

## **Sustainable tourism by preservation of cultural and architectural heritage of tribals at Wayanad, Coorg and The Nilgiris**

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### **Abstract**

Coorg, Wayanad and The Nilgiris are hill stations that lie in the southern states of India such as Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu. These regions of study lie roughly between North latitudes  $11^{\circ}12'$  to  $15^{\circ}58'$  and East longitudes  $70^{\circ}47'$  to  $76^{\circ}55'$  in the Western Ghats in South India. They have high altitudes ranging between 1000m and 2600m above sea level. These regions are characterized by tropical wet climate and are significant due to the scenic beauty and pleasant climate.

The paper explains about the population of the region who survives on tourism related activities. It also expresses the various schemes laid out by Government of India for the expansion of Rural/Village tourism. The paper mainly focusses on the various traditional construction techniques using mud, bamboo etc. and also the religious lifestyles of the people of this region who are mostly tribals.

The paper emphasize on the possibility of developing sustainable ecotourism with these green building techniques and socio-cultural aspects bound to the ancient tribes.

### **Introduction**

According to World Tourism and Travel Council's report the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in India was INR 2.478 billion in 2014. The total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP was INR 7.642 billion. Taking surveys on employment opportunities into consideration, we can see that in the same year 23,024,000 jobs were directly supported, which in turn contributed a total employment of 36,695,500 jobs.

Owing to the promising economy growth in the field of travel and tourism, it will be worthwhile to visualize the tourism scenario in three different regions such as Coorg, The Nilgiris and Wayanad which are districts that lie in different Indian states Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala respectively. Majority of the local population are forest dwellers who follow their traditional lifestyle and practices, which are very sustainable in nature. Traditional dwellings of the population are completely based on green technology since they use natural materials for construction and feel comfortable to live in these huts which respond well with the surrounding climate and features.

### **Tourism Potential of the Regions of Study**

#### *Important Characteristics of the Regions of Study:*

Coorg, Wayanad and The Nilgiris are adjacent in location, though these are situated in different states of India. They lie roughly between latitude  $11^{\circ}12'$  to  $15^{\circ}58'$  North and longitude  $70^{\circ}47'$  to  $76^{\circ}55'$  East in the Western Ghats of South India. They have high altitudes ranging from 1000m to 2600m above mean sea level. The cities adjacent to

Coorg, Wayanad and The Nilgiris are Mysore, Kozhikode and Coimbatore respectively.

These regions are characterized by cold humid climate and experience monsoon rains during the months of June to August, when tourist activities are almost nil. Maximum annual rainfall in Wayanad ranges from 3000 – 4000 mm. The mean maximum and minimum temperature recorded in Wayanad in the last five years were 29C and 18C respectively. The verified weather data of the last 10 years of Coorg (also known as Kodagu) showed a maximum annual rainfall of 3300 mm. Temperatures in Coorg normally range from 14C to 29C. The annual rainfall of The Nilgiris rises up to 1500mm. Daytime temperature ranges from 22C to 5C. The pleasant climate, scenic beauty and hospitality of the people are factors influencing increases in the rate of tourism in these regions.

When the percentages of purpose of travel by domestic tourists are compared in all the states of the country, Karnataka leads in the category of Business and Trade as well as in Leisure and Holidays. In fact, South India ranks top for tourism for Leisure and Holidays with Tamilnadu being first in Foreign Tourst Arrival among Indian states for the year 2014.

#### *Tourism activities in the Region:*

Wildlife sanctuaries, mountain peaks, valleys, waterfalls, lakes and botanical gardens form the points of attraction for tourists across these regions. A large group of domestic visitors visit these spots on pilgrimage too.

Some popular tourist spot in the region are shown below:



Fig 1. Thirunelli Temple



Fig 2. Edakkal Cave



Fig 3. Ooty Lake



Fig 4. Doddabetta Peak



Fig 5. Mudumalai National Park



Fig 6. Irippu waterfalls

#### *Sustainable Tourism in India:*

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as ‘leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems’. One of the aspects included in the Sustainable Tourism Development of India is ecotourism. It is clearly mentioned by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India that sustainable tourism should be developed for the socioeconomic benefit of local communities and should not cause harm to the country’s physical, cultural and environmental heritage.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) along with the UNWTO are promoting sustainable tourism focusing on economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfillment, local control, community wellbeing, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency and environmental purity. As per the Implementation of Action Plans of Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India, priority should be given to local initiatives such as creation of Village Tourism Development Committees (VTDC), Homestays etc. As per the Action Plan, use of locally appropriate principles of sustainable construction including styles, skills and materials for new construction is emphasized in the category of Design of Construction of Buildings and Infrastructure,. Also visitors should be encouraged to understand customs, local culture and cultural heritage.

According to this programme of the Government of India Ministry of Tourism, social and economic

benefits to the local community as well as to their cultural and historic heritage should be maximized by minimizing negative impacts. Biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes should be conserved. New construction should never adversely affect flora and fauna of that area, water bodies and courses, animal paths, vista and scenic views, features of socio cultural value and involve minimal deforestation and excavation etc. . .

MDG 7 of the Millenium Development Goals aims to ensure Environmental Sustainability by integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reversing the loss of environmental resources.

#### **Tribal Culture and Practices**

##### *Tribal Population of the Region:*

Demographic profile of 2011 census of Government of India shows that Scheduled Tribes (ST) make up 8.61% of total population in the country. Of this, 0.46% is in Kerala state, 0.76% in Tamilnadu and 4.07% in Karnataka. Data on the distribution of ST population in these states show that 31.23% of ST population in Kerala is in Wayanad district, 4.12% of ST population of Tamilnadu state in The Nilgiris district and 1.36% of ST population of Karnataka state in Kodagu district.

Agriculture and tourism are the main source of income for the tribals in these districts. The Kodagu district, also known as Coorg, is inhabited by people of different castes like Eravaru, Kudiyaru, Kurubas and Tribals along with Coorgis (Kodavas). Kodavas belonging to a very old civilization having a very special and attractive life style and culture of their own. Adivasi (Tribal)

groups like the Todas, Kotas, Badagas, Irullas, Kurumbas, Cholanaikans etc., are native to The Nilgiris while Paniyas, Kurumas, Adiyars, Kurichiyas, Ooralis, Kadans, Kattunaikkans etc. are the different aboriginal tribes of Wayanad. Kurichiyans are the most developed among them. *Tribal customs and practices:*

Huttariyakunitha, Bolukata, Ummathata, Kolata, Olagathata and Kathiyata are some of the folk dances of the Kodavas in Coorg. Cauvery sankramana, Shivaratri, Huttari, Kailapoladu, Shashti and Vishu sankramana are some of the important festivals of Kodagu (Coorg). Traditional lifestyle of Kodavas addresses the climate and topography of the location in every sense.<sup>11</sup>

Except for Cholanaikans who live exclusively by food gathering, hunting and fishing, all the other adivasi groups in The Nilgiris are involved in their traditional occupation of agriculture. The Cholanaikans in Gudalur are the only surviving hunter gatherers in the Indian subcontinent. The local ethnic group populations subsist on agriculture, agrihorticulture and use of natural resources such as medicinal plants and commercialization of these products.

Todas had their primitive history and origin in The Nilgiris and practice a natural way of living based on dairy farming. They are vegetarians with their own religion, lifestyle etc. living in beautiful settlements across The Nilgiris. A typical Toda prayer consists of sacred chant words of different natural landmarks like nearby peaks, slopes, valleys, ridges, shola thickets, specific sacred trees and rocks, swamps, meadows, pools and streams as well as their own built structures. Even today, a Toda elder would not commit the sacrilege of pointing out locations of a deity peak with his fingers.

In Wayanad, the Paniyas lived as labourers whereas Kurichiyas were small land owners. Kurichiyas lived on hunting, honey bee gathering and agriculture. They worshiped flora such as the Tulsi plant, Banyan tree etc. and had their own settlements inside forests, some of which still exist.

#### **Traditional Construction Techniques**

The remarkable settlements and construction practices in the region are those of communities such as Kurichiya, Toda and Kodavas. They practice 'nature-worship' which form the inevitable part of landscape of the settlement. Their various art forms such as *theyyam*, *nellukuthu*, etc. also require special open spaces in the settlements.

Tiny built structures of tribal settlements have a scale for human gatherings of small groups. This pushes out inhabitants into actively participating in outdoor activities. And so is their custom which is inbound to their belief and religion.

The construction method for walls in Kurichiya huts at Wayanad are mostly wattle and daub wall with thatched roof (Fig. 7-8). Meanwhile many huts were seen to be built with mud blocks and thatched roof. Coconut trees are available in plenty. So weaving coconut palm leaves is an art practiced by tribal ladies. Previously they used a certain long grass available in the deep forest for roof covering. A good roof overhang is provided to protect walls from rainwater seepage. The hutments in a hamlet are usually around 20 in number and provided in random clusters.

The plinth of the structure is erected with rammed earth, rectangular in shape. Round, strong posts are erected on the corners of the plinth which at their ends are connected by wooden beams. Between these woven bamboo slats are tied. On to this mud along with straw, cowdung is plastered on either side. Recent huts use adobe wall construction.

Dwellings of Toda community in The Nilgiris are small barrel vaulted huts made of bamboo, mud, buffalo dung etc (Fig. 9-14). These have circular shaped buffalo pen, conical shaped temple and many other small structures in the vicinity of each settlement. Huts are east facing, but temples are west facing. In some temples stones are used for walls.

The construction method followed in Coorg is not much different, which has again mud walls with thatch roof. In Fig. 15, the hut has been modified with a tile roof.



**Fig. 7.** Part of Kurichiya hut



Fig. 8. Hut of Kurichiya king



Fig.9. Toda Hut at Kogeremund



Fig. 10. and 11. Toda temples



Fig. 12. Buffalo Pen



Fig.13. Seating as part of landscape



Fig. 14. Internal lamps and lamp stand



Fig.15. Hut at Coorg modified with tile roof

### Discussion: Ecotourism Guidelines

The Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) is a scheme launched by Government of India in 2016 to deliver integrated project based infrastructure in rural areas which will also include development of economic activities and skills.

The mission of the Government of India Ministry of Rural Development, is "Sustainable and inclusive growth of rural India through a multipronged strategy for eradication of poverty by increasing livelihood opportunities, social safety net and developing infrastructure for growth and improvement of quality of life in rural India" Holistic development of rural areas can be ensured when disadvantaged groups like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, differently abled and minority communities are also brought into the ambit of development. Tapping the potential to contribute to the goal of sustainable poverty reduction and efficient use of natural resources, the Ministry of Rural Development looks at various objectives of which, some enable sustainable livelihoods based on sustainable use of natural resources, reducing ecological footprint of interventions through efficient use of energy, materials, natural resources and increased use of renewable materials etc.

The scheme of Rural Tourism was started in the year 2002-03 by the Government of India Ministry of Tourism with the objective of showcasing rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and villages. The promotion of village tourism is also aimed at generating revenue for rural communities through tourist visitations.

On these grounds the development and incorporation of tribal architecture, culture and social aspects of tribals etc. into the tourism sector, will definitely generate more employment opportunities for localites and thereby help eradicate their poverty. The festivals and art forms of tribals as well as their nature-worship should become an integral part of design aspects while developing tourism sites in these regions. Their traditional methods of construction have to be strictly followed and replicated so as to bring in sustainable aspects into their ancient ways.

According to the latest statistical report by Ministry of Tourism, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in India per year is around 7.68 m. with annual growth rate of 10.2%. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism were reported as INR 1,233,200 m with an annual growth rate of 14.5%. Also it was found that the number of domestic tourist visits to

all states/UTs each year is INR 1282 m. with an annual growth rate of 11.9%.

For a tourist from urban areas, tourist settlements of tribal pattern will provide enjoyment during their holidays. Memories will form a treasure house especially for child tourists. It is a different experience to understand the culture of the tribals while participating in their activities like hobbies while staying with them.

### Conclusion

- Discovery made by our ancestors were derived from centuries of trial and error experiments. Their knowledge is always a treasure worthy of conservation and to new generations.
- Tourist activities are always a rejuvenating phenomenon in everyone's life and if it is from a healthy and sustainable approach, it is all the more energizing.
- Tribals are communities who prefer to live in the forests. So their method of living, healing and belief are centered on nature and the rich culture has to be enhanced with experience from the outside world.
- The concept of design guidelines for tourism in tribal themes addresses all the aspects of rural/village tourism, and sustainable/ecotourism.

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