the reserve. Beewax has multiple benefits, for curing the head ache, body pains, massaging to name a few.

### **Parambikulam Dhara**

Parambikulam Dhara is an ingenious measure taken to free the sanctuary of plastic mineral bottles thrown away by the tourists. Department has started an Eco-development unit which is now run by Kuriarkutty Eco Development Committee volunteers. The bottles are now placed at the entrance of the sanctuary. A fine of ruppees 100/- will be charged on visitors for failing to return the bottles. Thus Prambikulam Dhara helps in maintaining the sanctuary a free zone and provides pure drinking water to ecotourists and employment opportunities for the local community.

### **Ecotourism Initiatives**

Community based ecotourism programmes like, Tented Niche, Tree top hut, Bamboo Rafting, Fullmoon census, Machan World, Thellikkal nights, Island Nest provide an excellent opportunity to the visitors to enjoy the beauty of the forest. This in turn contributes to the livelihood of local tribes as these programmes provide a major share

of employment to those living in the Reserve.

### **Ecoshops**

A wide variety of natural products like honey, bee wax, medicinal spices prepared in scientific manner are exchanged through Ecoshops. Other items like T shirts, Jackets, hats, caps, pens etc are sold through these shops which in turn generate revenue that empowers the tribes of the reserve.

### **Parmbikulam Honey**

Honey collection is a traditional method of sustenance among the tribes. The local traders procure the honey from the tribes through barter system which always put the local people in debt trap. An ecodevelopment initiative was taken upto overcome the issue. Now honey is collected scientifically and value is added in terms of filtering, bottling, labeling and sealing. This honey branded 'Parmbikulam Honey' is sold through ecoshops run by tribals. The

initiatives renders 30-40% more income directly from the ecoshops to the tribals. This has saved the tribals from all the problems they had to endure previously. The collection of honey is restricted to the buffer and fringe areas of Parmbikulam Tiger Reserve.

### **Paper Bags**

'The Parmbikulam Paper Bags' production is another initiative directed to empower the tribal women in the sanctuary. The paper bags sold at the entrance to the reserve to the visitors. This help in making the Parmbikulam Tiger Reserve plastic free zone to some great extent.

### **Souvenirs from Recycled Plastic Waste**

A Plastic Reduction Unit has been launched as a measure to free Parmbikulam Tiger Reserve from menace of plastic. The plastics are collected from various waste bins of the sanctuary and are segregated into plastic bottles, plastic bags etc. These are washed,

cleaned and dried. Then it is shredded into small pieces and are transported into a factory in Coimbatore. Then they are recycled to Pugmark Keychain souvenirs which are sold through ecoshops.

## Conclusion

Ecotourism is environmentally accountable travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature which promotes conservation. It is a form of tourism that is inspired primarily by the natural history and the environment of an area. It has grown as a consequence of dissatisfaction which arose on account of the inappropriate implementation of mass tourism. Being an environment friendly activity, ecotourism aims at prompting environmental values and creed for preserving nature in its uninterrupted form.

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