

# EMPLOYMENT GENERATION FOR WOMEN THROUGH RURAL TOURISM IN KERALA

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## ABSTRACT

*Rural tourism is highly associated with the lives of local community where women play a major role.*

*Kerala being endowed with huge potential for rural tourism offers tremendous opportunities for the countryside, particularly womenfolk. People in rural areas are generally considered to be poor and marginalized and unable to tap the opportunities due to their ignorance, less education, absence of exposure, lack of initiatives etc. Thus some external or internal intervention is preferable to drive them for poverty reduction and community capacity building. Thus, the study tries to find out the agents which initiate and persuade the women to involve in rural tourism for their livelihood and identify activities that can generate employment for women*

**Key Words:** *rural tourism, employment opportunities, women participation.*

## Introduction and Background

Ministry of tourism, Government of India defined rural tourism as any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience. It is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. The southern Indian state of Kerala being endowed with huge potential for rural tourism offers tremendous opportunities for countryside, particularly the womenfolk. Rural tourism is highly associated with the lives of local community where women play a major role. People in rural areas are generally considered to be poor and marginalized and unable to tap the opportunities due to their ignorance, lower levels of education, absence of exposure, lack of initiatives etc. Thus some external or internal intervention is a catalyst to drive them to take up activities for poverty reduction and community capacity building.

Pro Poor tourism model is one of such innovative approach on tourism development and management which result in increasing net

benefit of 'poor' people in developing countries. It boosts the positive impacts of tourism on local economy while reducing the negatives impacts on the natives. These impacts are different in different destinations. It enhances the linkages between tourism businesses and poor people, so that tourism's contribution to poverty reduction is increased and the 'poor' people are able to participate more effectively in product development ([www.propoortourism.org.uk](http://www.propoortourism.org.uk)). The term 'Poor', the targeted group, need to be properly redefined. It can be either skilled or semiskilled or micro entrepreneurs or rural households or womenfolk which depend on stakeholders of tourism, specific to each destination area or type of industry (Ashley C, 2006). Unemployment, low economic circumstances, widowhood and desertion of the family by the husband compel or become push factors for women to seek work outside home. Even though some of them may succeed in finding remunerative occupations many are not able to find jobs. In such circumstances help from Self Help Groups (SHG), Non Governmental Organizations (NGO), government agencies, and private or public organizations in the hospitality/tourism sector act as motivating or facilitating agents for women to find occupation for themselves.

In Kerala, Kudumbasree (a SHG) has initiated various projects by collaborating tourism departments with local community to reap the economic benefits of tourism. Gopal et al (2008) have found that community support for tourism development and the attitudes and hospitality of local tourism workers are important for successful tourism. The Implementation of Responsible Tourism is such kind of initiative in which Department of Tourism and Kudumbasree are supposed to work together to bring local community to get involved in rural tourism.

Thus this study tries to find out the role of social agents which initiate and persuade the women to involve in rural tourism for their livelihood and to identify opportunities for women in rural Kerala.

## Objectives

- i) To study the kind of rural tourism activities women get involved
- ii) To find out the agents/organizations which initiate and promote women participation in rural tourism
- iii) To identify the kind of activities that can promote involvement of women in rural tourism.

## Methodology

The study covered 18 village tourism destinations of Kerala. Both primary and secondary data are used. Secondary data are collected from NGOs' report and primary data are collected through structured questionnaire. Native women of 18 and above years who are engaged directly or indirectly in tourism industry for not less than one year are taken as samples. Since the village tourism activities belong to informal sector, official data is unavailable on worker participation in tourism activities like working/assisting at home stay, indirect participation of laundry service, working at resorts as laborers etc. So it was estimated to collect household data from maximum of 65 women respondents involved in tourism activities from each village. Snowball sampling is followed in which sample emerges through a process of reference from one person to the other. However some villages failed to fill the quota of 65 where female participation in the village tourism activity was very low. Accordingly the sample size of women respondents became 660.

## Profile of the Respondents

Average age of respondents is calculated as 41 years (table 1) and there is no retirement in rural tourism related jobs as youngest of the cohort is of 18 years and oldest is of 77 years of age. It is very clear that the kind of tourism jobs which have been formulated are in such a way that any age group can participate in such kind of

activities like demo performer, home stay business etc. (see table 3). Regarding marital status, 81 percent are married and 10 percent are widows. Respondents with elementary education and secondary education constitute 24 percent and 54 percent respectively and only 20 percent have education above secondary level. Here 'secondary education' denotes education above elementary level and need not be a pass in 10th standard. As a whole majority of women engaged in occupations related to village tourism are middle aged, not highly educated, and belong to lower-middle or middle-middle class.

### **Village Tourism and Employment Generation**

Before going to discuss the employment generated through tourism in each village it is quite appropriate to examine the previous employment status of respondents, to know which segment of people have been attracted to the tourism industry. Table 2 shows the type of employment that women were having before entering tourism industry. It indicates that nearly half of the respondents (48%) were housewives before entering tourism. Another group, largely attracted to tourism comprised of laborers called as 'coolies' (24%). Here 'Coolie' refers to any manual /unskilled worker not related to tourism, e.g., work on farm, construction work etc. Another interesting finding is that 6.5 percent of our respondents were working as nurses before entering tourism. The low wage rate prompted them to look for another job without compromising the status that they had been receiving until that time, which finally ends up in running handicraft shop, home stay administration or even work as sales girl. Other respondents were housemaids (3%), fish cleaning and prawn peeling workers (3%), fish sellers (0.3%), sales girls (2.3%), petty shop owners (4.2%), workers who come under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act -MGNREGA- (0.6%), clerks/office workers (2.3%), artisans (3.0%), teachers (1.4%) and tailors (1.4%) before involving in tourism.

### **Tourism Jobs**

In all villages, tourism jobs were formed according to the nature and activity of the destination. Six kinds of tourism jobs were classified based on the uniqueness and attractions that each village destination possess such as nature tourism, eco tourism, back water tourism, art/activity based tourism, pilgrimage tourism and beach/aqua tourism. Accordingly fifteen kinds of tourism job were recognized in which women are involved. The table 5 shows sort of tourism related jobs, the percentage of respondents involved in each job, description of each job and finally how each job is distributed in different kinds of tourism. To illustrate 'catering service' is feasible in all kinds of tourism, but doing laundry service is feasible where back water tourism exists. Even though the laundry service have a huge prospects in village tourism as long as resorts/hotels run in the locality, it has been less preferred due to of lack of professionalism on part of native women while doing laundry work in terms of hygiene, punctuality and caring. Yet it is profitable and convenient for house boat owners to engage local women for laundry work as their boats halt in front of their house during idle time.

Thus, tourism related works can be broadly categorized in to three: destination inclusive works, destination exclusive works, intervening agent motivated works. Inclusive works refers to all kind of jobs and services related to tourism which are originated through direct demand, and thus can be performed/operated at all kind of tourism destinations irrespective of uniqueness/attractions/characteristics of the destination. For example, jobs/services like running catering service, petty shops, home stay and working as a sale girl can be performed at any village destination regardless of particular characteristics of the destination. On the other hand, there are some other works/services which are exclusive in nature or location specific. These jobs/services are derived because of the peculiarity/uniqueness of that particular destination. Normally these works are originated through derived demand

like laundry services, resort worker etc. In villages like Aranmula (one of the Endogenous Tourism Project destinations of Government of India) and Thrikkaipetta, where women make use of possibilities of tourism only through their craftsmanship of metal mirror and bamboo products respectively. There are some other works which were formed through the intervention of Self Help Groups (SHGs) or Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs). In Kerala the intervening agents who facilitate and promote rural tourism are SHGs like Kudumbasree units, other private SHGs, VSS, EDCs, NGOs like Uravu and some people are employed through MGNREGA.

### **Channels of Tourism Employment**

Six channels namely, self employment, SHGs, resorts/hotels, NGOs, tourism authorities and MGNREGA were identified through which employment was generated in various villages. Figure 1 depicts the kinds and proportion of employment generated / provided through the six different channels. The employments created through tourism are mostly self-employed in nature as 27.3 percent of respondents are self-employed. If we put aside the self employment, the major channels of employment generation are NGOs (25.3%) and Self Help Group (20.8%). Only 15.9 percent are employed through government tourism authorities.

#### ***Self employment***

Self employment is defined as a kind of employment where worker earns income through trade or business and he is working for himself instead of working for an employer who pays salary or wage. Running home stay, doing laundry work from home, running petty shop and driver (of own vehicle) were the recognized self employment jobs in village tourism industry of Kerala in which about 17 percent of respondents are running petty shops at the tourism spots. Self Help Groups help in employment generation process by providing assistance to avail micro credit facilities, giving marketing insights and access to market for the

products. Catering services, sale of vegetables to nearby hotels and resorts are such kind of employments generated through SHGs.

#### ***Self Help Groups (SHGs)***

Self Help Group (SHG) is a voluntary association of poor women and other marginalized people of 10-20 members who can be either only women or only men, with similar social and financial backgrounds. The group need not be registered and women's groups are generally found to perform better. SHG stands for enabling livelihood opportunities for the members, enterprising them through microcredit facilities with bank linkages and strengthening collective ability of community both socially and economically. SHGs are operated usually by NGOs or by Government agencies like Kudumbasree. Vana Samrakshana Samithi (VSS) is a basic organization instrumental for the implementation of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in territorial forest division of Kerala. These Samithies are registered under Charitable Societies Act and recognized by the forest department. VSS work with forest department to maintain and sustain forest, sensitize and educate people. In tourism sector VSS members perform as tour guides in reserved forest areas of the state. Eco Development Committee is also a JFM institution created in protected areas of the state. Major activities are eco tourism and serving as guides for visitors apart from the activities undertaken by VSS.

#### ***Resorts/hotels***

Resorts/hotels at the tourism spots provide employment mainly in three ways; by employing local people especially women for cleaning kitchen and lawns of resorts, by keeping a group of artists of local community who can perform local art forms and by keeping a group of demo performers of local community who can demonstrate local village activities like weaving, coir making etc.

### ***Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)***

NGOs are the prime promoters of the handicraft industry and thus the artisans in village tourism come to 25 percent of total respondents. Uravu is a NGO at Thrikkaipetta tourism village working with people, governments and businesses to implement programs for sustainable employment and income generation in rural areas. They are generating employment for more than 1000 people directly and indirectly in Wayanad district. Uravu promotes social enterprises based on value addition of local, natural resources, especially bamboo. It implements integrated, end-to-end programs in the bamboo sector, which include providing skill training in bamboo processing establishing micro enterprises, marketing of bamboo handicraft, cultivation of bamboo and promotion of eco-tourism. Uravu strives for empowering marginalized social groups, especially the traditional artisans, women and the indigenous people. Thus they promote village tourism by providing training in establishing micro enterprises, bamboo products making, marketing of the products etc.

### ***Tourism authorities***

Tourism authorities like District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) run eco shops at some destinations in which they appoint local people for sales. DTPC appoints tour guides in association with Vana Samrakshana Samithi (VSS) in some destinations like Kuruva (North Kerala) and Palaruvi (South Kerala) which come under the forest department. Cleaning/housekeeping of the tourism spots is another area where DTPC helps local people to be employed.

### ***Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)***

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) of the Government of India aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household who

volunteer to do unskilled manual work. In some destinations, people who joined MGNREGA take the responsibility of cleaning and maintenance of the tourism places.

## **Suggestions and Conclusion**

The following suggestions are made after this study and the authors feel that, if initiatives are taken and implemented in the right perspective, village tourism can better the lives of rural people.

### **Location Specific Activities/ Products**

As the demands are location/tourists specific, care may be taken to meet the specific demands. We find that most of the tourists in locations such as Kulathupuzha, Palaruvi, Thenmala, Puthuvypin and Kuruva are domestic; whereas foreigners prefer places such as Munroe, Thrikkaipetta, Kumarakom and Punnamada. The products/services for sale may be refined to meet the demands of local, other Indian states, and foreign tourists. So it is suggested to design and initiate specific strategies to develop, sustain and show case the 'offerings' of a particular village.

### **Women Centric Activities**

Women have lot of opportunities in running businesses in food services, home stay, demo performance (coir making, pottery, weaving etc.), local art forms, petty shops/wayside vending, laundry service etc. This will enable them to develop their innate capabilities leading to empowerment and enhanced economic and social development.

### **Training for Women**

Women involved in rural tourism are unorganized workers. Thus steps have to be taken to integrate their activities to utilize opportunities and resources in such a way as to cross fertilize each activity with others. This can be done either through government bodies involved in tourism development or through NGOs.

### **Institutional Support**

As NGOs and SHGs play a major role in rural tourism, the collaboration of government tourism development bodies or panchayaths with NGOs and SHGs could become very effective for implementation of grass root level initiatives in tourism industry. Financial and technical initiatives have to be taken to encourage their activities.

### **Governmental Initiatives**

Government, through the tourism department should take up active promotion of village tourism to enhance the employment opportunities of rural people and lessen migration to urban areas in search of employment.

Rural tourism offers affordable tourism to a larger group of people and can reap benefits if properly promoted and maintained. The involvement of rural folk, NGOs, SHGs and government agencies can promote employment particularly for women when rural activities, local cuisines, art forms etc are promoted. Such coordinated efforts enhance the sustainable development of village tourism destinations.

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**Tables and Figures**

**Table 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents**

S.No.	Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Value	S.D
1	<b>Average age (years)</b>	18	77	<b>41.39</b>	10.05
2	<b>Marital Status</b>	-	-	-	-
	Single	-	-	<b>5 %</b>	-
	Married	-	-	<b>81.5 %</b>	-
	Separated/Divorcee	-	-	<b>3.7 %</b>	-
	Widow	-	-	<b>9.7 %</b>	-
4	<b>Educational status</b>	-	-	-	-
	Illiterate	-	-	<b>2 %</b>	-
	Literate without formal education	-	-	<b>0.6 %</b>	-
	Elementary	-	-	<b>23.9 %</b>	-
	Secondary	-	-	<b>54.1 %</b>	-
	Above secondary	-	-	<b>19.4 %</b>	-
5	<b>Occupational Status</b>				
	Government Service			<b>1.8 %</b>	
	Private Sector Service			<b>34.4 %</b>	
	Self Employed			<b>63.8 %</b>	
7	<b>Average monthly Household Income</b>	INR1000	INR80000	<b>11300.99</b>	7585
8	<b>Average no. of family members</b>	1	13	<b>3.2</b>	1.28
9	<b>Average No. of years of participation in village tourism</b>	1	14	4.27	3.16

*Source: Primary data*

**Table 2: Prior Occupation of the Women**

S.No	Kind of work	Percentage
1	Coolie (labourer)	24.4
2	Housemaid	2.9
3	Fish sales	0.3
4	Fish peeling	3.0
5	Sales girl*	2.3
6	Petty shops	4.2
7	MGNREGA	0.6
8	Administration/clerical	2.3
9	Artisan**	3.0
10	Teacher	1.7
11	Nurse	6.5
12	Jobless/Housewives	47.7
13	Tailoring	1.4
	Total	100

Source: Primary data,

\* Sales not related to tourism industry;

\*\* Artisan who does not involved in any activity related to tourism

**Table 3: Type of Work Women Involved in After Entering Village Tourism**

S.I No	Kind of work	Number (%)	Job Description	Support of SHGs/ NGO/Organization/ Institution	Kind of tourism (villages)
1	Fish/vegetables sales (to house boat/ resort /hotel)	7 (1)	collects vegetables and fish from the locality and keep supplying to all the resorts/ hotels and houseboats	Kudumbasree and Regional Agricultural Resarch Station (RARS),	Back Water Tourism (Kumarakom, Punnamada)
2	Resort worker	27(4)	Unskilled daily wage workers employed in resorts or hotels for cleaning the kitchen and surroundings.	-Nil	Beach and Back water tourism (Cherai,Alappuzha, Punnamada)
3	Sales girl	62 (9.4)	Person who works at shops where sales are meant only for tourists, e.g. handicrafts shops, spice shop, fancy shop at the tourism spot etc.	-Nil	Nature tourism (Pookode, Pookode, Palaruvi Thenmala)
4	Laundry service	42(6)	Washing and ironing of clothes (towels, bed spreads etc.) which they receive from houseboats after each trip. They do this work manually at home without any additional investment.	Nil	Back water tourism (Punnamada, Kumarakom)
5	Catering service (Food)	110(17)	Operate this business in two ways; one, tourists are given opportunity to customize their menu. The other way is to provide village's unique or own food to the tourists.	Kudumbasere,	All kind of tourism (Nature, Eco, Back water, art/activity,pilgrimage,an d beach tourism)

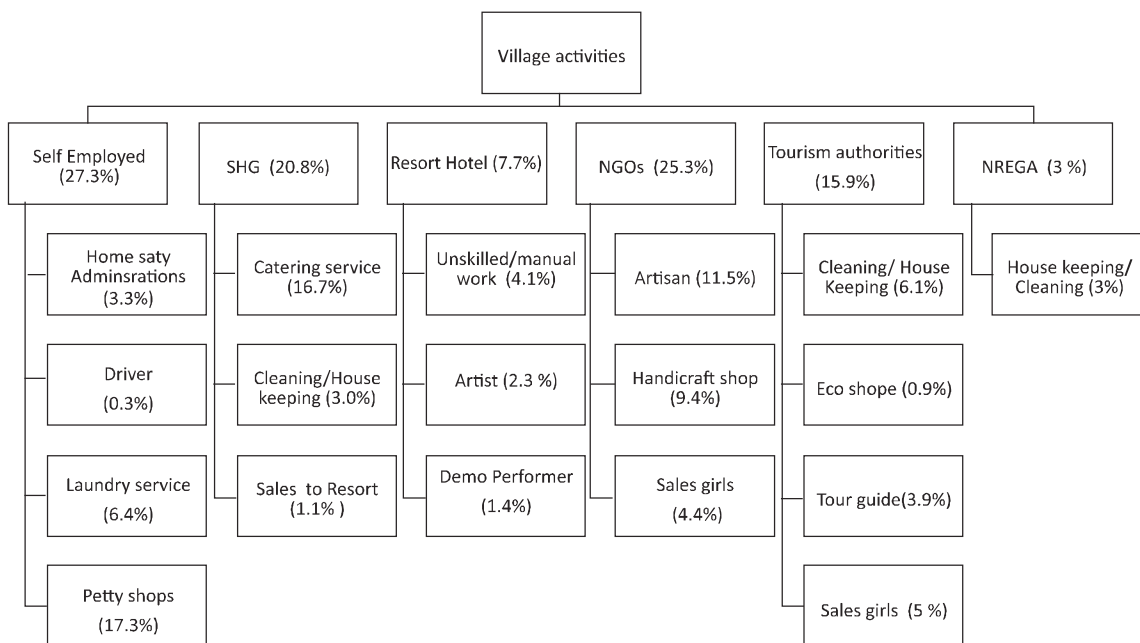


**Employment Generation for  
Women through Rural Tourism in Kerala**

<b>S.I No</b>	<b>Kind of work</b>	<b>Number (%)</b>	<b>Job Description</b>	<b>Support of SHGs/ NGO/Organization/ Institution</b>	<b>Kind of tourism (villages)</b>
6	Petty shops	114 (17.2)	Shops which sell locally available food and nonfood items	Nil	All kinds of tourism (Nature, Eco, Back water, art/activity, pilgrimage, and beach tourism)
7	Drivers	2(0.3)	Drivers refer to only auto rickshaw drivers who are mostly found where the majority of the tourists are backpackers who widely rely on auto rickshaws for their transportation.	Nil	Beach Tourism
8	Artisan	76(11.5)	Skilled worker who make crafts(handicrafts). Eg..making of bamboo products, metal mirror,	Urvavu, Kudumbasree and private SHGs	Art/activity Based tourism (Thrikkaipetta, Aranmula)
9	Tour guide	26 (4)	Person who provides assistance, information and cultural, historical and contemporary heritage interpretation to tourists.	VSS and EDC with the support of tourism authorities	Nature and Eco tourism (Kuruva, Thenmala)
10	Housekeeping/ cleaning	80 (12)	Job of cleaning and maintenance of property and areas within the tourism spots.	Kudumbasree, NREGA	Nature, Eco, pilgrimage (Thirunelly, Kuruva, Pookode, Thenamala)
11	Handicraft/spice shop	62 (9.4)	Shop which sells handicrafts, spices imported from different parts of the country.	VSS and EDC with the support of tourism authorities	Nature and Eco
12	Home stay administration	22 (3.3)	Management and service of home stay	Nil	All kind of tourism (Nature, Eco, Back water, art/activity, pilgrimage, and beach tourism)
13	Eco-Tourism shop sales	6 (1)	Shop which sells village's own products (bamboo products, honey, pickles etc.)	EDC	Nature and Eco
14	Demo performer	9(1.3)	Person who demonstrates village own activities (like coir making, coconut leaf weaving etc) at tourist wish.	Nil	Art/activity, beach
15	Artist/Performer	15(2.2)	Person who performs any art form (Classical/folk dance, folk song) for entertaining tourists. Normally Resorts/Hotels utilize this facility to entertain their guests	Kudumbasree	Beach and Back water
	Total	660 (100)			

Source: Primary data

**Figure 1: Channels of employment generation and type of employment- shares**



Source: primary data