

PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY ON
RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVE IN KUMARAKOM GRAMA
PANCHAYATH

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ABSTRACT

Despite being a consumerist state, Kerala was able to maintain high living standards matching those of highly developed nations, owing to its huge foreign remittances and human development. More than four decades have passed since the conception of 'Kerala model of development' and the earlier euphoria surrounding the model no longer exists as serious questions regarding its sustainability were raised in 1990s. Almost in the same decade, the idea of 'New Kerala Model' was mooted in academic circles. This new model, which promised to integrate sustainable development goals into policy making, was essentially rooted in the concept of decentralisation. However, over the years, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been vehemently criticised for their failure to take into account long-term aspirations of the locality and to implement projects without meaningful forward and backward linkages. It was almost in the same era that Kerala recognised the potential of tourism as an important income generator. The present paper reflects upon how problems associated with PRIs can be solved to an extent if we can effectively incorporate tourism as an alternate revenue source, through a study on responsible tourism initiative in Kumarakom Grama Panchayath. The aim of the present paper is to make an in-depth study regarding the role of tourism as an alternate revenue source for PRIs in Kerala. The two main objectives of the paper are (i) to trace the history of PRIs in Kerala and analyse the challenges faced by them during the post-liberalisation era (ii) to examine how tourism can be effectively used to overcome the challenges faced by decentralisation in Kerala through a case study in Kumarakom Grama Panchayath. The paper employs descriptive and analytical methods to dissect facts and frameworks and to reach at outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of rural development is multi-sectorial comprising agriculture, rural industries and necessary infrastructure aiming to enhance the quality of life of rural masses. Rural development is a national necessity. Since agriculture, predominantly rural in nature, provides employment to nearly 70 percent of Indians and serves raw materials and purchasing power for industries, rural development has to be given considerable importance in our development process.¹

The first serious effort to solve the problems of rural development was made through Community Development Programme in 1952 and National Extension Service in 1953. After the completion of five years of Community Development Programme, as per the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, a three-tier Panchayati raj system was set up in India with Gram Panchayats at the Village level, Taluka/Block Panchayat at the Taluk level and Zila Parishad/District Panchayat at the District level. The idea of a grassroots level democracy in which common people participate in the political deliberations and decision making was not alien to India. The modern-day Gram Sabhas have similarities to these Vedic institutions of Sabha and Samiti.

Plan documents of both state and central governments have always emphasised the importance of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). During the second five-year plan itself, Panchayats were held responsible for socioeconomic transformation of village life. The plan document further stated that rural progress depends entirely on the existence of active organisation in village which can bring all the people, including the weaker sections, into the ambit of common programmes to be carried out with the assistance of the village administration. Since then, PRIs served as instruments for rural reconstruction and development and as agencies for both state and central government sponsored programmes.

¹ K. M. Arjun, 'Indian Agriculture- Status, Importance and Role in Indian Economy' (2013) 4 (4) International Journal of Agriculture and Food Science Technology <https://www.ripublication.com/ijafst_spl/ijafstv4n4spl_11.pdf> accessed 25 November 2017

2. PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN KERALA

The developmental experience of Kerala was some sort of a paradox for social scientists across the globe.² Kerala achieved high standard of living matched by many developed countries despite registering a relatively low per capita income. Referred to as the Kerala model, the exemplary development model is often attributed as the result of public actions and responsible governance. Many scholars regard this development experience as lopsided development, a term which they borrow from the Human Development Report. However, such a macro economy with a few dominating sectors is prone to be unsustainable in the long run.³ Like Kuznets' inference, the initial euphoria surrounding the Kerala model began to slowly disappear and questions regarding the sustainability of the Kerala model were raised in the 1990s.⁴ Industrial backwardness, agricultural stagnation, high level of unemployment, poverty among the marginalised sections, high incidence of lifestyle diseases and rising suicide rates were some commonly cited failures of the Kerala Development Model. The state was caught up in a cobweb of problems or in a 'Vicious Cycle,' i.e., low economic development led to low human development which in turn led to further low economic development. It was during this period, the idea of 'New Kerala model' developed in academic circles. The new model emphasised on participatory growth rather than on welfare growth and marked a shift towards bottom-up planning from top-down intervention. Decentralisation was the key concept around which the entire 'New Kerala Model' evolved.⁵

² K. P. Kannan, 'Kerala's Turnaround in Growth: Role of Social Development, Remittances and Reform' (2005) 40 (6) *Economic and Political Weekly* <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4416172>> accessed 25 November 2017

³ Simon Kuznets, 'Quantitative Aspects of Economic Growth of Nations: Industrial Distribution of National Product and Labour Force' (1957) 4 *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 1.

⁴ The initial euphoria regarding the sustainability of Kerala model was questioned by academicians in 1990s as human development is not possible beyond a point without economic development. Their ideas were rooted in the writings of Kuznets and his views regarding pattern of macro-level growth of economy. Kuznets was of the view that the long run growth as well as its sustainability depends on the pattern of change in the economic structure defined as the sectorial composition of output, employment and labour productivity. He inferred that as economic development takes place, the share of secondary sector increases on initial phase followed by the tertiary sector. However in Kerala, there occurred a transition from primary sector to tertiary sector without creating a well-developed secondary sector. Kuznets inferred that such a lopsided structure with few dominating sectors is not conducive for sustaining and maximising overall growth of macro-economy, based on his research in European countries.

⁵ René Véron, 'The "New" Kerala Model: Lessons for Sustainable Development' (2001) 29 (8) *World Development* <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(00\)00119-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(00)00119-4)> accessed 24 July 2017

Though Kerala passed its Panchayati Raj Act in 1994 and held elections to the three-tier Panchayats in 1995 delegating 29 functions to local bodies in accordance with the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, the basic ideals were present in the state long back. The Administrative Reforms Committee constituted by the first E. M. S Namboodiripad ministry was heavily in favour of a decentralised governance structure.⁶ However, due to various reasons, the decentralisation drive failed to take off in the state, until 1990s. Kerala was also relatively serious in the decentralisation drive compared to the other states, as evident by the budgetary allocation of nearly 35-40 percent of the total outlay to local self-governments in 1996.⁷ Departing from the conventional wisdom of slowly building capacity of local self-governments and then the devolution of powers and functions, Kerala followed a different strategy of ‘Big Bang’ approach.⁸ Through this new approach, the state transferred nearly 30-40 percent of its annual plan outlay in favour of local self-governments. Decentralisation drive was launched under the popular name ‘People’s Planning Campaign’ during the 9th plan period. With the launch of ‘People’s Planning Campaign’ and ‘Planning from below,’ nearly two million Keralites were able to voice their opinions regarding local development. The nomenclature was subsequently changed as ‘Kerala Development Plan’ and ‘People’s Plan’ over the years, reflecting the changes in government, while broad objectives remained more or less the same. Some commonly upheld objectives of the decentralisation drive in Kerala are improving the quality of investment through resource allocation by priority fixation, framing local solutions to developmental problems through improved planning and implementation, exploiting local production possibilities, ensuring greater public participation and facilitating a system of demand to enhance improvement in the delivery of development and welfare services.

⁶ S M Vijayanand, ‘Kerala- A case Study of classical democratic decentralization’ (April 2009, Kerala Institute of Local Administration) <<http://www.panchayat.gov.in/documents/10198/1389387/S%2BM%2BVijayananth-Classical%2Bdecentralisation-Kerala.pdf>> accessed 25 November 2017

⁷ Besley T, Rohini Pande and Vijayendra Rao, ‘Panchayaths and Resource Allocation: A Comparison of South Indian states’ (April 2005) <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/eopp/_new/data/indian_project/papers/StateComparison.pdf> accessed 25 November 2017

⁸ K. Rajasekharan, ‘Decentralisation in Kerala: Problems and Prospects’ in T M Joseph (ed.), *Local Governance in India: Ideas, Challenges and Strategies* (Concept Publishing Company 2007)

3. COMMON CRITICISMS LEVELED AGAINST PRIs IN KERALA

Kerala records nearly three times of the unemployment rate at the national level.⁹ Migration played a pivotal role in venting out the magnitude of the crisis till late 1980s. The short-sighted policy to set up unaided colleges especially in engineering and science fields liberally had put enormous stress on the labour market, eventually resulting in educated unemployment. Failure of PRIs to curtail unemployment through job creation was subjected to severe criticism. The situation became worse since the rate of growth of productive sectors failed to absorb the expanding educated manpower.

During 2015-16, the contribution from primary, secondary and tertiary sectors to the Gross State Value Added at Constant prices (2011-12) was 11.58 percent, 26.17 percent and 62.24 percent respectively. With a stagnating secondary sector and a declining primary sector, local bodies failed in enhancing the contribution of agriculture and small-scale industries to Kerala economy. Coir, handloom, cashew and fishery industries barely receive any boost due to the decentralisation drive. Critics of decentralisation argue that projects undertaken by the local self-governments towards local development did not show any significant forward or backward linkages. The meetings of Gram Sabhas were not convened regularly. Even if they were convened, they involved only targeted beneficiaries and most of the upper, middle class sections seldom participated. This is against the very character of these organisations.

Decentralisation earmarks ten percent of total plan funds targeting enhanced participation of women in development decisions and ensuring a better quality of life. However, decentralisation drive in Kerala is widely criticised for serious lapses in the matters of women participation and neglect of other gender related-issues like domestic violence,

⁹ 'Kerala tops the unemployment rate' *The Hindu* (12 February 2016) <www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/kerala-tops-in-unemployment-rates/article8226139.ece> accessed 25 November 2017

health care, etc..., in planning process. It is criticised that marginalised sections like the Scheduled Tribes are yet to fully reap the benefits of decentralisation. Poverty-related deaths still get reported from tribal villages like Attappadi, etc...

The poor financial position of the Kerala economy adversely affects the effective functioning of fiscal decentralisation. As decentralisation is constitutionally a state subject, unless the state governments improve their financial health or local self-governments take steps to beef up their own resources, chances for the complete success of a decentralisation drive are gleam.

It is also criticised that devolution of large amount of plan resources took away the genuine interest of local self-governments to collect their own resources as they are content with the plan grants itself¹⁰. According to newspaper reports, in many areas of Kerala, only 30-40 percent of the allotted funds are utilised while the rest of them lapses. The failure of PRIs to implement projects within a stipulated time frame and the lack of clarity among PRIs regarding project selection often end up in non-productive segregated projects , adding more to the problem. These projects are often prepared on the basis of vote bank rather than taking into account the long-term aspirations of the locality, though the latter had been made an integral part of the planning process. So it is in this context, that we need to consider how problems associated with PRIs can be solved to an extent if we effectively incorporate tourism as an alternate income source.

4. WHY TOURISM IS IMPORTANT TO THE KERALA ECONOMY?

Since its modern beginnings, tourism had been promoted as an engine of growth and as a game changer for developing nations, including India. It is a well-known fact that, being one of the most densely populated states in India, land availability is an issue in Kerala. This is evident from the frequent newspaper reports about the agitations between local people and authority over land acquisition. Being such a land-deficit state, the establishment of heavy industries requiring large acres of lands is not feasible in Kerala. Secondly, many writers

¹⁰ K. Rajasekharan n (8)

have rightly acknowledged the beautiful landscape of Kerala which offers tremendous potential for tourism development.¹¹ Owing to its emerald backwaters, beautiful seashores and its precious biodiversity, Kerala has been described as ‘one of the must-see destinations of a life time’.¹² Tourism also contributes to the Kerala economy through direct and indirect income streams. Total revenue (including direct and indirect) from tourism during 2016 was Rs. 29658.56 crores.¹³ Foreign exchange earnings owing to tourism witnessed an increase of 15.07% from the previous figure and reached Rs. 6398.93 crores in 2014 and Rs.7749.51 crores in 2016.

Table 1

Total earnings from tourism from 2010 to 2016

YEAR	TOTAL REVENUE GENERATED FROM TOURISM (Direct & Indirect)
2010	17348
2011	19037
2012	20430
2013	22926.55
2014	24885.44
2015	26689.63
2016	29658.56

Source: Kerala Tourism Statistics 2016

With many Middle East nations makes mandatory recruitment of local populace by the implementation of NITAQAT laws and other states catching up with Kerala in terms of

¹¹ P. D. Jeromi , ‘What Ails Kerala’s Economy: A Sectoral Exploration’ (2003) 38 (16) Economic and Political Weekly < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4413463>> accessed 25 November 2017

¹² Kokkranikal, J. and Alison Morrison, ‘Entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism: The houseboats of Kerala’ (2002) 4(1) Tourism and Hospitality Research < <https://doi.org/10.1177/146735840200400102>> accessed 25 November 2017.

¹³ Ministry of Tourism, Government of Kerala, ‘Kerala Tourism Statistics’ (Government Press 2016)

educational achievements, tourism is the need of the hour.¹⁴ Tourism is also regarded as an industry with strong linkage and multiplier effects. The Government of Kerala appointed Tata Consultancy Services to make an in-depth analysis of the impact of tourism on the rest of the Kerala economy. The study found that every one rupee of tourist expenditure creates a total output of Rs. 2.07 in the open model and Rs. 8.83 in the closed model. The study also found that the type I employment multiplier is 4.62 while type II employment multiplier is 15.19.¹⁵ Tourism can promote agro-based industries and thereby positively contribute to both agriculture and industry.

At this juncture, we need to revisit one of the most important challenges faced by the industry. It is related to the lesser role of PRIs in the development of the tourism industry. Frequent newspaper reports about the different stands taken by the local self-bodies and the state governments on tourism-related issues make this clear. The proper solution lies with the devolution of power and funds from the state and the central governments to the local self-governments. This should begin from the choice of destination to the distribution of revenue generated as the local self-governments have a better idea regarding the destination and its areas of potential. The question of improvising decentralisation through tourism and tourism through decentralisation is explored in later sections.

5. TOURISM AND DECENTRALISATION

It was almost during the same era of decentralisation that tourism was seriously considered as a profitable business in Kerala. Tourism is yet to be transferred as a subject to local governments, but local self-governments have shown interest.¹⁶ There were many initial attempts at decentralisation of tourism like the institutionalisation of District Tourism

¹⁴ For example, in Saudi Arabia, Nitaqat law makes it mandatory for all businesses in the private sector to reserve at least 10 percent of jobs for Saudi nationals

¹⁵ Tata Consultancy Services, 'Economic Benefits of Tourism Sector in Kerala' (Bengaluru 2000)

¹⁶ S. S Kang, 'Decentralisation- The Kerala Experience with Special Reference to Tourism Development' (International Colloquium on Regional Governance and Sustainable Development in Tourism-Driven Economies, Cancun, 2002)

Promotion Councils (DTPCs), emergence of ecotourism initiatives, etc...Some attempts at linking tourism and decentralisation in Kerala can be briefed as follows.

- (i) Group entrepreneurship by poor sections of the locality through skill development training and financial infrastructure for tourism-related activities is an example of how tourism can uplift the marginalised sections of the society, often criticised to be neglected by decentralisation. Kudumbasree initiative is the most relevant example.
- (ii) Ecotourism is another innovative step in recent years, where local self-governments provide minimum infrastructural requirements like drinking water and toilet. They also train tourist guides to generate self-employment.
- (iii) The state government is also in the process of building long-term perspectives on tourism development in association with the local governments. In recent years, the government has also kept a check on overcrowded architecture in destinations through spatial planning. The state government has already begun the preparation of tourism satellite account at destination level with active participation of agencies like DTPC.
- (iv) Responsible Tourism (RT) is about “making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.” This will be dealt in detail in the next section.

6. RESPONSIBLE TOURISM (RT)

Though the concept can be traced back to 1996 and even before that through the works of Jost Krippendorf, it was Cape Town Declaration of 2002 that gives a detailed view regarding the aims and factors involved in RT. According to the Cape Town Declaration, RT is about “making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.” RT involves all kinds of tourism activities which seeks to minimise negative economic, environmental and social impacts and to maximise the potential benefits to the local community.¹⁷

¹⁷ H. Goodwin, *Taking Responsibility for Tourism: Responsible Tourism Management* (1st edn, Good fellow Publishers 2011)

The terms sustainable tourism (ST) and RT are often used interchangeably. However, they are not exactly the same. ST connotes a broader concept placing more emphasis on theory which is an overused one. RT, on the other hand, places more emphasis on action rather than on theory or concept. It is to be noted that RT is not a brand as launched by many governments. All forms of tourism can be made more responsible.¹⁸

Ethic of responsibility involves willingness and capacity to respond and to exercise responsibility. RT involves three kinds of responsibilities- economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. The guiding principles behind these responsibilities are given below (Table 2).

Table 2

Guiding Principles for Economic, Social and Environmental Responsibility

ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY	SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY
Provide appropriate and sufficient support to small, medium and micro enterprises to ensure tourism-related enterprises thrive and are sustainable	Endeavour to make tourism an inclusive social experience and to ensure that there is access for all, in particular vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and individuals	Use resources sustainably, and reduce waste and over-consumption
Maximise local economic benefits by increasing linkages and reducing leakages, by ensuring that communities are involved in, and benefit from tourism	Combat the sexual exploitation of human beings, particularly the exploitation of children	Promote education and awareness for sustainable development for all stakeholders
Develop quality products that reflect, complement,	Be sensitive to the host culture, maintaining and	Raise the capacity of all stakeholders and ensure that

¹⁸ *ibid*

and enhance the destination	encouraging social and cultural diversity	best practice is followed, for this purpose consult with environmental and conservation experts
Market tourism in ways which reflect natural, cultural and social integrity of destination, and which encourage appropriate forms of tourism.	Endeavour to ensure that tourism contributes to improvements in health and education	Assess environmental impacts throughout the lifecycle of tourist establishments and operations-including planning and design phase-and ensure that negative impacts are reduced to the minimum and maximizing positive ones

Source: *Goodwin, H. (2011). Taking Responsibility for Tourism: Responsible Tourism Management. United Kingdom: Good fellow Publishers.*

Though all these three responsibilities have their own relevance, the utmost importance is given to Economic Responsibility which seeks to promote local procurement of resources, to encourage local spending and employment and to ensure that local populace gets the benefit of tourism development. The industry-community symbiosis created through responsible tourism offers a win-win situation to the economy by making positive contributions to the conservation of nature and culture of locality.

7. RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IN KERALA

By organising state-level consultative meeting called ‘better together’ in February 2007, Kerala officially began its RT campaign. Subsequently, Kumarakom, Kovalam, Thekkady and Wayanad were declared as pilot projects. Destination Level Responsible Tourism Committees were organised for planning and execution of programmes at

destinations with the State Level Responsible Tourism Committee providing guidance at the upper level. These committees are represented by NGOs, tourism professionals, members from legislative assemblies, local self-governments, etc... Within these, there are various working groups focussing on economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions.

8. RT INITIATIVE IN KUMARAKOM

Kumarakom situated near Vembanad Lake on the western part of Kottayam district is famous for its lush green paddy fields, emerald backwaters, serene rural life and tiny plot of lands surrounded by small canals. Traditional economic activities of the region include agriculture, fishing and collection of sand for land reclamation purposes. With the stay of former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in 2000, Kumarakom received international attention. Kumarakom never turned back since then, as investment began flowing to the village.

However, uncontrolled expansion of tourism like any other economic activity has literally twisted the rural life in Kumarakom. Mushrooming of resorts and homestays without proper planning has adversely affected fishing and many species of fish have disappeared. Tourism has even gone to the extent of privatising inland water bodies like Vembanad lake as many resort built illegal constructions near lake, destroying mangrove forests with zero regard to Panchayat.¹⁹

Following this, Kumarakom Grama Panchayath formulated People's Charter and Draft Guidelines and organised functional committees and technical sessions to check on the uncontrolled tourist activities. However, the efforts of the Panchayath suffered a setback as Kumarakom was declared as Special Tourism Zone with centralised committees deciding on tourism development in the concerned area. The Grama Panchayath had voiced its concerns as this move was totally against the spirit of decentralisation and openly declared that they would not allow the state government to take off their powers effortlessly. It was in this

¹⁹ *Responsible Tourism Initiative of Kerala: A Case Study on Kumarakom* (Kerala Institute of Travel and Tourism Studies 2013)

context that the state government initiated RT Programme in Kumarakom as a pilot destination in 2007. The Panchayath played a key role in the RT initiative unlike other tourism projects implemented earlier in the locality. Active cooperation with Kudumbasree units were made to ensure that benefits of the programme trickle down to the marginalised people, one of the major criticisms levelled against the decentralisation programme in Kerala. Like described earlier, economic responsibilities ensured that all stakeholders involved are benefited economically. In Kumarakom, since agriculture remains as an important economic activity, any programme aimed at the economic upliftment of the populace should be linked with agriculture. For achieving this end, the Panchayath identified most vulnerable groups and linked them with hotels and restaurants. The Panchayath, the Department of Tourism, Kudumbasree and Kerala Institute of Travel and Tourism Studies were part of this local procurement initiative. Price committee and Quality Assurance committee were formed to regulate price fluctuations and to ensure quality of procured vegetables and fruits. Through ‘Samrudhi’ groups, the Panchayath ensured timely delivery of procured items to the hotels and restaurants. Through this programme alone, it is estimated that nearly Rs. 1.5 million worth of items were procured.²⁰ Majority of the population also got employment opportunities after the implementation of RT in relation with the scenario before RT. They also did not have regular income flow prior to the implementation of RT. After the implementation of RT, their income was raised to a range of 0-6000 according to studies.²¹

Since most of the Panchayats are computerised in Kerala after 2011, data before 2011 is rarely available. In case of Kumarakom, data prior to 2011 is not available due to the expiry of preservation period. So a researcher has to rely on the comments of the Panchayath officials and the available data after 2011 for the purpose. It is to be noted that the Panchayath did not levy any direct tax on tourism. But impact of tourist inflows are reflected on increased collection of permit fee for buildings, license fee on resorts and lodges, profession tax on institutions and traders and various other penalties and fines as per the

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ B. Sudheer, 'Final Report Of UGC Sponsored Minor Research Project On Economic And Cultural Impact Of Responsible Tourism Initiative In Kerala- A Case Study Of KumarakomPanchayath' (UGC 2015) <<http://www.sncollegecherthala.in/research%5Csudheer.pdf>> accessed 18 June 2017.

Panchayath officials. According to the latest data, nearly Rs. 8.9 lakh had been amassed by the Panchayath through above-mentioned sources.

RT initiative in Kumarakom succeeded in the preservation and promotion of local art and culture forms. By linking with hotels and resorts, Panchayath aided women, cultural forums and others to perform Thiruvathira, Kolkali and Singarimelam providing them with alternative income source.²² In this way, the Panchayath was able to prevent the cultural breakdown that usually happens with short sighted tourism activities. The Panchayath also helped the hand craftsmen of the locality by skill development campaigns and marketed the souvenirs with the aid of hotels and resorts. Monthly sales worth Rs. 0.1 million happened through this alone according to the studies.²³ Through village life experience packages tourists get a real life experience of the village and learn about various types of activities like coconut leaf weaving, broom stick weaving, screw pine weaving, bow and arrow fishing, etc... These packages are conducted by country boats operated by local women and marginalised people with profit share attributed to them. Besides these programmes, institutions like Samrudhi Ethnic Food Restaurant operated by Kudumbasree workers also highlight the gender dimension of RT initiative.

Any unscientific development can threaten the host ecosystem and tourism is also not an exception. Recognising this, Environmental Responsibility was given due regard in RT initiative. With the help from Kudumbasree, 'Parisarasevikas' were organised by the Panchayath for the collection of waste and its disposal. The Panchayath also organised 'Zero Waste Kumarakom,' a training programme in association with RT cell for effective waste disposal. A Sewage Treatment Plant was established and plastic was totally banned at RT shops. Alternative materials like paper bags, cloth bags were encouraged. This along with a series of steps like distribution of mangrove seeds, reconversion of nearly 55 acres of fallow land to agricultural land, widespread campaign against the conversion of paddy fields by offering better prices to organic farmers, conversion of unused lakes and ponds previously

²² Kerala Institute of Travel and Tourism Studies n(19)

²³ *ibid*

served as sources of diseases like Chikungunya, Dengue fever to fish farming and lotus cultivation purposes were some of the achievements of RT initiative in Kumarakom.²⁴

The decentralisation programme in Kerala faces a lot of challenges. Success of RT initiative in Kumarakom shows how growth can trickle down and benefit marginalised sections of the society, justifying the very essence of decentralisation. Other PRIs with tourism potential should be encouraged to emulate the success of Kumarakom.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Developmental experience of Kerala was a puzzle for the social scientists across the globe. Kerala achieved high standard of living matched by many developed countries despite registering a relatively low per capita income. Referred to as Kerala model, the exemplary development model is often attributed as the result of public actions and responsible governance. Nearly four decades has passed and earlier euphoria surrounding the model no longer exists. With many Middle East nations making mandatory recruitment of local populace by the implementation of NITAQAT laws and other states catching up with Kerala in terms of educational achievements, state could not continue their social sector expenditure without increasing the pace of economic development. The idea of 'New Kerala Model' centred on the concept of decentralisation found its place in academic debates. However, over the years, decentralisation which marked a shift from the top-down intervention to the bottom-up approach, was subjected to criticism for its failure to take into account long-term aspirations of the locality. It was almost in the same decade, significance of tourism as an income generator was considered by the state as never before. It is very clear that RT initiative in Kumarakom is nothing short of a big success. The initiative resulted in increased collection of revenue and employment generation in the locality without causing cultural and environmental damage to the locality. There are frequent newspaper reports about the underutilisation of funds and the lapse of remaining amount from many parts of Kerala. In many areas only 30-40 percent of the funds are utilised while rest of them are lapsed. Due to the lack of clarity regarding the project selection, Panchayati Raj Institutions fail to

²⁴ *ibid*

implement the projects within the stipulated time frame, resulting often in non-productive projects. So in this context, local self-governments need to be encouraged to adopt alternate pathways like RT. Some of the commonly highlighted weaknesses of decentralisation like the failure of local self-governments to beef up its own resources, failure to take off agriculture and industry, neglect of marginalised sections, etc..., can be avoided to a great extent, if alternative methods like RT is followed. Successful methods like RT can be considered and replicated in more tourist spots. This will provide an alternative income source for local self-governments and ensure that growth will trickle down to the lowest strata of society.