

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE POSITIVE CULTURAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BACKWATER AND WILDLIFE TOURIST CENTRES IN CENTRAL KERALA

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## **Abstract**

*Kerala, through aggressive campaigning and promotion was able to invite a sizable investment in the hospitality industry. By early 2000s, tourism had grown into a full-fledged, multi-billion dollar industry in the State. Tourism is a cultural phenomenon and affects the culture of the locality in multiple ways. The study tries to familiarize the sociological theories relevant in this context by different thinkers and experts. It also intends to find out what are the positive and negative cultural factors of tourism development. Finally it compares backwater and wildlife tourist centres of central Kerala in terms of positive cultural impacts. The analysis based on primary data reveals that backwater centres of central Kerala are more benefited through cultural positive impacts than wildlife centres. Kerala tourism industry being a substantial foreign exchange earner for the Govt. is the life blood of the state's economy. Hence, the Govt. must find ways and means to flourish the industry with less harm to our culture and society.*

## **1. Introduction**

Kerala is one of the most popular tourist destinations in India, renowned for its greenery and natural beauty. It is world famous for its responsible tourism initiatives emphasized on sustainable tourism development. The growth rate of Kerala tourism is about 14 percent and tourism contributes heavily to the state's GDP. At present the tourism industry of Kerala is going through an unprecedented crisis due to the lethal pandemic COVID-19. It shattered the state's tourism industry, rigorously blocking the flow of foreign as well as domestic tourist arrivals to its favourite destinations. Its average annual revenue on account of tourism reached upto 40000 crore a couple of years back but facing a severe setback because of the reasons stated above .

Kerala has a well educated society with a high Human Development Index and Standard of Living. But its economic development is not at par with meeting the demands of the job aspirants. The state's low economic development led to a large number of educated unemployed seeking jobs overseas which in turn resulted in the development of travel agencies and travel operators in large scale in the state to facilitate their travel needs. Soon after that identifying the potential of the State as a tourist destination the authorities started aggressive marketing campaigns and in 1980s, Kerala tourism had gained an industry status. By the early 2000s, tourism had grown into a full-fledged, multi-billion dollar industry in the State.

Tourism is a cultural phenomenon. It both impact culture and society, and is shaped by culture and society. There is a deep influence of tourist and tourism on host country. Tourism is genuinely powerful and unique force for change in the community. The most profound impact that tourism can have in the personal arenas of the private households, the domestic lives, emotional experience, deeply held beliefs and the moral fabric of the group of people who form the community. It is more apparent that social and cultural ideas influence the younger generation who have had direct contact with foreign tourists.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Tourism can cause change or loss of local identity and values brought about by several closely related factors. Commodification of local cultures, standardization in tune with tourist desires, staged authenticity to give a glimpse of the local atmosphere, adaptation to tourist demands, cultural clashes and irritation due to tourist behavior are some of such factors. Apart from these, crime generation, child labour, solid waste generation, prostitution and sex tourism are some other factors. Massive and unplanned tourism development just for the sake of revenue posed a lot of such social, cultural and ethical issues in the State. Thus tourism brings massive strain on local resources and most of the tourist centres of Kerala are suffocated with a lot of such socio-cultural problems. Apart from that tourism is instrumental in impacting the culture of the locality positively. Acculturation, cultural exchange and fixing cultural identity are some of them. The study concentrates to compare backwater and wildlife tourist centres in central Kerala in the light of the positive cultural impacts. Inter cultural contact between tourist and host nationals can be regarded as a unique form of cross cultural interaction. Tourist generally stay a short period of time in a community, while staying at the destination, tourists inter-relate with local inhabitants, and the result of their interaction between two culture is alteration in the host persons and host community's living standard, value systems, labor division, attitudes, habits, thoughts, family relationships, manner, behavioral patterns, ceremonies and creative expressions. This stay has multiple impact both positive and negative and the study tries to compare the positive cultural impacts between backwater and wildlife tourist centres of central Kerala through primary data. Hence the problem is stated as **'A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE POSITIVE CULTURAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BACKWATER AND WILDLIFE TOURIST CENTRES OF CENTRAL KERALA'**

### 3. Objectives of the Paper

The paper tries to find out answers to the following objectives;

- 1 To identify the sociological theories relevant to tourism development.
2. To identify the positive and negative cultural factors of tourism development.
3. To compare the positive and negative cultural impacts of tourism development among backwater and wildlife tourist centres of central Kerala.

### 4. Research Methodology

The paper uses secondary and primary data. Secondary data is collected from different published sources like Department Publications, Magazines, News Papers, Journals, Reference Books, Library Materials and the internet. Primary data is collected from host community of the selected two tourist centres one belonging to backwater and the other one wildlife of central districts of Kerala. The central districts consist of five districts Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Palakkad. By Simple Random Sampling one backwater tourist centre Kumarakom and one wildlife centre Munnar is selected for the study. The data is collected from the host community by using a questionnaire. The sample size is fixed on the ratio of number of inhabitants residing in the tourist locality of the two centres.

### 5. Tools used for Data Analysis

The study uses Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation and Independent Sample t-Test for comparison and hypothesis testing.

### 6. Theoretical Perspectives

The development of tourism leads to a lot of changes in the culture of the society. Sociological theories back this fact. Studies of impacts of tourism on local communities elsewhere in the world have revealed that has a specific sociological effect on host communities [Cohen 1988]. The following theories explains specific relationship between tourism and culture of the host community.

#### 6.1. Butler's Tourist Area Life Cycle Model.

Butler [1980] proposes that tourism progresses through the stages of exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and then decline. There is a correlation between these stages and attitude of residents to tourist. The initial stage or exploration is typified by a new found curiosity in travelling to the area. During the following stage, services are introduced to serve the needs of this travelling public. The third stage is characterized by robust physical development in area products and services. In the consolidation stage the rate of increase of visitors decline through total numbers are still increasing and exceeding permanent residents. At stagnation peak tourist volumes have now been reached and the destination is no longer fashionable relying upon repeat visitors from more conservative travelers.

The last phase is determined by the positive or negative impact that have occurred during the development phase. Hence the final stage of decline is largely contingent on the host community's ability to cope with identified tourism impacts.

## **6.2 Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory has been considered an appropriate frame work for developing an understanding of resident's perception of tourism impacts. When an exchange of resources between residents and tourism is high and balanced or high for the host, tourism impacts are viewed positively by residents. On the other hand when an exchange resources is low or unbalanced exchange that favours the tourist occurs, residents view the impact negatively. Social exchange theory suggests that individuals will engage in exchange if, the resulting rewards are valued. That means the exchange is likely to produce valued rewards. The perceived costs do not exceed perceived rewards.

These principles suggest that residents will be willing to enter in to an exchange with the tourist, if they can reap some benefits without incurring unacceptable cost. Theoretically residents, who view the results of tourism as personally valuable and believe that costs do not exceed the benefits will favour the exchange and support tourism development.

## **7. Positive Impact on Culture due to Tourism Development**

### **7.1. Acculturation**

Development of tourism will help to adapt positively a new culture in the locality. Due to tourist interaction a cultural advancement is possible leading to a mixed culture in the locality. It leads to the development of language, new food habits, new life style and thereby making the culture hybrid and modern. It boosts education, standard of living and infrastructure facilities.

### **7.2. Preservation of Tradition**

It helps to preserve the monuments and rich traditions of the locality in a better way. Tourism helps to increase the demand for historical and cultural exhibits of the locality. Moreover it will definitely transmit the local culture among the tourists who are visiting the tourist destinations.

### **7.3. Fixing Cultural Identity**

Tourism development helps to fix the cultural identity of the inhabitants. It makes the host population renowned in the name of their cultural uniqueness.

### **7.4. Demonstration Effect**

Local communities can mix with people from diverse back grounds with different life styles which through 'Demonstration effect' may lead to the development of improved life styles and practices from the tourist examples.

### **7.5. Better Living Atmosphere**

There can be an improvement in local life through better local facilities and infrastructure which could lead to better education, health care, employment opportunities and income.

### **7.6. Improved Cultural and Recreational Facilities**

Tourism development will create improved opportunities for cultural and social events, entertainment and exhibitions for host population. Improved sports and leisure facilities created for the tourists which local people may use particularly out of tourists season. Above all it results in the conservation of the local cultural heritage of an area and rebirth of its crafts, architectural traditions and ancestral heritage.

### **7.7. Revival of an Area**

Urban areas which may be in decline can be revived and the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas for employment may be reversed as jobs will be available in the tourism industry.

## **8. Negative Impact on Culture due to Tourism Development**

Tourism can cause change or loss of local identity and values by many reasons. These are called negative cultural impact due to tourism. The major negative impact are given below

### **8.1. Commodification**

Tourism can turn local cultures in to commodities when religious rituals, traditional ethnic rites and festivals are reduced and sanitized to conform to tourist expectations, resulting in what has been 'reconstructed ethnicity'. It is a process equal to selling the culture for the sake of tourist revenue. It neglects the demands of the host population and gives overemphasis to tourist demands.

### **8.2. Standardization**

It is a process by which everything is converted into standardized products giving secondary importance for its cultural values. Destinations risk standardization in the process of satisfying tourist desires for familiar facilities. Standardization degrades the cultural values prevailing in the locality.

### **8.3. Loss of Authenticity and Staged Authenticity.**

Tourism drives big negative changes in the art, crafts and festivals in the region. In some occasions it even leads to the displacement of the local community. Adapting cultural expressions to the tastes of tourists or even performing shows as if they were real life constitutes 'staged authenticity'.

### **8.4. Adaptation to Tourist Demands**

Tourist want souvenirs, arts, crafts, and cultural manifestations, and in many tourist destinations, craftsmen have responded to the growing demand and have made changes in design of their products to bring than more line with the new customer's tastes.

## 8.5. Cultural Clashes

In many occasions the tourist culture distracts the religious and traditional beliefs of the host community. It results in a cultural invasion and thereby ruins the inherent values of the host culture. It leads to economic inequality, irritation due to tourist behavior, job level friction etc. In developing countries especially many jobs occupied by local people in the tourist industry are at lower level, such as house maids, waiters, gardeners, and other practical work, while higher paying and more prestigious managerial jobs were occupied by foreigners or urbanized nationals. Tourism sometimes causes some ethical issues like crime, child labour, prostitution and sex tourism which also act as a driving force for clashes.

## 9. Analysis and Interpretation

The study is intended to identify the impact of cultural positives on the host community of the two types of tourist centres-backwater and wildlife-in the central districts of Kerala. One backwater tourist centre, Kumarakom and one wildlife tourist centre Munnar are selected by Simple Random Sampling for the study. There are five cultural positives impacting the host culture which are acculturation, preservation of tradition, stimulation of cultural exchange, cultural exchange and fixing cultural identity. The study uses one sample t-test for comparing mean scores and testing hypothesis.

**Table 1 - t-Test Group Statistics**

Variables	Tourist Centre	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Acculturation	Backwater	81	<b>36.1728</b>	6.60453	.73384
	Wildlife	98	31.2857	7.27515	.73490
Preservation of Tradition	Backwater	81	<b>21.1852</b>	3.85393	.42821
	Wildlife	98	19.2245	5.28864	.53423
Stimulation of Cultural Exchange	Backwater	81	<b>26.0370</b>	5.81473	.64608
	Wildlife	98	23.1633	6.53570	.66021
Cultural Exchange	Backwater	81	<b>18.0494</b>	3.27834	.36426
	Wildlife	98	17.0204	5.48659	.55423
Fixing Cultural Identity	Backwater	81	<b>21.4198</b>	3.89828	.43314
	Wildlife	98	19.6327	5.14408	.51963

Source: Primary Data

In all the five variables representing positive cultural impacts on host community the mean scores are higher for backwater tourist centre. In acculturation it is **36.17** for backwater where it is only **31.29** for wildlife. In the case of preservation of tradition mean score for backwater is **21.19** while for wildlife it is only **19.22**. Considering stimulation of cultural exchange it stands at **26.04** for backwater while for wildlife it is only **23.16**. Regarding cultural exchange it is **18.05** for backwater where it is only **17.02** for wildlife. In the case of the variable fixing cultural identity it is **21.42** for backwater while for wildlife it stands only at **19.63**. Now whether these variations are significant is to be tested by forming the following hypotheses and testing it by using t-test:

*H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant variation in positive cultural impacts on host community between backwater and wildlife tourist centres.*

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant variation in positive cultural impacts on host community between backwater and wildlife tourist centres.*

**Table 2 Independent Samples t-Test**

Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Acculturation	4.663	177	.000*	4.88713	1.04816
Preservation of Tradition	2.781	177	.005*	1.96070	.70500
Stimulation of Cultural Exchange	3.077	177	.002*	2.87377	.93406
Cultural Exchange	1.483	177	.140	1.02897	.69393
Fixing Cultural Identity	2.574	177	.011*	1.78710	.69418

Source: Primary Data

\* Significant at 5% Level of Significance

Apart from cultural exchange, in all other cases the variation is found significant at 5% level of significance ( $p > 0.05$  except in cultural exchange). All the hypotheses except the one for cultural exchange is rejected at 5% level. The null hypothesis for cultural exchange that is, there is no significant variation as a positive cultural impact on host community between backwater and wildlife tourist centres, is accepted ( $p = 0.140 > 0.05$ ). Apart from cultural exchange in all other four variables backwater tourist centres are more benefited in terms of cultural positives.

## 10. Findings of the Study

The following are the major findings of the study;

1. The two major theories of Sociology, Butler's Tourist Area Life Cycle Model and Social Exchange Theory are relevant in explaining the cultural positive impacts of tourism development.
2. The positive cultural factors of tourism development are generally classified into Acculturation, Preservation of Tradition, Fixing Cultural Identity, Demonstration Effect, Better Living Atmosphere, Improved Cultural and Recreational Facilities and Revival of an Area.
3. The negative cultural factors in general are Commodification, Standardization, Loss of Authenticity, Staged Authenticity, Adaptation to Tourist Demands and Cultural Clashes.
4. The five positive cultural impacts of tourism development are acculturation, preservation of tradition, stimulation of cultural exchange, cultural exchange and fixing cultural identity. In all the five variables representing positive cultural impacts on host community the mean scores are higher for backwater tourist centre as compared to wildlife centre. While testing hypothesis it is found that the variation is not significant for the variable cultural exchange. Hence that variable is not considered for comparison. Apart

from that in all other four variables backwater tourist centres are more benefited in terms of cultural positives.

## 11. Conclusion

Kerala tourism had gained an industry status by 1986. Through aggressive campaigning and promotion, the state was able to invite a sizable investment in the hospitality industry and by the early 2000s, tourism had grown into a full-fledged, multi-billion dollar industry in the State. Tourism is a cultural phenomenon and affects both culture and society. There is a deep influence of tourist and tourism on host country. It influences the culture positively and negatively. If not controlled carefully the negatives of tourism development will elevate the cultural issues at an alarmingly unmanageable level. Kerala tourism industry being a substantial foreign exchange earner for the Govt. is the life blood of the state's economy. Hence, the Govt. must find ways and means to flourish the industry with less harm to our culture and society.

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