

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF ACCUMULATION AND RESISTANCE

TOPIC - AYURVEDA TOURISM: ISSUES OF DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY KERALA

By Dr. Rashmi Gopi
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies (Affiliated to GGSIPU)
A U Block, Pitampura, Delhi-110034

Abstract

This paper aims to understand the self-projection of Kerala through Ayurveda tourism and what this is doing to concepts of masculinity and femininity and to the idea of development. The author focuses on actual female and male bodies as producers and consumers of Ayurveda tourism, arguing that the rigidity of what constitutes femininity and masculinity is not questioned, but who possesses it is interchanged. This in turn exposes the constructedness of the binary opposition between femininity and masculinity as there exist multiple combinations of masculinity and femininity at any given time and space. The work also touches upon debates around modernity and tradition in Ayurveda tourism. The researcher argues that the dominant ideas of men as active, and women as passive, are shaped by the discourse of upper caste Hindus and colonial modernity. Ayurveda tourism, in reinventing both tradition and modernity, has changed its form and function. This has led to two main changes in the idea of development: (a) Both Ayurveda and development have become a sphere of the rich, by the rich and for the rich; and (b) it has undergone a process of homogenization and standardization. The author also engages with the nature of Ayurveda itself in the paper. The dominance of Allopathy over submissive Ayurveda is symbolic of the authority of husband over wife in a patriarchal society. Through all these recent reinvention of Ayurveda by Ayurveda tourism, a very exclusive discourse about development is taking place. The predominant trend, throughout world, to understand development as something only related to economic growth has gained momentum in Kerala. Development discourse is ignoring a vital part of it, that is, distribution and redistribution. Development is not only about growth but it is also about justice. The government of Kerala is projecting Ayurveda tourism as a panacea for all the ills of 'Kerala Model of development' which were known for following features

- A set of high material quality-of-life indicators coinciding with low per-capita incomes, both distributed across nearly the entire population of Kerala.
- A set of wealth and resource redistribution programmes that have largely brought about the high material quality-of-life indicators.
- High levels of political participation and activism among ordinary people along with substantial numbers of dedicated leaders at all levels. Kerala's mass activism and committed cadre were able to function within a largely democratic structure, which their activism has served to reinforce.

This has been ensured by the multiple factors that has shaped the current Kerala. These include forward looking rulers, foreign trade and interactions with outside world, presence of Christian missionary in educational and health sectors, social movements by the backward communities and Communist movement in the state. But lately, this 'Kerala Model' has come under a scanner for excluding and exploiting the communities in the periphery. It has highlighted impoverished state of Adivasis and Dalits in the state. It has shown the miserable condition of fisher-folks. The tall claims of education, health-care has evaded these communities, who are termed as 'outliers' in the development discourse (Oommen 1999). What the present Ayurveda tourism, propagated by the State, promises to do is to erase this disparity. This paper highlights the complexities in understanding the impact of Ayurveda tourism, it is not completely positive or completely negative.

The author is not taking non-critical approach towards 'Kerala Model of development', rather she is aware of its lacunae in its own way. But what author is emphasizing here is the fact that Ayurveda tourism may have contributed to economic growth of the state at the cost of sub-altern communities but it has definitely not addressed the cause of 'economic justice' in the state. This paper is an attempt to raise the question of justice for the people who are forced to leave their beaches to make way for five-star Ayurveda resorts. This work focuses on aspirations of fisher-folks in Vizhinam beach of Kerala.

This study draws attention to Ayurveda tourism and its relationship to gender (masculinity and femininity) and development discourses in the state. The following points may be noted:

- a) the activities and processes involved in Ayurveda tourism are constructed out of gendered societies and consequently, the masculine and feminine identities articulated by both host and guest societies come into play in the promotion of tourism
- b) Ayurveda tourism involves power relations between groups of people – both within the host society as well as between host and guest societies. These power relations reflect on class, caste, modernity and tradition – which all are gendered in turn and affect understanding of 'development by whom? Development for whom? And development of whom?

This paper is based on interactions with Ayurveda practitioners in Kerala. Other sources include interviews with displaced fisher-folks in the Vizhinam beach of Thiruvananthapuram, students of tourism courses, politicians, and officials in the Department of Tourism. With a view to study the projection of Ayurveda tourism by the state, the author looked at the Kerala Tourism Development Council's brochures and statistics. Through all of these, the researcher raises political questions in the field of Ayurveda and Development, trying to redefine the political and re-looking at interactions of plural femininity and masculinity. The popularity of Ayurveda tourism in recent times clearly demonstrates that knowledge means control, and control power.