



The Role Of Ethnicity For Tourism Promotion With Reference To Kodagu District

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Abstract:-Ethnicity plays a vital role in shaping tourism promotion by providing a destination with a diverse cultural identity. This study examines the role of ethnicity in tourism promotion with special reference to Kodagu district of Karnataka, a region known for its rich ethnic heritage, indigenous communities, and unique cultural practices. Kodagu's ethnic identity shapes the district's tourism image through traditional festivals, cuisine, architecture, rituals, martial traditions, and attire. The research explores how ethnic elements are incorporated into tourism marketing strategies, destination promotion and travels experiences, and evaluates their contribution to cultural preservation and regional economic growth. The study is based on primary and secondary data, interviews with cultural experts and field observations. Findings suggest that ethnicity serves as a powerful tool in enhancing destination attractiveness and encouraging sustainable tourism when local communities are enthusiastically involved.

Keywords: - Ethnicity, Tourism, Promotion, & Kodagu District

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as a significant contributor to regional development by generating employment, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting socio-economic growth. In recent years, cultural and ethnic tourism has gained prominence as travellers increasingly seek authentic experiences rooted in local traditions, lifestyles, and indigenous identities. Ethnicity, which includes common cultural practices, language, rituals, customs, and historical cognizance, is a key factor in making a place unique and appealing to tourists. Located in the Western Ghats of Karnataka, India, Kodagu district, sometimes called Coorg, is well-known for its rich ethnic diversity and unique cultural identity in addition to its natural beauty. The region is home to various ethnic communities such as the Kodavas, Yeravas, Jamma Mapillas, and other indigenous groups; each of these groups has its own customs, festivals, food habits and social systems. These ethnic traits are an essential component of Kodagu's cultural landscape and have a big impact on the local tourism offerings.

The traditional practices of few Kodava communities such as festivals like Kailpdh, Puthari and Kaveri Sankramana, as well as unique clothing, folk music, rituals, and ancestral residences, have come to symbolize the district's identity. By setting Kodagu apart from other hill resorts, these ethnic features are not only protecting cultural heritage but also act as effective marketing tool. The function of ethnicity in organized tourism promotion is still not well understood, despite Kodagu's appeal as a travel destination. The representation, modification, and preservation of ethnic identity in tourist-related activities, as well as its effects on local communities and sustainable tourism development, must be investigated. In order to remote tourism that respects cultural authenticity and benefits indigenous inhabitants economically, it is essential to comprehend this link.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of ethnicity has gained considerable importance in tourism studies as destinations increasingly rely on cultural uniqueness to attract visitors. According to Richards (2018), ethnic and cultural elements enhance destination competitiveness by offering authentic and immersive experiences to tourists seeking meaningful engagement with local communities.

Smith (2009) argues that ethnic tourism allows indigenous communities to participate in tourism activities while maintain their traditional lifestyles. However, the study also cautions against excessive commercialization, which may lead to cultural distortion and loss of authenticity. This balance between economic benefit and cultural preservation remains a recurring theme in tourism research.

Ethnicity based tourism has a lot of potential in India because of the country's varied cultural environment. According to research by Chakraborty and Das (2015), community-based tourism efforts, indigenous art forms, and ethnic traditions all have a significant role in promoting tourism, especially in rural and tribal areas .Ethnic identity has been successfully incorporated into destination branding in states like Rajasthan, Kerala, and the Northeast, which has enhanced local residents standard of living and attracted more tourists.

The significance of heritage and cultural tourism as essential elements of the state's tourist policy is highlighted by research on tourism in Karnataka. Districts with different ethnic identities have significant tourism potential, according to Kumar and Rao (2017), particularly when local populations are involved in planning and promotion. However, the study notes that efficient use of ethnic resources is frequently hampered by inadequate documentation of ethnic culture and a lack of promotional tactics.

The Kodagu district, which is well-known for its distinct ethnic makeup, has garnered scholarly interest mainly for its natural surroundings and coffee tourism, with little emphasis on ethnicity-driven tourism promotion. The Kodava community's distinctive culture is highlighted by studies by Nanjamma and Cariappa (2014). This includes their festivals like Kailpodh, Puthari, and Kaveri Sankaramana, as well as their traditional martial arts, folk songs, food, and ancestral residence.

STUDY AREA

Kodagu is a hilly district in Karnataka with a geographical area of 4,108.88 km² located on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats with an elevation varying from 900m to 1715m. It lies between 75.22' to 76.12' longitude and 11.56' to 12.50' latitude .The district is encircled by Dakshina Kannada district to the northwest, Hassan district to the north, Mysore district to the east, Kasaragod district of Kerala in west and Kannur district of Kerala to the southwest, and Wayanad district of Kerala to the south. The highest peaks found in the district are Tadiandamol (5,740 ft) and Pushpagiri (5,627 ft). The main river in Kodagu is the Cauvery, which originates at Talakaveri, located on the eastern side of the Western Ghats, and with its tributaries, drains the greater part of Kodagu. Kodagu has a typical tropical climate characterized by medium to high humidity, heavy rainfall and cool summer. The most important climate characteristics of Kodagu district is the strong rainfall gradient with annual rainfall decreasing in less than 50 km from over 5000 mm in the Evergreen Western part to 1200 mm in the Moist Deciduous eastern part. A major part of the year consists of rainy season as the monsoon period starting in June lasts till the ends of September. Even during the post-monsoon months of October and November certain parts of the district receive a significant amount of rainfall.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To acknowledge the contribution of Kodagu's ethnic identity for tourism promotion.
- To analyse local communities' participation in ethnic tourism activities.
- To assess tourism service provider promotional strategies using ethnicity.
- To identify challenges and opportunities in ethnic based tourism development.

SOURCE OF DATA

The study includes a qualitative methodology which includes primary and secondary data to gain deeper information.

Primary data-Semi structured interviews with cultural experts, local residents, tourism practitioner's guide and tourists' observation during

Secondary data-Government tourism reports published articles, websites and archival materials related to cultural tradition and Kodagu tourism.

Sampling-purposive sampling was used to select participants with knowledge of cultural tourism including members of different Kodava communities, local home stay owners and tourism policy makers.

ETHNICITY FOR TOURISM PROMOTION

Ethnicity and tourism are closely linked because tourism often involves between people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Tourists travel specifically to experience the culture of an ethnic group. Ethnic diversity helps to shape a destinations image and uniqueness, making it more attractive and distinctive in the global tourism market.

Ethnic diversity of Kodagu

Kodagu home to diverse ethnic communities including the Kodavas, sub Kodava, Yeravas, Kurubas, Kudiya and another tribal group. Among these, the Kodava communities hold a distinct identity with its unique traditions, customs, attire, ritual and social practices. This ethnic diversity adds depth and reliable to the regions tourism appeal making Kodagu a cultural destination.

Traditional Culture and festivals

Ethnic traditions and festivals play a major role in attracting tourists. Festivals such as Kailpodh, Puttari, Kaveri Sankramana, and Madikeri Dasara reflect the agrarian lifestyle and warrior heritage of the Kodavas. Traditional music, folk dances and rituals performed during these festivals provide tourist with an immersive cultural experience. Tourist plans their trips to coincide with these celebrations, thereby boost seasonal tourism.

Traditional attire, jewellery and martial heritage

The distinctive traditional dress of the Kodavas black knee length coat (Kupiya), Sash (chele) and the traditional knife (peechekathi) tucked into the sash considered as most iconic symbol of pride and identity. Kodava podiya (saree) for women draped and pleated at the back, unlike other Indian styles. The pallu is secured over the right shoulder with a gold brooch. The unique gold jewellery of Kodagu includes Pathak, Jomale, Kokethathi, Kada and many more which is not just decorative, it reflects Kodava values, ancestry and status. These attract cultural tourist visiting Kodagu, mainly sold in local artisan shops and preserve traditional craftsmanship. The martial tradition as of Kodagu including weapon worship and historical warrior customs fascinate tourists interested in heritage tourism. Museum, cultural centres, and heritage homes showcase this tradition help to preserve and promote ethnic identity.

Indigenous cuisine as tourism strength

Kodava cuisine is another important ethnic element promoting tourism. Food habits in Kodagu are rustic and deeply connected to the region's forests, plantations and tribal traditions. Delicacy like pandi curry, kadambuttu akkirotti and bamboo shoot curry attract food enthusiasts from across the country. Home stays, resorts and local restaurants offering traditional cuisine provide tourist with an authentic taste of Kodagu's ethnic culture, enhancing overall travel experiences.

Ethnic home stays and rural tourism

Ethnic home stays run by local families play a significant role in tourism promotion. These home stays allow visitors to experience local customs, agricultural practices, coffee cultivation and traditional lifestyles. Rural and eco-tourism initiatives centred on ethnic identity help generate employment, empower local communities, and promote sustainable tourism while preserving cultural heritage.

Tribal culture and eco-tourism

Tribal communities contribute to eco-tourism through their traditional knowledge of forests, wildlife, and medical plants. Community run eco lodges, tribal home stays, Eco education and cultural immersion programs, guided nature walks, storytelling and cultural interactions offer tourists meaningful and educational experiences while highlighting the importance of conserving indigenous cultures and natural resources. Kodagu's tribal culture and eco-tourism are deeply intertwined. When tourism respects indigenous knowledge and ecological limits, it becomes a tool for cultural preservation, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Preservation of ethnic identity through Tourism

Tourism has become a tool for preserving and revitalizing ethnic traditions in Kodagu. Increased interest from tourists encourages local communities to maintain their customs, art forms, architecture, and rituals. At the same time, responsible tourism practices ensure that commercialization does not dilute the authenticity of ethnic culture.

Findings of the study

- Local communities play a dynamic role in ethnic tourism.
- Home stays and resorts exhibit authentic cultural interaction.
- Community performances allow residents to share and preserve traditions.
- Local guides enrich tourist experiences with narrative rooted in ethnic heritage.
- Tourism stakeholders (government, private operators, highlight ethnicity in their promotional material.
- Marketing campaigns use visuals and stories around Kodava traditions
- Cultural tourism journeys that integrate village experiences and festivals.
- Digital media, travel blogs and social platforms amplify Kodagu's ethnic identity to global audience.

Recommendations

- Encourage and strengthen local community ownership.
- Promote sustainable practices.
- Fortify ethnicity-based destination marking.
- Ethnic festivals and cultural events to be organized.
- Documentation and preservation of ethnic heritage.
- Research and academic collaboration on the socio-cultural impacts of ethnic tourism in Kodagu.

CONCLUSION

Ethnicity plays a vital role in tourism promotion in Kodagu district by enriching the destination with cultural depth, authenticity, and uniqueness. The traditions, festivals, cuisine, attire, and lifestyle of the ethnic communities transform Kodagu into a living cultural landscape. By integrating ethnic heritage with sustainable tourism practices, Kodagu not only attracts tourists but also preserves its cultural identity for future generations. Thus, ethnicity is not merely a cultural asset but a powerful driver of tourism development in the district

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