

Eco-Tourism and Environmental Sustenance in Baralikkadu, Coimbatore - A Study

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Abstract

The present study area is located in Coimbatore Forest Division which has the presence of Reserved forests, National parks, and ranges like Western Ghats, making this district an area of rich ecological diversity. Though there are many regions, which are declared as Eco-Tourism Spots in Tamil Nadu, this region is ideal for a day visit as it is easily reachable within hours from Coimbatore city and all can relish because of its pristine purity of air and natural surroundings. This study is being carried out to assess the implications of Ecotourism activity with respect to Environmental Sustainability in Baralikkadu region.

Keywords: *ecotourism, environmental sustainability, flora & fauna, forests, tribes, wildlife.*

Introduction

Since time immemorial Tamil Nadu has followed a strong tradition of conserving Forests and Wild life. The term 'Eco Tourism' has been defined as a Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the natural and cultural History of Environment (State Forest Policy 11). It has been recognised as a permissible activity in the Protected areas and Forests as per the Guidelines of MoEF & CC (Tamil Nadu Eco Tourism Policy 1).

The present study area is located in Coimbatore Forest Division which has the presence of Reserved forests, National parks, and ranges like Western Ghats making this district an area of rich ecological diversity. The entire western and northern part of the district, borders the Western Ghats with the Nilgiris biosphere as well as Anaimalai and Munar ranges. Because of its close proximity to the forest region, three places in Coimbatore district viz., Kovai Coutralam, Poochamarathur and Baralikkadu have been chosen as Ecotourism spots. This study analyses the importance of environmental sustainability with the thrust upon Ecotourism and for which the study area has been chosen as Baralikkadu in Karamadai range of Coimbatore Forest Division. There are seven Forest Ranges in Coimbatore district viz., Coimbatore, Periyanaicken Palayam, Karamadai, Sirumugai, Mettupalayam, Madukkarai and Bolampatti. Among these ranges, as this Baralikkadu under Karamadai

Range is a renowned eco-tourism spot in Coimbatore, this study gained momentum. The researcher has made an attempt to analyse the activities carried out at Baralikkadu as a successful Eco Tourism spot without causing damage to the Environment.

Baralikkadu

The term 'Forest' means an area of land proclaimed to be a forest under a Forest Law.³ (K.P.Sagreiya,1). The study area Baralikkadu consists of plain and dry mixed deciduous forests which has a faunal population such as wild boar, elephant, deer, bear, tiger and leopard. It is 32 km far away from Karamadai. The Coimbatore Forest Division has been arranging a day trip which includes activities such as Trekking, Coracle boating, and Bathing in the Bhavani river. Through these activities, the Forest Department aims to promote community-based Ecotourism and ultimately to improve the Economy of the study region without causing any destruction.

Eco Tourism in Baralikkadu

The Baralikkadu is a tiny tribal village in Nellithurai Panchayat under Karamadai Block in Coimbatore district. It comes under Karamadai Reserved Forest Range which has an area limitation of 11,000 ha. It consists of around 100 people who belonged to Irula community as its population. The State Forest Department, Government of Tamil Nadu has been working on the objective of

Ecotourism i.e zero percent destruction to environment since the introduction of Eco Tourism in Baralikkadu region from the year 2007. They are striving hard to meet the goal of Environmental Sustenance in all their deeds. The Karamadai Range of State Forest Department is promoting Eco Tourism on par with the objectives of the State Forest Department. On the day, each tourist registered (through online), the team of Forest Department receives the tourists and clear instructions are being given to them about the region to adhere their goal. The people of this village are also go in hand with the forest department to achieve the goal of the Forest Department by assisting them.

Activities Embarked on Ecotourism at Baralikkadu

The Forest department has taken initiative in such a way that they shall strive for Environmental Sustenance in the Baralikkadu region. Steps are being taken to promote Economic upliftment of the people without causing any devastation to the flora and fauna of the region. As the Tribal people of this region, have expertise in coracle riding, the Forest Department Personnel Mr.I.Anwardeen I.F.S Former District Forest Officer and Mr. Nagarajan Former Karamadai Range Officer both conceptualized the idea of organizing Eco Tourism in Karamadai Range which was funded by 12th Finance Commission. (State Forest Report on Ecotourism). Followed by this, Baralikkadu Eco Tourism Joint Forest Management Committee was formed which includes the places such as Korapathi, Veerakal, Baralikkadu, Neeradi and Kodyur. The main objective of this Eco Tourism is to enhance the basic amenities like education, sanitization, health, transportation and Socio Economic Welfare of the tribal people. (Ibid.,)

The tourists who would prefer to visit Baralikkadu, must register through the Forest department portal (www.coimbatorewilderness.com) by paying Rs.550/adult and for children Rs.450 which includes Lunch and Coracle riding. The Tourists who have registered are being requested to reach Karamadai by 8 am on the day they have registered for visit so that they can reach Baralikkadu by 9.30 am. The Tourists are received by the Forest Department team followed by the distribution of Sukku

Coffee (welcome drink) prepared by the Tamarai Self Help Group women of Baralikkadu. All can enjoy the pristine purity of nature and shall relish with fresh breeze through swings which are hanging at various trees on the banks of the Bhavani river. Followed by the refreshment, the Tourists are allowed to go for Coracle ride on the back water of Pilloor Dam at Neeravi. After a ride, they are brought back for a lunch in Baralikkadu and after a while those who are interested, can be permitted to take bath in the river or can leave. This is how the Forest Department has scheduled the visit of all Tourists.

Eco Tourism and Environmental Sustenance in Baralikkadu

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) has defined the term 'Ecotourism' as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (ecotourism.org). The Baralikkadu Ecotourism has stood up by the above description of TIES.

Principles of Ecotourism

- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Generate financial benefits for both local people
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates.
- Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.(ibid.,)

The Ecotourism conducted by the State Forest Department at Baralikkadu abide by the above listed components and are successful in achieving their goals. It was based on the objectives of State Forest Policy: Preserving Natural Forests and Wild Life, Conservation of Eco System etc.(State Forest Policy op.cit, 2).

Effective Implementation/Execution of Ecotourism at Baralikkadu

The amount which has been collected (Rs.550/- per head (adults) & Rs.450 (for children) for the visit to Baralikkadu Ecotourism are being shared with the people in such a way that Rs.100/head – Coracle ride, Rs.250/head- food which has been given to Tamarai Mahalir Self Help Group, Rs.100/head for Eco watcher whose duty is to protect the tourists from any adversity in the Ecotourism spots and to assist the Forest Department. The balance amount of Rs.100 will be kept in Baralikkadu EDC bank account so as to sanction this as loan for needy people which they will repay later.

Outcome of the Study

- Effective protection of forest and wildlife with the involvement of tribal communities, set as an example for environmental sustenance. The introduction of this Ecotourism has zero impact on Environment. i.e one could not find the illegal cutting of woods and no poaching of animals in the study area. No cases filed against the illegal cutting of trees as well as for Poaching of wild animals in this region.
- Through this Eco Tourism, awareness is being created among all its stakeholders in maintaining the environmental equilibrium of the forest region. The Forest Department sought the help of local people in various ways such as monitoring the Forest Range, Protection from forest fire, watching Animal Movement etc. On the other hand, this Ecotourism activity exhilarates the Socio Economic upliftment of the forest dwellers.
- It has also sensitized the society towards conservation and spreading the message of the necessity to protect the natural resources from devastation through human intervention.
- It is constructive in adhering the Principles of Ecotourism as stated by the International Ecotourism Society.

Suggestions and Recommendations

This study is being carried out to assess the implications of Ecotourism activities carried out at Baralikkadu by maintaining Environmental Sustenance. It is indeed a commendable work being done by the State Forest Department under Karamadai Forest Range Office, Coimbatore. Based on the observation after the study, the Researcher would prefer to put forward the following suggestions:

- To create awareness among the visitors of Baralikkadu, Tribal Heritage Centre can be established wherein there is a possibility of explicitly explaining the importance of the Eco system by the people of the region themselves.
- Awareness shall be given among visitors on Carbon Footprint, Indigenous Traditional knowledge of the Tribal people etc.
- Visuals can be shown among the people on Wild Animals Movement, importance of Elephant Corridors, Faunal Pug marks, ecological importance of the Flora & Fauna of the region and its geographical proximity to Nilgiris Biosphere.
- Along with Coracle riding, Bamboo Rafting can also be introduced as it is also comes under Nature Friendly

To conclude, as this Ecotourism project has been successfully executed by the State Forest Department, it is supportive for the administration while formulating an effective policy on conservation. The Department's ultimate goal is to promote the livelihood of the forest dwellers and not to make this venture as a profit making one which may eventually lead against its objectives.

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