

## **Veerappan's Terrains: The Brigand's Death Opens Door for Eco-Tourism in Western Ghats**

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**K Shiva Kumar** and **M. R. Gangadhar**, Department of Studies in Anthropology, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri, Karnataka, India. email: [gangadharmr@gmail.com](mailto:gangadharmr@gmail.com)

### ***Abstract***

*By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tourism has become the largest industry in the world, and this is now considered as the most rapidly growing industry in the world. Strategic tourism management has emerged as an important aspect of research in modern times. South India has abundant tourism destinations which have attracted the tourists from India and abroad. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) declared the theme of the World Tourism Day to be observed on 27 September 2002 as 'Eco-Tourism'. The definitions of ecotourism focus on three significant aspects viz. nature, tourism and local communities. Tourism development based on the philosophy of sustainability has emerged as one of the most comprehensive and accepted approaches to strategic tourism management. Deaths caused by Veerappan had blow to the culture, environment, human values and public interest in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala States. These tourists who once kept away from wildlife, forest, temples and even visiting their relatives in villages falling in Veerappan's territory fearing both Special Task Force operation and Brigand kidnap bid is now eco tourism hub. There is a need to implement development plans and manage natural resources in a way that ensures ecological and environmental integrity.*

***Keywords:*** Karnataka, Veerappan's territory, Eco-tourism, Sustainable Development.

### **Introduction**

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tourism has become the largest industry in the world, and this is now considered as the most rapidly growing industry of the world. The impact of largely unplanned tourism development has been felt deeply as impending on environment, ecology, and on the people or the community. In the wake of these impacts, there is a need for the alternate tourism so that we can preserve tourism with its benefits for next generations also. And the outcome is the concept of eco-tourism. Thus, sustainable tourism development has become one of the essential elements of the new tourism paradigm from mass tourism to sustainable tourism.

Ecotourism is now a major growth area in its own right. Tourism is a major industry which creates employment opportunities across the globe. It has great strategic importance to the national and regional economies due to its capacity for generation of wealth. Tourism plays an important role in driving growth and bringing about economic prosperity. Strategic tourism management has emerged as an important aspect of research in modern times. The present article examines the new opportunities for eco-tourism in Western Ghats after Veerappan's era.

### **Tourism in South India**

South India is a region in the southern part of India. It includes the states Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. South India basically represents Dravidian culture. This region has enormous beaches, waterfalls, forests, lakes, backwaters, Wild Life Sanctuary etc. The famous cities in this region are Hyderabad and its twin city Secunderabad, Mysore, Bengaluru, Kochi, Trivandrum, Chennai, Kanyakumari etc. The famous hill stations in this region are Kodaikanal, Ooty and Munnar.

Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states constitute the 'Rice bowl of India'. These two states have major cities like Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Vishakhapatnam. There are historically famous places which attract large number of tourists. Karnataka state also has scenic parks, historical forts and palaces, calm backwaters and modern technological hubs. Kerala is a popular tourist destination famous for its backwaters for houseboat cruising, Ayurvedic treatments, long stretches of golden beaches, tropical greenery romantic honeymoon destinations, fragrant spice and tea gardens and plethora of flora and fauna in the various wildlife parks.

Tamil Nadu is home to many natural resources, grand Hindu temples of Dravidian architecture, hill stations, beach resorts, multi-religious pilgrimage sites. The state also has famous temples and hill stations. The Pondicherry is a Union Territory of India, situated on the coast of Bay of Bengal. Pondicherry is also considered an educational hub of southern India, having many medical, engineering, law, agricultural colleges. It is famous for its churches, temples and beaches. South India has historical monuments, famous temples, wildlife sanctuaries, lush green

valleys and hill stations which are worth seeing. This region offers plenty of opportunities for tourism promotion in the country.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Tourism is both profit and service oriented industry in modern times. It has immense potential to generate income, create employment, development infrastructure, promote regional development and facilitate economic development. The tourism industry has grown enormously since 1970s all over the world. Tourism industry also creates adverse implications in terms of cultural, social, environmental and economic conditions. The concept of sustainable tourism development has gained importance in the world. According to the principles of sustainability, all forms of tourism should be sustainable. The champions of environmental protection have called upon the stakeholders of tourism development to minimize the negative consequences of tourism development and protect the interest of people. The present study will be carried out on the basis of the theory offered by Neto (2003).

### **Salient Features of Eco Tourism**

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) declared the theme of the World Tourism Day to be observed on 27 September 2002 as “Eco-Tourism: The Key to Sustainable Development. Though ecotourism assumes so much significance in the present context, it accounts for a small proportion of the global tourism market current estimates vary between 3 to 7% only (Place, 1995). Ecotourism is usually considered to be more than just tourism to natural areas. The Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and the natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to the local people. The World Conservation Union’s (IUCN) Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA) defines ecotourism as “Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.

One of the best definitions of ecotourism is that provided by the Australian National Ecotourism Strategy, which states: “Ecotourism is nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. The definitions of ecotourism focus on three significant aspects viz. nature, tourism and local communities.

The main objectives of eco-tourism include - provision of socio-economic benefits, provision of environmental services, conservation of the natural areas, provision of high quality experience and promotion of environmental advocacy. The fundamental functions of eco tourism are - protection of natural areas, generation of money, education, quality tourism and local participation (Ziffer, 1989).

Conservation, sustainability and biological diversity are the three interrelated aspects of ecotourism.

1. Conserve biological (and cultural) diversity, by strengthening protected area management systems (Public or Private) and increasing the value of sound ecosystem.
2. Promote the sustainable use of biodiversity, by generating income, jobs and business opportunities in ecotourism and related business networks.
3. Share the benefits of ecotourism developments equitably with local communities and indigenous people, by obtaining their informed consent and full participation in planning and management of ecotourism businesses.

Eco tourism differs in a meaningful way from mass tourism that aims at consuming nature leaving it depleted on more than one front (Yogi, 2010).

The strong orientation of the ecotourism field towards principles, guidelines and certification based on sustainability standard gives it an unusual position in the tourism field. Ecotourism is viewed, as a means of protecting natural areas through the generation of revenues, environmental education and involvement of the local people in such ways; both conservation and development will be prompted in a sustainable manner.

### **Strategic Management of Tourism**

Strategy making has become an important aspect of contemporary management. The subject of strategic management has become a new discipline in management. There are classical approaches to the study of strategic management. A strategy can be explored from a variety of different perspectives which provide a holistic understanding of strategy formulation and implementation in all walks of life including management (Evans, et.al.,2003). Strategic implementation is concerned with the issues which are considered to be necessary for the successful execution of strategy.

In a deliberate strategic process, strategic implementation would be carried out only after an organization has gathered sufficient information on its internal and external environments. The evaluation of these options is followed by the selection of the most appropriate option. Most strategies necessitate some degree of internal change and this process of change will need to be managed (Dale, 2005). Put simply, successful strategy selection and implementation relies upon the pre-supposition that the organization has carried out a meaningful strategic analysis.

Tourism development based on the philosophy of sustainability has emerged as one of the most comprehensive and accepted approaches to strategic tourism management. A number of different planning approaches have evolved to meet the changing tourism development needs. Tourism planning generally involved detailed surveys and appraisals of the physical resources of the country or region (Murphy, 1994).

The sustainable approach to tourism planning developed from broader international concerns over ecological issues. A further prerequisite for a sustainable tourism planning approach is the use of strategic planning to supersede conventional planning approaches (Tribe, 1997). The tourism industry has several challenges and opportunities. The stakeholders of tourism development are required to understand the competitive tourism environment in order to formulate suitable strategies that enable a strategic advantage to be gained over competitors (Hall, 1998).

An understanding of stakeholder needs and expectations is crucial for effective tourism management under the existing challenging circumstances. The tourism organizations should be guided by a clear strategic direction. Strategic tourism management primarily involves a systematic analysis of an organization's physical, human, intellectual, financial and reputational resources (Peattie and Moutinho, 2000). Adequate mobilization of resources and effective utilization of resources for tourism development depends upon a perfect understanding of competencies and core competencies of an organization.

The tourism organization can formulate strategies in pursuit of a competitive advantage on the basis of scientific analysis of macro and micro tourism environment. The organizers should also develop an appropriate resource based approach and the relational approach in determining competitive advantage within tourism firms (Ritchie and Geoffrey, 2000). Suitable corporate strategies should be designed on the basis of understanding of suitability, acceptability and feasibility of resources and opportunities for tourism development. Strategic evaluation and implementation of tourism promotions strategy assumes great significance in modern times (Tsiotsou and Ratten, 2010).

The cultural ethos, tourism, environment and orientation of tourism organization are important components of strategic management of tourism. The Strategic tourism development covers a wide range of management issues. The process of strategic tourism management includes macro and micro environmental analysis, stakeholder analysis, formulation of objectives, resource planning, strategic implementation, strategic risk management and strategic leadership development in tourism organizations (Wang and Xiang, 2012). The factors involved in the evaluation and implementation of systematic tourism development strategies should also be considered by the organizers and promoters.

### **Eco Tourism in Western Ghats in the Post-Veerappan Era**

12 years after the notorious forest brigand Veerappan was gunned down, the Veerappan's territory that fell in 6000 sq kms of forest spanning three states; Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu has turned out to most favorite destinations for lakhs of tourists. These tourists who once

kept away from wildlife, forest, temples and even visiting their relatives in villages falling in Veerappan's territory fearing both Special Task Force operation and Brigand kidnap bid is now eco tourism hub.

These forests that were roamed by Veerappan and his gang members that carried out series of abductions from officials to Kannada matinee idol Rajkumar for more than two decades had left unexplored due to security reasons. However, with Veerappan gone and lot of infrastructural changes like paccu roads, telecommunication networks, good number of resorts, home stays and guest's houses mushrooming and concept of eco tourism and craze for wildlife catching up in urbanites and old and young people having stressful life are pouring in to explore the hideouts of Brigand.

The devotees flow to Male Mahadeshwara hills that was less than 2 lakh per year during STF operation and Veerappan's times has increased to more than 13 lakh devotees taking its hundi collection to more than Rs 13 crore per annum. The flow to the Biligiri Ranganathaswamy temple and Himavad Gopalswamy hills in Bandipur has increased by ten folds and hundi collection shooting up from Rs 30 lakhs to more than 1.2 crores per annum. These temples that have less than 12 – 16 buses operated both by the Karnataka State Road Transport and Private operators has more than 50 buses from various destination other than fleet of four wheelers making beeline to these temples.

The Brigands death has not only shot up the flow to temples falling in hilly regions and in reserve forests, but has also boosted economic activities with a good number of high ends resorts and hotels coming up in Bandipur Wild Life sanctuary, B R Hills, Hanur, also near Gopinatham, native village of Veerappan. This has also worried the forest authorities as the tourists flow is exceeding the carrying capacity of the wildlife sanctuaries despite the night traffic ban in force. The Biligirirangaswamy hills that had very few takers and with Jungle Lodge resort at K Gudi, have six resorts including high end one which has booking in weekends and also during vacations.

Malleshappa, founder Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, said that these nearby forest have turned out to be stress busters to the urban population. He said that increase in income, affordability, connectivity and no fear or threat of Brigand has boosted tourists flow by 4-5 times in recent years. While, Bandipur that was left with resort from Jungle Lodges Resort and two private resorts have more than one dozen resorts and hotels. However, the government enforcing eco sensitive zones has stalls further mushrooming of resorts in Bandipur.

Honorary Wildlife Warden Naveen Kumar said that the tourists flow to Bandipur that was in few thousands in late 2000's has increased to 1.14 lakh in 2014-15 and 1.65 lakhs to 2015-16. This flow will add pressure on the carrying capacity of vehicle in the national park. Forest Department authorities are not in favor of permitting for new resorts and have regulated speed of the vehicles, installed cameras inside and also along the national highway. They are also apprehensive that the further growth of tourism and other activities would lead to man animal conflicts.

### **Mystery Trail**

The Forest Department in association with Jungle Lodges and Resorts Ltd keen to promote eco tourism on Karnataka – Tamil Nadu forest border as set up Gopinatham Mystery Trails Camp ' on the tank bed of a dam behind Gopinatham village. They have come up with ten huts with modern amenities, with activities like coracle ride, trekking and other activities for children in more than five acres in Cauvery Wildlife sanctuary.

The Mystery trail is near to Palar Bridge where Veerappan killed 22 people, including policemen, blasting land mines in 1993. This will also attract tourists from Tamil Nadu and across Hoggenkal falls to explore eco tourism in brigand's hide outs. The increase in vehicular movement to Hoggenekal via M M Hills and Gopinatham has boosted hotel business and the remote that had no tea shop, or roadside hotel during Veerappab trail has Bar and Restaurant that has record sale as people from both Karnataka – Tamil Nadu depend for liquor while, it has turned blessing in guise to tourists.



Cauvery Wild Life sanctuary, DFO Ramesh Kumar said that there is a good response to Mystery trail bookings. He said that they have planned to start trekking to make the place popular and permit people to explore the flora fauna in Cauvery wildlife introducing one and two days activities.

### **Guest Houses in Veerappan's Terrain in TN**

The death of forest brigand Veerappan has turned out to be blessing in disguise to explore and tap the tourism potential in Hasanur on Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border. The lush green dense forest at the foot of chains of hills in Western Ghats has attracted leading business houses, corporate and individuals to construct guest houses all around. Consequently, there are a number of the prominent hill stations around Erode, Salem and Chamarajanagar now.

The guest houses charge Rs 500 to Rs 3,000 per day for stay as they have good facilities and the families of tourists can enjoy stay, truck into the hideout of Verrappan, move around Bhavani Sagar dam, Rajkumar's house in Doddagajanur, Bannari Amman temple, visit K Gudi forest range, Suvarnavathi and Chikkahole reservoirs. This has also boosted business on Chamrajanagar- Sathyamagalam national highway will good number of hotels, restaurants; nursery's leading to boom in real estate prices.

### **Conclusion**

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000) emphasize the need for ensuring environmental sustainability across the world. Veerappan had caused a death blow to the culture, environment, human values, and public interest in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala States. He violated human rights as a forest brigand and looted precious natural resources as a notorious dacoit of South Indian history. Veerappan's area of operation remained cut off from the mainstream of development and the people remained economically weak and socially vulnerable. The areas dominated by Veerappan have turned into eco tourism destinations after his death. Therefore, in order to provide sustainability in the ecotourism, it is necessary to know environmental, social and economical effects of ecotourism activities and to consider these effects during the planning in these areas. Additionally, ecotourism development must promote

educational development and create awareness in people who are marginalized sections of the society. There is a need to implement development plans and manage natural resources in a way that ensures ecological and environmental integrity.

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