

Ecotourism Management Committees (ETMC), Sustainable Tourism and Leadership provided for Women Self-Help Groups (SHG) in Tamil Nadu

¹Freeda Maria Swarna M, ²Shaheed Khan, ³R. Kannan

¹Director, Operations, Dharthi, Bangalore

²Head, Research, Training and Advocacy, Dharthi, Bangalore

³Professor and Director, Centre for Tourism Hotel Management, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai

¹(<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9649-090X>), ²(<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5920-6703>)

Abstract

Purpose – Ecotourism in the Forests and Forest fringes is managed by the Forest department (FD) along with the support of the Community, through institutional mechanisms, in this case the Women Self-help groups. The purpose being continued employment, tourism promotion and preservation and conservation of Natural resources. It is important to note here that Women have been at the forefront of not only conservation and preservation but also provided for the management of the Destinations through special purpose vehicles (SPV's) viz., Ecotourism Management Committees (ETMC's), Ecodevelopment Committees (EDC's).

Design/Methodology/Approach – The researcher has been working on the ETMCs from 2018 and is placing a perspective on the Leadership facet of the Women Self-Help Groups (WSHG) which have augured well over a period of time. Even during the pandemic scenario, where there was 'no' or 'zero tourism' the women demonstrated *Atmanirbharta* and Leadership which ensured continuity for the Destinations and the community contribution to ecotourism at least in some of the destinations.

Findings – The findings and conclusions this far have helped the researcher to come to conclusions and provide for suggestions with interventions based on the impacts identified. The paper will provide for practical findings about the approach to the ETMCs at the destinations identified, that has varied models, which will help in the build-up of practical and sustainable ecotourism systems.

Originality/Value – The study has been an ongoing and one for the envisaged research for the past 14 years, and the researcher has been placing all the perspectives for the doctoral research as well. The researchers have been in constant touch with the communities and officers, who have supported and helped to understand the SPVs, the destinations, the impacts and the interventions.

Key words Community Based Ecotourism (CBE), Self-Help Groups (SHG), ETMC, Sustainable Leadership.

Paper type Research paper, that will help place a perspective on the way Community Based Ecotourism (CBE) needs to be augmented through SHGs, which will ensure qualitative interventions and impacts assessments for the long run. The research is a real-time study with the researcher traveling to all the places and ensuring a connect.

Ecotourism Management Committees (ETMC), Sustainable Tourism and Leadership provided for Women Self-Help Groups (SHG) in Tamil Nadu.

Introduction

Donohoe and Needham (2006) reviewed forty-two definitions and concluded that ecotourism is characterized as nature-based, preservative, educative, sustainable, responsible and ethical tourism. Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) further exemplify that in addition to the nature-based component, these are all normative features guiding us *how* ecotourism should be performed. Taking the lessons learned from ecotourism, in terms of nature-based tourism (NBT), most of us inherently have an image about *what it is*, but no one has really told us *what it should be*. NBT is an umbrella term used to describe tourism activities and visitor experiences that depend on nature. Further Laarman and Durst (1987), mention that the travels related to nature, in other words, nature-based tourism is a type of tourism which unites together education, recreation, and mostly adventure. Lucas (1984) mentions that NBT has low effects on the environment, but high social and economic benefits. Cater et al., (2015) visualises NBT within the other types of tourism and the characteristics of their concepts. Accordingly, the relation between nature-based tourism and other types of tourism has been pointed at figure 1.

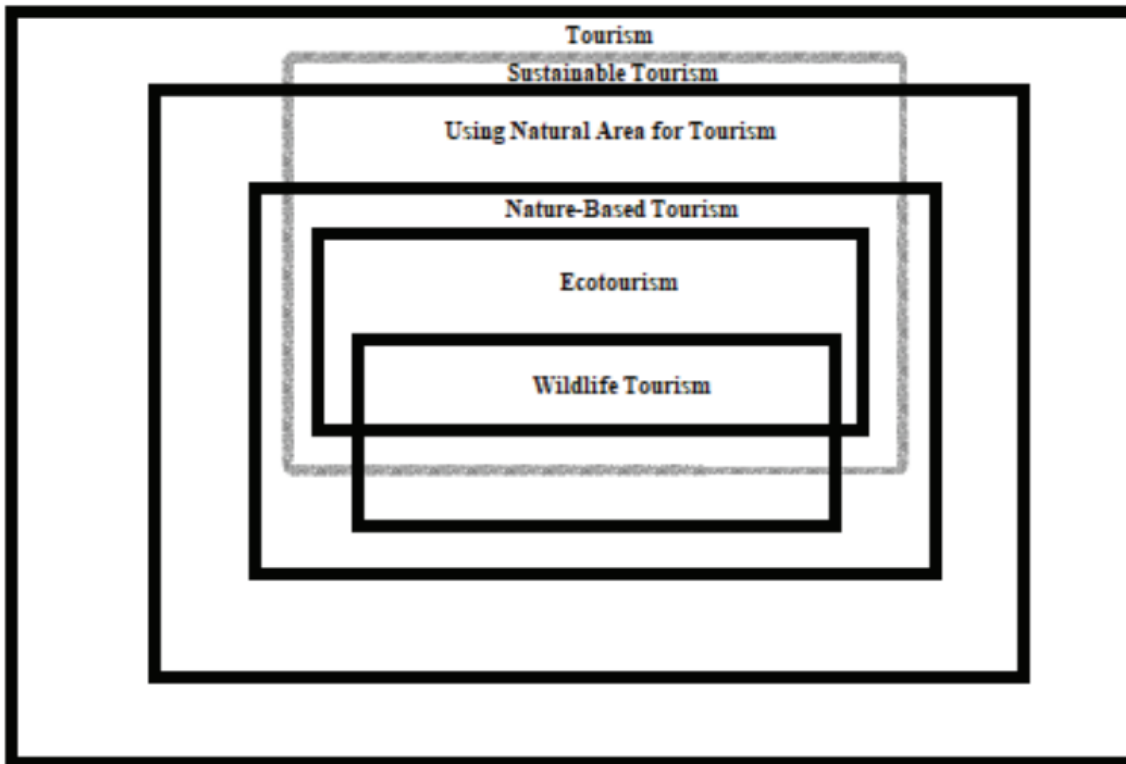


Figure 1: The placement of nature-based tourism in the tourism context (Cater et al., 2015)

By understanding facets as provided by Cater et al., (2015) it is clear that the overlap and juxtapositioning of the finer aspects and the nomenclature that is adopted by researchers, academics and practitioners NBT becomes the pivot, the fulcrum to the larger dimension of tourism that we play on. Metin (2019) categorically mentions that one of the main resources of tourism is the ‘natural resources.’ The interest to the natural resources has been increasing rapidly in the last few years. Due to the fact that Nature-based tourism movement catches attention in tourism. The present tourism has been seen rising on ethics such as the basis of awareness of protecting the nature, the precautions of prevention of consuming the natural resources. Moving from here, nature-based tourism, could be described as a tourism type which contains a wide range of activities, as being performed in the areas that are supposedly different and purer natural areas, and swimming, diving, hiking, campfire, picnic, taking photographs, learning, friends or spending time as families, etc. The important point of this definition, the activities which will take place in the movement of tourism and the selections of the destinations of the tourist's subjects or obliges the natural areas.

Hence, when we consider Cater et al., (2015) and the articulation of thoughts by Metin (2019) and what we as researchers have seen on the field, it is clear that in India, much of the Ecotourism that we speak of is in the Wildlife areas, hence, deriving the nomenclature of Wildlife Tourism, and Ecotourism; which further becomes a postulate of NBT. Sustainable Tourism no doubt finally cuts through over all the finer aspects of NBT, Ecotourism and Wildlife Tourism. To provide for an illustration in the Indian context; if we look at Nilgiris and its environment, a tract of over 5000 square kilometers which was constituted as Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) by UNESCO in 1986 under the Man and Biosphere Programme to become India’s first and foremost biosphere reserves with a heritage, rich in flora and fauna (UNESCO, 2018), is an area that cuts through Karnataka (Bandipur Forests), Kerala (Waynad Forests) and Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) on the Tamil Nadu side.

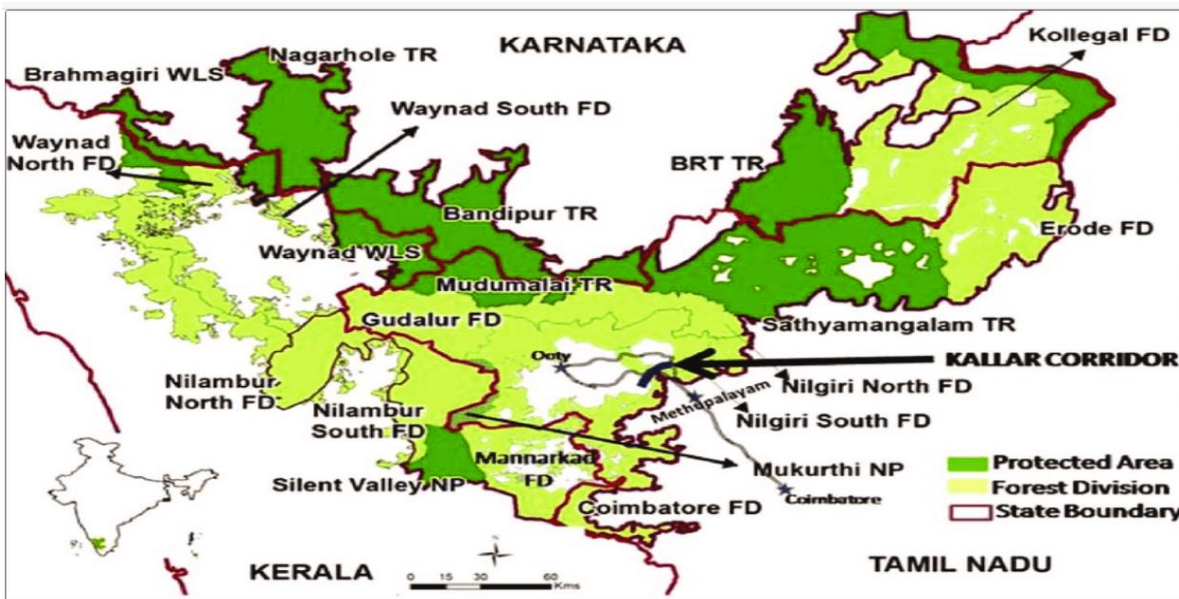


Illustration 1: Map of Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve (NBR) (Verma, 2021)

Illustration 1 categorically make the differentiation between the Forest areas of the NBR region, which will help us to better our understanding on the subject as propounded by Cater et al., (2015). When we get to tourism activities in the NBR areas of Bandipur, Wayanad and MTR forests it is clearly wildlife tourism with all the aspects of Sustainable Tourism for we are in the thick of the protected areas (PA). If we move towards the Ooty area then it becomes generic tourism, with the finer aspects of Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism being juxtaposed within. It is from this we can surely initiate a debate about how the in the Wildlife areas, the forest-fringes, the Forest Departments (FD) across the Indian Nation and even in Tamil Nadu are working along to ensure tourism through various Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) viz., Ecodevelopment Committees (EDC), Ecotourism Management Committees (ETMC), to mention a few. As Sharma (n.d.) notes; one needs to know that, the Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) was created as a democratic, decentralized and transparent local institution of forest and forest fringe dwelling communities, that is part of the *Gram Sabha* fully or partially and set up as per the provisions of applicable Joint Forest Management (JFM) rules/guidelines of the state much earlier than all the SPVs for eco-tourism. Typically, there is one JFMC in one revenue village. However, in special situations, e.g., a historical collaboration between neighbouring villages, or where it doesn’t make sense to divide the forest, a JFMC may cover two or more villages. On the other hand, especially in tribal areas, there may be situations where one village may have several dispersed hamlets, JFMCs may be set up at sub-revenue village or hamlet level.

An EDC is like JFMC but meant for villages in PAs and their buffer zones (Sharma, n.d.). Their setup, working, role, responsibilities, powers, funds etc. are as per the state-level government orders (GO). The area of operation is restricted to PAs and forest and non-forest areas near protected areas. EDCs are set up with twin objectives i.e.,

- i) To protect wildlife and other biodiversity and
- ii) To undertake eco-development activities in the villages.

To understand the facets better; the EDCs were constituted further so that:

- a) The investment climate in the forestry sector is enhanced as rural communities participate in forest protection and management,
- b) Rural communities are equal partners in the protection and management of forests,
- c) They control the management of forest lands and community lands by both members and non-members,
- d) The community gets a say in the objectives of management of the local forests,
- e) The community and its members contribute knowledge, time and effort through the EDC,
- f) The EDC mechanism is a position to develop local leadership for roles in the future in regards to the forest,
- g) To work with the 'revolving funds' that get created from the income-generating activities/sources of the EDC

In the EDC/ETMC model it needs to be seen that the host communities play a dynamic role, which ensures success for the SPV. Besides, the host communities it is the officer, the District Forest Officer (DFO), or Wildlife Warden or Deputy Conservator of Forest (DCF) and the team who are important to the eco-system. It is the relationship that the officers at all levels enjoy with the host community, the village or group of villages, that one can see success in these SPV and the SHGs that evolve over a period of time. Tosun (1999) specifically addresses the characteristics of destination resident participation, identifying three forms of host community participation in tourism development. First, spontaneous participation is when host community engagement in tourism development is voluntary, and based on the community's own ideas and motivations. Second, induced participation is where the host community merely suggests ideas for tourism development with tourism authorities ultimately responsible for final decisions. Third, coercive participation refers to the situation where tourism development is ostensibly to meet the needs of destination residents but, in reality, is for the benefit of external stakeholders such as statutory authorities, tourists, or tour operators.

Tosun (2000) contends that the ideal type of host community participation in tourism is spontaneous participation. Stimulating spontaneous participation requires appropriate policy development at local, national, and international levels. In this case, most of the ETMCs have come forward because of some of the destinations earlier had EDCs functioning and the community and its people were aware of the same. In India, the Federal Government makes generic policy to ensure such activities occur with the international mandates, which result in broad-based policy construct that is shared with the states, and the state/provincial governments build up on the said directions and create SPVs that don the role as required by the policy and the orders that need to be established over a period of time. It is therefore categorical to say that it is the initial top-down approach that has ensured the success of such interventions; which otherwise would get watered down.

Cole (2006) suggests that adequate knowledge about tourism empowers a host community and engages it in tourism development. In a good number of ETMCs that the researcher has studied it can be seen that the community was aware of the tourism potential and were actually participating in some of form or the other. The trigger was such that, when the FD officers reach out to the community to participate, some wholeheartedly join the bandwagon. Hampton (2005) concurs and points out that communication should be two-way and that the opinions of host community members should be heeded; he further proposes local small-scale business development as a means to encourage

participation. This has been the factor of success for most of the SPVs across the country. The willingness to participate and partake the benefits that come out of such enterprises. Here, the researcher would like to state that, though the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRI) in India is strong following the 73rd Amendment Act of the Indian Constitution and the *Gram panchayat/Gram Sabhas* have a unique role to play. For some reason, FDs have not worked with the PRI mechanism, which itself may and will create issues of legitimacy over a period. This may be detrimental to the SPVs on the long run, considering the extra-constitutionality of the same or even non-extra-constitutionality of the exercise. More than anything or aspect the PRIs have access to the Common property of the area in which they operate and a lot can be done, as seen by the researcher who connected with the PRI bodies just to understand if they (the PRI bodies) are okay to intervene for the good of the host Community. It came as a surprise that the PRI bodies are willing to work along and ensure success for one and all, considering the funding mechanism is better laid out in the PRI set-up.

Women Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurship, Leadership

Female entrepreneurship drives tourism development in resource-scarce destinations but little is known about why local women engage in business and what determines their success in a time of a life event crisis (Filimonau, 2022). Filimonau (2022) had made these observations whilst researching in Uzbekistan, but when we apply the facets to the Indian milieu it is visibly different. The Indian women in the EDC and ETMCs or any other SPV with any nomenclature want to be part of income earning for the family and they are willing to take up jobs that are to be found in the local business environment. Either they want to supplement the income of the husbands or want to remain silo income earners contributing to the family coffers.

Ecotourism and Entrepreneurship has therefore, become the focus of attention of many researchers because it creates a sense of individual and social welfare. Research conducted in the field of entrepreneurship has been looking for answers to these questions: Why do some people have the ability to seeing the new opportunities or crucial, while others have not such a feature? Why do some people convert business ideas or dreams into a real business while others cannot do it? Why do some entrepreneurs are successful while others fail (Baron, 1998). Though the current research is on Sustainable Leadership in the Ecotourism SPVs, it skims the nuances of entrepreneurship and does not deep-dive into the domain of Entrepreneurship; but acknowledges the fact the Entrepreneurship, the Entrepreneurial way of life is unique and important to the success of these SPVs which otherwise would have lost out in the din of bureaucratic hassles and governmental apathy.

The Indian scenario with the presence of the Local Self-Government Institutions (LSG) in the form of *Gram Panchayat/Sabha* has created an atmosphere of confidence in the women folks and they are willing to take up leadership roles as and when they get an opportunity. Though at times, the men-folk drive the power centricity, but women still stand out to ensure success for themselves and their families. Tourism is therefore, one of the routes through which women can be integrated into economic and social life (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009), and entrepreneurship may help women, particularly those who live in rural areas where the job opportunities are limited, to increase their self-reliance and empowerment. Especially for the women who live in rural areas, the development of ecotourism can provide work opportunities. Taking part in ecotourism activities gives those women the freedom to earn their own money and be economically independent, which also enhances their social condition (Shokouhi et al., 2013).

Although there has been increased interest in academic studies of ecotourism and entrepreneurship in general, we still lack an understanding of the factors that lead to well-being among ecotourism entrepreneurs (Thompson et al., 2018). In particular, the factors influencing the success of women ecotourism entrepreneurs whose empowerment and involvement can have significant social impact have not received adequate attention in the existing literature. To provide a better understanding of

the impact of ecotourism on the lives of the women ecotourism entrepreneurs who typically did not have prior professional experience, we investigated how their mindsets, based on how empowered they feel, influence their well-being and feelings of flourishing (Ertac & Tanova, 2020). Going back to the discussion of EDC, ETMCs, the SPVs and the role of Indian women, it has been seen that the women are coming forward in greater numbers for they feel the ability to get empowered and become economically independent far out-wit the factors of dependency that they have seen in the traditional lifestyles that they live. Hence, if there are factors of success for the women folks to evolve a leadership, it is out of sheer need and the push factor of economic independence, that the women folks in these SPVs have become Leaders and ensured success for themselves and the SPVs.

Methods

The researcher in this context got an opportunity to study the ETMCs in Tamil Nadu after receiving permission from the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (TNFD). The researcher had been working in the field of Ecotourism, Community, livelihood opportunities for about fifteen years. The research that is presented is a part of the throughputs that the researcher has been able to make in regards to the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that occur within the SPVs of the TNFD, in this case both EDCs and ETMCs. The researcher has focussed on the facets of Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) which is the way the TNFD and other Forest Departments (FD) across India would like to consider. Hence, the researcher and team followed a definition that is worth adopting to ensure a carry forward of thoughts and ideas. Amir et al., (2015) have in a simplistic and succinct way communicated, Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) has been considered to be a concept of community resilience, that is referred to the capacity of an individual or community to cope with stress, overcome adversity or adapt positively to change.

Participants/Respondents

The research collected the data from twenty-five ETMCs spread across Tamil Nadu through Focus-Group Discussion (FGD) with each of the groups and communities. At times, the researcher went to field multiple number of times to ensure traction and an understanding of the scenarios. Though a questionnaire was designed with the support of the TNFD officers and the supervisor; the discussions would always be free-wheeling.

Procedures

The data collated has been analyzed for various other parameters/objectives of the doctoral research that has been undertaken; but for the current paper, the extracts are from the FGDs that were undertaken across the ETMCs. To ensure a good understanding the following ETMCs and Community members of i) Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, Kodiakarai Village in Vedaranyam ii) Sasthakovil Site, the river, the waterfall, Srivilliputhur Wildlife Sanctuary and iii) only have been discussed in the research paper and hence, the findings and observations need not be mandated to the other ETMCs or similar SPVs. Based on the findings of the current study and the larger research for the doctoral thesis, the researcher has been providing for best practices of these Ecotourism SPVs to states like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka FDs. Consulting firms too have taken inputs from the studies that have been undertaken, which have helped the researcher to place a perspective.

Data Analysis

The data collated during the FGDs and the discussions with the Community Leaders and the Officers of the ETMC have been used in the research paper and the doctoral thesis. Though at times data was not forthcoming, multiple visits ensured a situation of trust between researcher and the communities, who provided for inputs, information and sometimes even got into personal discussions, which the researcher and her team had to endure at time to usher in the element of trust.

A. Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, Kodiakarai Village in Vedaranyam (Vedaranyam Range, Nagapattinam Wildlife Division, Tiruchirapalli Circle) (10°17'16.08" N 79°51'54.36" E)**The Ecotourism Product**

The Kodiakarai village appears to be non-descript and beyond the reach of visitors; but it opens a mosaic of Ecotourism opportunities, which bring in variety to the CBE Model through the ETMC, SPV in Tamil Nadu, and thereby becomes a role model, a best practice bench mark for the forest administrator and the community. The ETMC was established in 2014. A Birders Paradise, Point Calimere is a wetland complex that has been given the Ramsar Site Status in 2002. It plays host to thousands of migratory birds that come from far flung areas, and the Greater Flamingos too are important and unique visitors. Geographically, the sanctuary is a site of mudflats, mangroves. The wildlife sanctuary was set up on 17.26 sq. km. of swamp land in 1967 for the conservation of Blackbuck, and endangered and endemic species and the Government of Tamil Nadu has expanded Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary by adding 12,407.27 hectares of the Great Vedaranyam Swamp in Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam and Thanjavur districts (Mariappan, 2013). With a need to protect and develop the fauna and flora of the area, the TNFD has brought the reserve forests of Muthupet, Thuraikadu, Vadakadu, Maravakadu, Thamarankottai, Palanjur in Pattukottai and Thiruthuraipoondi taluks and Kodiakadu of Vedaranyam taluk, under the new wildlife sanctuary.

The Ecotourism landscape of Point Calimere has the following products that the visitors get to see and be part of:

1. Black buck sighting by vehicle or trekking for a distance of 5 km between Gate No. 3 and the Chola Light House.
2. Bird watching on the mud flats in the sanctuary and in the Mangrove/Salt swamp areas
3. Turtle watch (Seasonal: December to March)
4. Ramarpadam
5. Muniappan Kovil
6. Shervarayan Temple
7. Chola Light House
8. Trekking in dry Evergreen Forest between Ramarpadam Modimandapam for a distance of 0.5 Km
9. Beach Walk/Trek for 7 Km from Chola Lighthouse to Kodiakarai Jetty

The ETMC at Point Calimere is a convert from the EDC model and is in the process of galvanising itself. Considering the off-beat factor of the Ecotourism destination, “the ETMC is evolving” as mentioned by the Deputy Forest Range Officer. “A lot of work has to be done to attract tourists to the Ecotourism Destination,” says the President of the ETMC. The ETMC also has control on a 26-seater Swaraj Mazda and a 7-seater Air-Conditioned TATA Venture; which will help those who come through public transport to see the Ecotourism destination of Kodiakarai. The Point Calimere, Kodiakarai ETMC is a highly evolved one and one can see that, the setting is bright for this ETMC to grow leaps and bounds, with good marketing and creation of awareness of the unique Ecotourism destination.

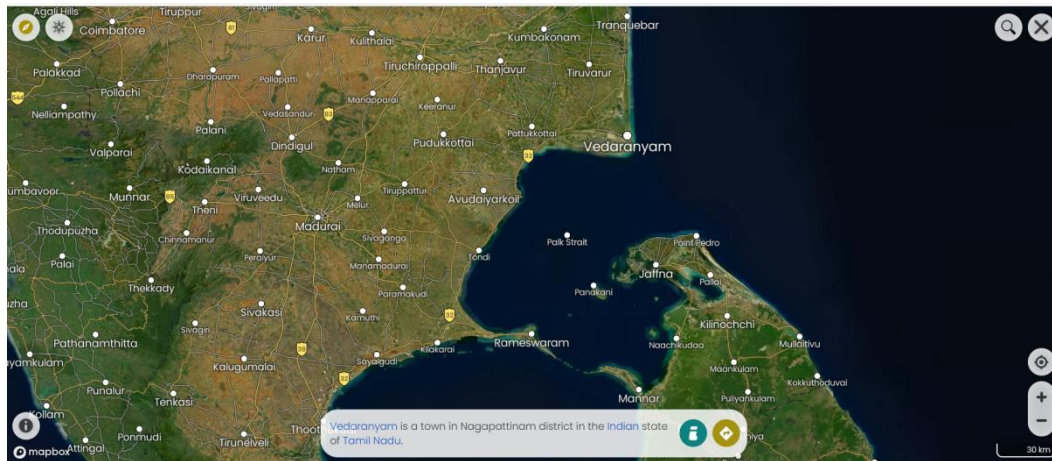


Illustration 2: Map of Vedaranyam (Mapcarta, n.d.)

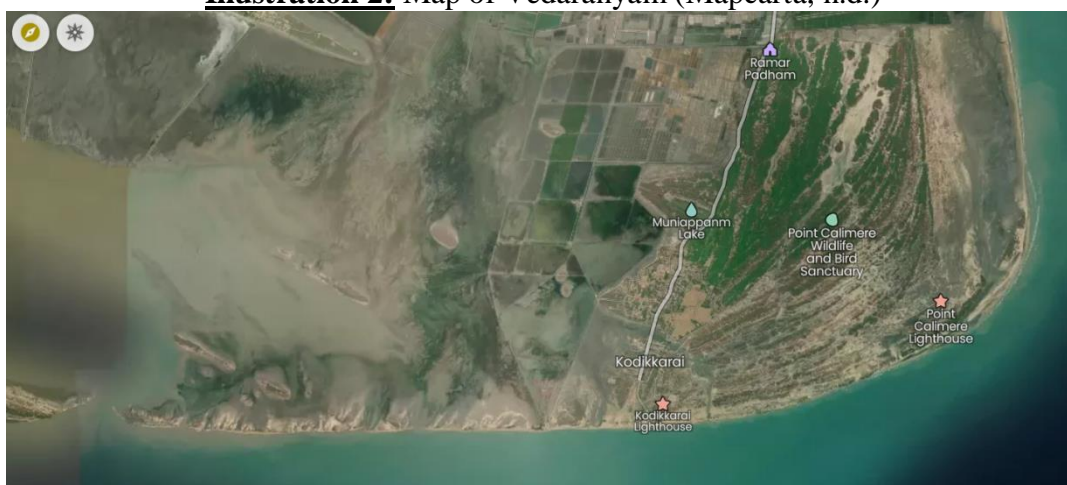


Illustration 3: Map of Vedaranyam (Closer look) (Mapcarta, n.d.)

The Community Engagement

Prior to the ETMC being established in Kodiakarai, the TNFD had run multiple EDCs to bring about community connect and create opportunities of livelihood generation. The community had understood the uniqueness of the intervention and hence, when the ETMC was launched they participated in anticipation. There exists EDCs that empowers women to form SHG's (Self-help groups), that uses the Government schemes like the *Magalir Thittam* and *Pudhu Vazhvu* Twitter, essentially aimed at employment and economic activity. This apart the EDCs also use funds from with the groups savings to fulfil their immediate needs. This is called internal revolving funds. The external funds are sought from banks and micro finance institutions to start new business and group businesses. This set up, is very essential in the dry and barren Kodiakarai village as, the options of any other form of employment is bleak. Since the primary occupation of the village is fishing and related activities. It employs a good portion of the population. But the income is very meagre and not sufficient to make ends meet. Hence, on establishing the ETMC for Kodiakarai; the focus was on Point Calimere area and the tourism opportunities that could be created. The ETMC members realize that greater the number of visitors, the better it is for the tourism system of Kodiakarai Village. The income generation opportunities though came from ticket collection and the interpretation centre, the number of women involved was three. But they were able to make a living out of the same, and also look to investment through their family members in other aspects of business. The representatives of the ETMC and the women even provided an opportunity for a person to work as a driver of the tourist vehicles that proceed into the tourism zone in the area. Pandemic too havoc with the ETMC at Kodiakarai, as the whole of 2020-21 was a washout. Though towards the end of 2021 there was some traction, but the number of visitors coming to the destination was less than 15 per

day. The ETMC members when last spoken to in November 2021, had decided to continue with the struggle and ensure the ETMC moves ahead.

B. Case Study of Sasthakovil Site, the river, the waterfall (Srivilliputhur Wildlife Sanctuary) (9° 21' to 9° 48' N and 77°21' to 77°46' E)

The Ecotourism Product

Located twenty-four km from Rajapalayam town (in Virudhunagar District) which is the nearest bus and railway station points as well and with Madurai (96 km) being the nearest airport; the site is inside the Srivilliputhur Wildlife Sanctuary (SWS) (also known as Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary-GSWS). Spread over an area of 485.2 km² SWS was established in 1988 to protect threatened Grizzled Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*). The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has approved the location as the fifth Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu, which will encompass the Meghamalai and Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuaries (Rajaguru, 2021) and has been rechristened as Srivilliputhur-Megamalai Tiger Reserve (SMTR) (Fathima, 2021). Located in the lap of Western Ghats which falls in the border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it is bordered on the southwest by the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR) and has been considered as one of the best-preserved forests south of the Palghat Gap. the tourist spot is located on the River Nagariyar, and the place where the water, falls has been identified as the Sasthakovil Falls. The forest cover falls under various categories (TBGP, n.d.) viz., deciduous forest at the lower elevation, river line forest, tropical evergreen forests and semi-evergreen forest at the higher elevations. In a few areas grasslands can also be seen (Rajaguru, 2021), making it a nature's paradise and providing an opportunity for promoting Ecotourism and with the destination considered a place for sighting Elephants and Tigers besides the lion tailed macaques (LTM), gaur, leopard, Nilgiri Langur, Nilgiri Tahr, bonnet macaque, common langur, palm civets, slender loris, sambhar, spotted deer, tree shrews, great pied hornbill, Nilgiri pipit, wild cats and boars, it sure becomes a point of attraction, besides the local populous wanting to go not only to the river and the falls, but also visit the Images of Lord Ayyappa in an open space, who is considered to be the family deity by the local people. With such flora and fauna and the declaration of the area being a Tiger Reserve, the area comes under the Wildlife division of the TNFD.



Illustration 4: Map of the Sasthakovil Ecotourism Site (provided by the Biologist of Srivilliputhur Wildlife Sanctuary)



Illustration 3a: The Sasthakovil environs and the Women members of the ETMC and TNFD officers

Under Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project (TBGP), an Ecotourism Management Committee (ETMC) at Kovilur village for Sasthakovil (TNFD, 2016a) site has generated an income of Rs. 7.01 lakhs in 2014-15 and Rs. 9.57 lakhs in 2015-16, totally, Rs. 16.58 lakhs, which enable engaging 2 women members for checking & ticketing and 4 men members for guiding visitors, fire watchers and driver wages etc. Further 6 women SHGs have been provided for an internal revolving loan of Rs. 5.80 in 2014-15 and Rs. 8.80 lakhs in 2015-16, totally Rs. 16.60 lakhs including revolving funds for alternate income generation activities. The community participation helped in the regulation of visitors, regulation of activities like removal of litter, prohibiting liquor & cigar, cooking, use of shampoo etc., and reduced the burden of Forest officials. When the research team met with the Sasthakovil ETMC team just before the Covid-19 pandemic along with the Biologist from the Wildlife Office at Rajapalayam; and the ensuing lockdown, the ETMC members had decided to buy a mini-bus that would help them to facilitate visitors to travel from the Rajapalayam Railway Station to the Ecotourism location and return to the Railway station once sightseeing was accomplished. This was a phenomenal achievement in itself.

The Community Engagement

The ETMC of Sasthakovil led by the Women and the TNFD has marched ahead. Covid-19 no doubt placed a multitude of barriers with the stoppage of visitations by the tourists. The FD in fact shut down the place in its entirety, resulting in the women entrepreneurs and the ETMC members focussing on other job opportunities to eke out a living. The research team in its deliberations too realized that the ETMC members in general and the women folk attached to the ETMC in particular had made tourism a dependent business opportunity, which at times of crisis, clearly ushers in a stoppage of visitors and thereby killing the very business the locals were dependent upon. Successive notifications of the Government ensured no tourist movement as in the case of other ETMCs across the state. Though in some ETMCs tourism was allowed, but other Income Generation programmes (IGP) and the funds for the same were not provided for. It is the women folk who have ensured a bind along with the FD staff that has ensured for the ETMC and continuous to do so. In fact, it can be seen that, it is the strength of the women and the Leadership that they are providing at Sasthakovil that will ensure success for the ETMC and all other stakeholders.

Sasthakovil stands out as a unique feature on account of the interest taken by a group of women from one village. Yes, they want to be successful to themselves and get to be independent and empowered, but would not like to be competitive with the women folk of other villages for they consider them as competition; but then if Ecotourism is a business, then the facet the competition, of strategy does come out, even if it in the rural areas or the forest-fringe areas. Thence, the women demonstrate this ability to avoid others to participate and ensure a success for themselves. It has been

observed that the facet of inclusivity of others dies out when it comes to one community or the other and if one sees that competition will ensure many more people to be fed.

C. Kalikesam Eco Camp (Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary) (8.3781° N, 77.4080° E)

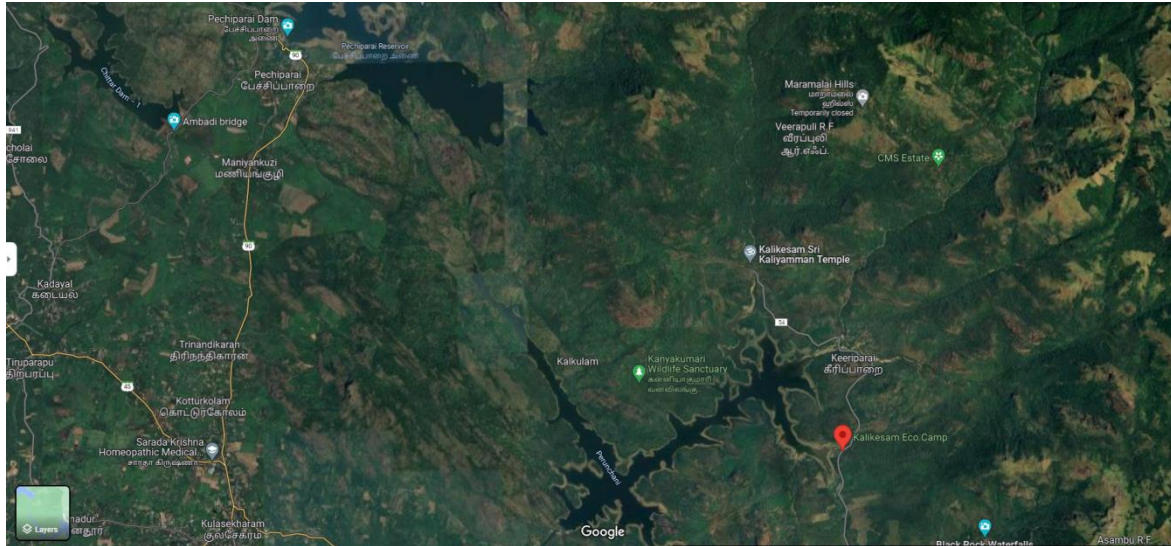


Illustration 5: Map of the Kalikesam Eco Camp area (Google maps, 2022)

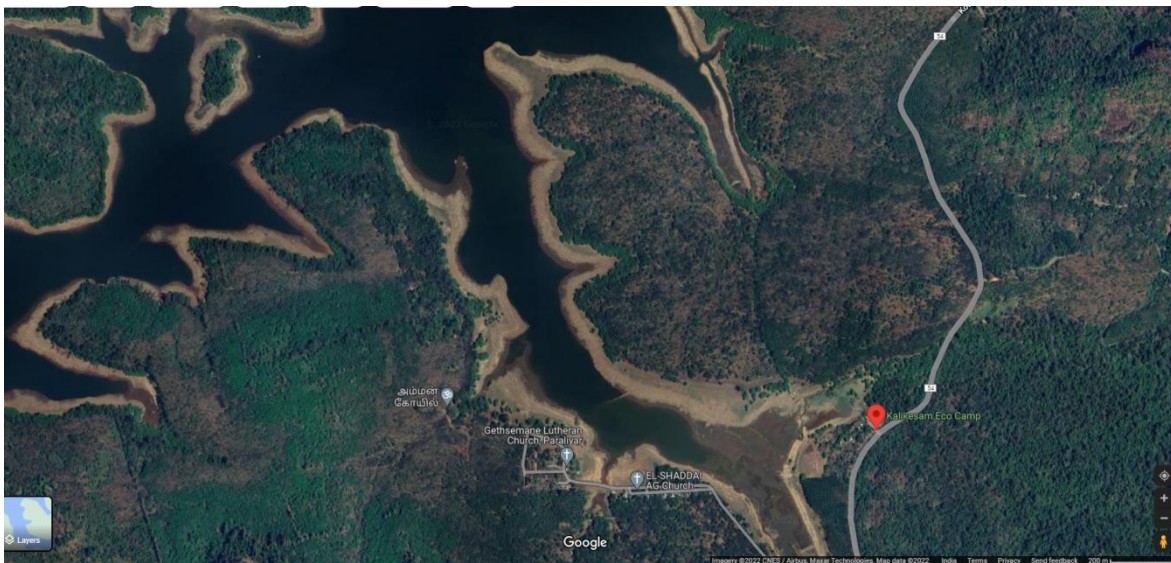


Illustration 5a: Map of the Kalikesam Eco Camp area (Google maps, 2022)

The Kalikesam Eco Camp is a unique SPV that the TNFD has created. The area is dominated by the Kani Tribe, an ancient tribe that has inhabited the area since times immemorial. The SPV is layered with EDC, ETMC and SHG. The following is the membership of the SPVs.

	SPV	Constituents/members	Work done
1	EDC	12	Earliest of SPV, do routine works
2	ETMC	8	Guiding, Ticket Collection, Coracle Rides and Camp Maintenance (Paid Salary from the income earned)
3	SHG	40 All Women (12 Women from Vinayaka SHG)	Run Canteen. 5% of the income must be set aside for Village Development, 95% remaining minus the expenses is profit that

			will be divided between 12 women members.
--	--	--	---

Table 1: The SPVs in Kalikesam Eco Camp

The Kalikesam Eco Camp has a total of ten cottages wherein about ten visitors can stay at any given point in time. The SPVs eagerly await the visitors such that they can service them as required. They are ever willing to ensure support and guidance and work as a team. 90% of them being tribal, they are not in a position to move out. Though the younger generation is slowly but steadily moving out of the area for better opportunities in education and work. The women folk who are part of the SHG have ensured that they continue work that has been assigned and established themselves. They work during peak season and the lean season and ensure an income for themselves. They have stood out in the crowd and income generators, rather than just depending on the men folk of the governmental institutions for doles for survival.

Conclusion

Considering all the parameters of marketing and managing CBE, the Industry voice in India through the Travel Agents Association of India (TAA) (<https://www.travelagentsofindia.com>) commented on Wildlife tourism as an unexplored and niche category. Jyoti Mayal, the President, TAAI, mentions, “.....our members receive queries from various parts of the globe to visit India only and only explore wildlife sanctuaries and national parks....” She goes on to add, “.....there are almost 100+ national parks in India which are visited by both domestic and foreign tourists and it significantly contributes to the employment generation in that area, nearby towns and village....” (ETTravel World, 2022). With the industry anticipating a major movement towards wildlife tourism, the destinations and the communities involved should gear up and ensure success to all the stakeholders.

The India travellers startled the tourism eco-system when 94% of the Indian travellers surveyed by booking.com mentioned that ‘sustainable travel’ is a priority for them in the future (ETTravelWorld, 2021). Not only was the demand for sustainable travel on the high, but the finer aspects of ensuring what is spent by the visitor, the traveller; 68% in Indian respondents believed and wanted the ‘spend’ to reach the local community. Booking.com (2021) has in its research dissected many aspects which will be an eye-opener for the Indian industry, for the discerning Indian Traveller, has stated in no unequivocal terms to that 77% of the travellers expect the industry to offer more sustainable options, through Travel Sustainable badges and not surprisingly 88% of the travellers indicating that they would be more likely to choose a specific accommodation if they knew it was implementing sustainable practices. Booking.com (2021a) provides more food for thought in its research, wherein the Indian traveller categorically states, 42% mentioning they could not find any sustainable options; 26% did not even know that sustainable accommodation existed. Clearly, a vision for the sustainable badge, certification, ecolabel, was in the horizon not as a mirage, but as something in reality. Thus, then the world over, if in some geographies, the sustainability strides have been launched and moving fast; India has arrived. Is the travel, tourism and hospitality (TTH) eco-system of able to take on the sustainability bandwagon, is it at the cusp of something bigger for the trade and stakeholders, or will it remain on paper a dream considering that the TTH sector contributes in a grand fashion to the economy of the country and the world.

Acknowledgement:

The research paper was presented at the two-day National Conference on Adaptive strategies in Tourism and Heritage for competitiveness and sustainable development organized by Department of Tourism Management, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (Deemed to be University), Coimbatore in 2022. Many thanks to the Department faculty members for giving permission to publish the research paper. Many thanks to Mr. Pravin T of RSP Conference,

Coimbatore, who has supported the research team in a multitude of dimensions. A huge thanks to all the women who are members of various Ecotourism bodies, where the research was undertaken for their time and efforts. We are confident that the leadership they are providing will catapult them to bigger league.

References

Amir, A., F., Ammar, A., G., Salamiah, A., J., & Khairun, N., (2015) Sustainable Tourism Development: A Study on Community Resilience for Rural Tourism in Malaysia. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 168, 116-122. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.217>

Booking.com (2021), Booking.com launches first of its kind travel sustainable badge to lead industry in showcasing a wider variety of sustainable stays. November 16, 2021. Retrieved from. <https://news.booking.com/en-in/Booking.com-sustainability-badge-India/>

Booking.com (2021a), Sustainable travel report 2021 by booking.com reveals the pandemic has influenced 88% of Indian travellers to want to travel more sustainably in the future. June 24, 2021. Retrieved from. <https://news.booking.com/en-in/sustainable-travel-report-2021-by-bookingcom-reveals-the-pandemic-has-influenced-88-of-indian-travellers-to-want-to-travel-more-sustainably-in-the-future/>

Cater, Carl, Garrod, Brain & Low, Tiffany (2015). The encyclopaedia of sustainable tourism. CABI. ISBN: 9781780641430

Cole, Stroma (2006). Information and empowerment: The keys to achieving sustainable tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14, 629–644. Retrieved from. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2167/jost607.0>
DoI: <https://doi.org/10.2167/jost607.0>

Donohoe, H.M., & Needham, R.D. (2006). Ecotourism: The evolving contemporary definition. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 5(3), 192–210.

Ertac, Murude & Tanova, Cem (2020) Flourishing Women through Sustainable Tourism Entrepreneurship. *Sustainability* 2020, 12, 5643. Retrieved from. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342935239_Flourishing_Women_through_Sustainable_Tourism_Entrepreneurship DoI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145643>

ETTravelWorld (2021), 94% of Indian traveller to make sustainable travel a priority in the future: Booking.com survey. ETTravelWorld, April 22, 2021. Retrieved from. <https://travel.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/research-and-statistics/research/94-of-indian-travellers-to-make-sustainable-travel-a-priority-in-the-future-booking-com-survey/82191498>

ETTravelWorld (2022, June 28) Wildlife Tourism to drive Rural Economy: TAAI. Retrieved from. <https://travel.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/associations/wildlife-tourism-to-drive-rural-economy-taai/92503858>

Fathima, Azeefa (2021, October 3), Six butterfly enthusiasts ROAR to Western Ghats. Indian Express. Retrieved from. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/oct/03/six-butterfly-enthusiasts-roar-to-western-ghats-2366992.html>

Filimonau, Viachaslau; Matyakubov, Umidjon; Matniyozov, Murodjon; Shaken, Aiman & Mika, Mirosław (2022) Women entrepreneurs in tourism in a time of a life event crisis. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. Retrieved from.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/09669582.2022.2091142?scroll=top&needAccess=true> DoI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2022/2091142>

Fredman, Peter & Tyrväinen, Lisa (2010) *Frontiers in Nature-Based Tourism*, *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 10:3, 177-189, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2010.502365>

Goeldner, C.R. & Ritchie, J.R.B. (2003) *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*; John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, NJ, USA. Retrieved from

www.microlinkcolleges.net/elib/files/undergraduate/Tourism%20&%20Hotel%20Management/TOURISM%20-%20Principles,%20practices%20&%20Philosophies.pdf

Google Maps (2022) Kalikesam Eco Camp area. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Kalikesam+Eco+Camp/@8.383439,77.4015291,2299m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0x69c955249ea51019!8m2!3d8.3781219!4d77.4080286>

Hampton, P., Mark (2005). Heritage, local communities and economic development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32(3), 735–759. Retrieved from.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160738305000629>

DoI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.10.010>

Laarman, J. G., & Durst, P. B. (1987). Nature travel in the tropics. *Journal of Forestry*, 85(5), 43-46.

Lucas, P. H. C. (1985). How protected areas can help meet society's evolving needs. In *National parks, conservation, and development. The role of protected areas in sustaining society. Proceedings of the World Congress on National Parks, Bali, Indonesia, 11-12 October 1982* (pp. 72-77). Smithsonian Institution Press.

Mapcarta (n.d.) Vedaranyam Retrieved December 29, 2021, from <https://mapcarta.com/14852338/Map>

Mariappan, Julie (2013, June 5), Chennai's Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary gets bigger, *Economic Times*. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/environment/flora-fauna/chennais-point-calimere-wildlife-sanctuary-gets-bigger/articleshow/20434761.cms>

Rajaguru (2021, July 31), Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuaries. Retrieved from <https://www.rajaguruuiacademy.com/index.php/p/srivilliputhur-grizzled-squirrel-wildlife-sanctuaries>

Sharma, D., K. (n.d.) *Joint Forest Management: A Handbook*, JICA-MoEF project on Capacity Development for Forest Management and Training of personnel, ID-P199. Retrieved from. <http://ifs.nic.in/Dynamic/pdf/JFM%20handbook.pdf>

Shokouhi, A.K.; Khoshfar, G.; Karimi, L. The Role of Tourism in Rural Women's Empowerment, Case Study: Village Ziarat City of Gorgan, *Planning and Development of Tourism, the First Year. Geogr. Plan. Space J.* 2013, 3, 151–179.

TBGP (n.d.), Ecotourism Site, Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project, Sasthakoil. Retrieved from <http://tbgp.org/data/Eco-Tourism-Sites2.pdf>



Thompson, B.S., Gillen, J., & Friess, D.A., (2018) Challenging the principles of ecotourism: Insights from entrepreneurs on environmental and economic sustainability in Langkawi, Malaysia. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. 2018, 26, 257-276.

Tosun, Cevat (1999). Towards a typology of community participation in the tourism development process. *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 10, 113–134. Retrieved from. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13032917.1999.9686975?journalCode=rana20>
DoI:<https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.1999.9686975>

Tosun, Cevat. (2000). Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries. *Tourism Management*, 21(6), 613–633. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261517700000091> DoI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(00\)00009-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00009-1)

UNESCO (2018) Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, India. Retrieved from. <https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/aspac/nilgiri>

Verma, Jatin (2021, June 11) Private land in the Kallar corridor declared a forest. Retrieved from. <https://www.jatinverma.org/private-land-in-the-kallar-corridor-declared-a-forest>