

# Lifting the Veil

## A framework for Community Involvement in Tourism in India

EQUATIONS  
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*We believe that participation of local communities in tourism is a matter of right rather than an act of benevolence on the part of the industry. This paper offers the political framework within which we seek community involvement in tourism and propose different levels of community engagement along a progressive spectrum, which is inspired by the understanding of people's participation.*

The need for community involvement in tourism, or any other developmental sector within the country, is not a matter that needs debate. The Constitution of India in Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy, states "Organisation of village panchayats The State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government". Therefore participation of people in decision making on development issues is a right. The subsequent changes made to the Constitution through the 73rd and 74th amendment further strengthen this provision.

Arriving at this strong position and practice of communities leading their development has its moorings in endeavours made by the British administration right from the 1880s. Prior to this, traditional self-governance systems have been practised in rural India, but with the trappings of caste, class, gender and ethnic hierarchies disallowing true participation of all residents within the jurisdiction of the said panchayat.

A series of efforts through the Mayo Resolution on Decentralisation, 1870; Lord Rippon's resolution, 1882; Report of the Royal Commission on Decentralization, 1907; the Government of India Resolution, 1915 and the Montague Chelmsford Report, 1918 were made by the British to promote self-rule in the country. Post-independence, it was after the recommendations of the Balwantray Mehta Committee Report, 1958 was accepted and actioned that the 3-tier system of self-governance as we know it today was institutionalised. (Baxi & Galanter, n.d.)

Self-governance is imagined as the space where direct democracy operates, rather than only through elections. Arguments made for self-governance have ranged from the belief that local institutions are political and therefore capable of true and genuine participation, that it is important for these institutions to be informed by local interests and knowledge; and to ensure decentralised decision making, since it is believed that centralised decisions are unable to address specific needs of local communities. (Jayal, Prakash, & Sharma, 2006)

Impediments to this seemingly near perfect system of self-governance are manifold – social hierarchies, inadequate devolution of decision making and financial powers and the creation of parallel decision making bodies ranging from overarching institutions like development authorities to village level committees like the Joint Forest Management Committee in forest areas are some of the key reasons for goals of self-governance to be subverted.

In more recent times, creation of Special Economic Zones, mega projects spanning several states like the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) have led to key developmental decisions to not only be taken away from the self-governance institutions but have handed over this task to special purpose vehicles, which are very often private / semi-private entities. Therefore for the past 20 years and actively for the last 10 years we see a systematic shift to corporatising of decision making.

In tourism, this takes on new meaning, given that the sector is dominated by private enterprise. Tourism is led by the private sector which comprises of accommodation units like hotels and resorts and tour operators. Therefore the role of the State in tourism is limited to policy making, promotion and infrastructure development, wherein policy making is heavily skewed towards the interests of the private sector. The State does not view regulation as an important role to be played either by the Ministry of Tourism nor by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj through devolution of tourism related decision making powers to the panchayats.

The only clearances required of tourism projects, either private or state owned, are those linked to getting permissions like is required to run any business, with at best, environmental clearances being required to be sought. Most panchayats feel that they have a rubber-stamp role of issuing a No Objection Certificate (NOC), after the private enterprise having already receiving all approvals from the relevant state/national level body.

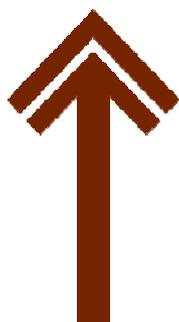
With neither the administration nor the panchayats watching out for tourism development, the sector is an open playground for the industry to do as it desires, with next to no accountability to the people living in and around tourism destinations and regarding the distribution of burden and benefits of tourism.

While the struggle with the State to bring in tourism within the purview of panchayats is an on-going one, a simultaneous effort to make the tourism industry more accountable to people most impacted by tourism in and around the destinations through eliciting their participation is an important engagement.

#### Levels of community participation in tourism

As a framework to understand true participation of communities in tourism development vis-a-vis the private sector, a spectrum of community involvement in tourism has been arrived at. This frame has been adapted from Roger Hart's ladder of participation. (Hart, 1992)

#### Spectrum of Community Involvement in Tourism



Ownership

Collaborating

Consulting

Informing

Tokenism

Levels of involvement	Role played by communities
Tokenism	Employing members of the community as drivers, tour guides etc.
Informing	Where communities are informed about the tourism development being planned and are involved through employment in the tourism activities.
Consulting	Where the communities are consulted with but where the aspirations of the community might or might not be addressed. In this instance the community would have the space to influence decisions while not being a formal part of the decision making process.
Collaborating	Where communities are seen as equal partners in the ecotourism development planned and are formally part of the decision making process. The community would then have control over the impacts as well as the benefits of tourism.
Ownership	Where the community owns the enterprise, which becomes the capital of the community. Where the pace, nature, forms, stakeholders are all decided by the communities and all others involved are supporters of the enterprise.

The above framework is not comprised of clear cut categories, rather it is continuum that the private enterprise finds itself located on. The higher up in community engagement, the larger are the areas of mutual interest and the greater is the role of the communities in decision making and control of the positive and negative fall outs of tourism.

In the next section are case studies offered as examples of the different levels of community involvement in tourism.

## **Tokenism**

Wildlife tourism: The creation of Protected Areas has increased the wildlife population causing increase in people-animal conflict. Yet communities cannot take any measures to protect themselves against this conflict since that would necessitate confronting the forest department, which more often than not would translate into physical harm of the communities and its resources.

The sale of land to tourism projects is not a sustainable option for communities since these monies dry up rather fast and leave no other source of income in their hands. Until now the only livelihood option that has been opened up for communities is their employment in the campuses of the establishments in the tourism industry, which translates to the fact that communities who were once land owners and practitioners of agriculture, with diverse cultural and social histories have become homogenous cheap labour in the tourism industry.

## **Informing and Consulting: Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) (EQUATIONS, 2013)**

Jungle Lodges and Resorts Ltd. was formed in the year 1980 as a private Limited Company in the joint sector between the Government of Karnataka and M/s. Tiger Tops (I) Pvt. Ltd. Tiger Tops withdrew their participation completely in the year 1987 by selling their entire shares to the Government of Karnataka. Since then JLR is fully owned by the Government of Karnataka the present share capital of the company is 91.75 lakhs.

Today JLR promotes itself as a responsible ecotourism company with 16 properties located in Karnataka's prime natural destinations. Each of these lodges are based on one of the following themes: wildlife, nature, adventure, angling, beaches. The accommodation offered are either tented cottages or log huts, cuisine is local and offers only outdoor activities. There are no indoor activities like a gymnasium in keeping with the concept of ecotourism. The company has approximately 19 resorts across Karnataka primarily in forest areas and some along the coast.

The objective of JLR is to promote ecotourism, wildlife tourism, adventure tourism, and various outdoor activities like trekking, camping, white water rafting, fishing, that are non-consumptive components of ecotourism and in general help in environmental conservation.

### Human Resources

Except for the lodge manager, hiring of staff is not centralised and happens at the lodge level. Typically, on joining JLR, most staff work for 2 - 3 years as daily wage earners and are then taken on a contract basis. These contracts are renewed annually. Promotion from daily wage to contract staff depends upon:

- a. The number of years worked at JLR
- b. Performance of the staff as observed by the lodge manager

Hiring of staff from nearby villages and the outreach is the linkage that JLR has with the communities. There are few more linkages with the Panchayat as relevant taxes are paid. Also when there are any grievances regarding the lodge, it is usually the Panchayat who approaches the lodge Manager for resolution as in the case of conflicts.

However, there is definitely an informal relationship that exists between the lodges and the local communities. People from the nearby villages who want to see the lodge are encouraged to do so. There is a transparency in the JLR lodges which does not exist in the other high-end ones, which are much like gated communities. While setting up a lodge, JLR does not consult the communities nor are they informed. However, when the construction starts, the people automatically get to know about the coming up of the lodge. Subsequently, relationship between the lodge and the community is forged with many of the construction workers coming from the village. They are then retained to work as staff once the property is ready. Once hired, all staff at all levels have opportunities to upgrade their skills and be promoted to the next level in the hierarchy. Therefore, there are examples where a person from the village who started work in JLR as a security guard is today a lodge manager in one of the properties.

### Supply Chain:

There is no written procurement policy for JLR. However, the understanding is that most of the non-perishable goods are purchased at the Metro, a wholesale outlet in Bangalore. This way the middleman is avoided and costs can be competent. Eggs, meat, vegetables and milk are procured locally.

## **Collaborating – Himalayan Homestays (EQUATIONS, 2009a)**

Himalayan Homestays is an initiative of the Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust (SLC-IT) ([www.snowleopardconservancy.org](http://www.snowleopardconservancy.org)) to conserve snow leopards in its prime habitat and to generate benefits and opportunities for local communities through tourism while protecting their rich natural and cultural heritage for future generations. The communities at many of the villages of Hemis, Sham and Zaskar region have been provided opportunity to develop homestays to get an additional source of income to compensate the livestock that have been killed by predatory animals.

The SLC-IT was established in 2000 to promote community based conservation of the snow leopard and its prey and habitats and support community development. The initiative of Himalayan Homestays was an outcome of discussions SLC-IT had with the villagers of Hemis National Park in a year to reduce the livestock loss of the villagers owing to the snow leopard attacks. The villagers were losing 12% of their livestock annually attributable to this cause. Increasing losses and resulting economic hardship increased local community resentment against the snow leopard. This resulted in retribution killings by local people thus threatening the survival of this endangered species as well as other predators.

The Himalayan Homestays were first established at the Hemis National Park in 2002. Within the Hemis National Park, which consists of twelve hamlets & villages, homestays were first set up in Rumbak, an important snow leopard habitat, with visitors coming through tour operators in Leh. Subsequently, the homestay programme was expanded to other villages in National park as well as other regions. Since only a few households could benefit from homestays, SLC-IT also went in for training for the youth as nature guides. The guides were trained so that they are also available to accompany the visitors / trekkers. Other initiatives are that of the parachute cafes which was started by the Leh Nutrition Project (LNP) and has been roped into the tourism initiative by SCL-IT. Some families who were already weaving in winters are able to sell their produce through the homestays, the parachute cafes and more recently through an outlet in Leh. For those who were unable to be involved in any of the above mentioned initiatives, community solar showers were set up for those trekkers who were only passing by and not staying at the village.

In order to ensure that all homestay families in the village have the opportunity to benefit from the tourists who come to the village on a trek or for staying in the homestays, a system of rotation has been introduced. Communities are encouraged to decide the best way of involving all homestay providers in a given tourist season. As a result, in some villages, the communities have appointed a point person who keeps track of the household whose turn it is to receive the visitors. So when the tourists come with a voucher of Himalayan Homestays, they are directed to the homestay provider whose turn it is to receive the tourists. This is followed in Rumbak. In villages like Ulley in the Sham region, the rotation system has not worked well either due to inadequate cooperation within the village in a few cases or the distances between homestays is large and problems caused by exhausted tourists who refuse to go to the homestays whose turn it is to receive visitors.

### Challenges

Though homestay programme have raised the standard of living of the families providing homestays it has also been the cause for conflicts within the community due to dysfunctional or partially functional rotational systems.

With an increase in engagement with tourists, the community has become more commercial. Sometimes they expect the local people / students to pay the same amount as the tourists for stay.

One question is whether the communities will become overly dependent on tourism. The fear that new alternatives are taking over the main tradition is not unfounded. With tourism gaining more popularity as a means of livelihood it may substitute the traditional agro pastoralism.

### Impact

Income of families involved in tourism has doubled. Since 10% of the money earned goes to a Village Conservation Fund, this is an additional fund used to maintain camping sites, which is also a money earner for the village.

In terms of environment impacts, the communities have now developed a more positive attitude towards conservation since it is the wild animals which is bringing more and more visitors to the villages. In 2009, there

were 100 homestays, 15 cafes (80 households), 35 trained guides, 16 families (baths, pack horses). This is a significant number of people being able to benefit from tourism.

The income earned from the homestays and the conservation fund is also being used to pay the premium for insuring their livestock against predator attacks under a community run insurance scheme. In Ulley it has also become possible with this income to pay an honorarium to people from the community who volunteer to take the animals to the pastures and stay there during the entire summers looking after the livestock while they graze in the open pastures. These volunteers are also selected on a rotational basis from families who are non homestay providers and paid Rs. 150 per day for two months. The programme has enabled the villagers to send their children to better schools. The women say that they now have cash in hand; they don't have to ask their husbands. Also the money from tourism has helped buy household supplies like cooking oil and gas and to upgrade home furnishing like pillows, mattresses and bed sheets. This has increased the decision making powers of women in economic matters within the household.

### **Ownership – Mountain Shepherd's Initiative (EQUATIONS, 2009b)**

In the fall of 2006, the Mountain Shepherds Initiative (MSI), a community owned and operated ecotourism venture, was formerly inaugurated in the vicinity of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve (NDBR) in Uttarakhand. The Mountain Shepherds Initiative was born out of the social struggle of the Chipko (early 1970s) and Jhapto Cheeno (late 1990s) movements and more recent efforts by the Nanda Devi Campaign - to reclaim peoples land and forest rights.

In May 2001, the state government, with the support of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) commissioned the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) to determine the feasibility of reopening the park to limited tourism activity.

In response to this development, the Bhotiya community came together to form the Nanda Devi Campaign in Lata village. On October 14, 2001, the community members of Niti Valley issued the progressive Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism Declaration to guide its future endeavours and held a workshop elaborating their community-based ecotourism proposals. The focus of the initiative has been to build capacities of the youth, to develop a product line and marketing. Today MSI is a private community owned enterprise. The following are some of the impacts on the community:

#### Economic Impacts:

Community members from the villages are involved in the enterprise. The capacity building of youth has resulted in the reduction of migration to cities. Further, backward and forward linkages have been made, where some homes offer homestays, others provide the food and yet others make the souvenirs which are purchased by the tourists.

#### Social Impacts:

One of the founding principles of MSI is to establish a community-owned operation without human exploitation and environmental degradation. This has resulted in an ethos where the youth who are the guides treat the tourists as equals rather than in a hierarchical manner, which is very much the culture in mainstream private tour ventures.

#### Conservation:

A large part of the Nanda Devi Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism Declaration of October 14, 2001 focuses on biodiversity conservation. All ecotourism activities are conducted such that there is no harm to the environment and that the diversity of the region is maintained.

This case study is an example of how the community seeing the impending tourism development in the region, took charge and therefore have evolved as a community based and owned ecotourism initiative.

### **Conclusion**

While the State has a duty to protect its citizens from the vagaries of the market, it is important that the tourism industry also takes it upon itself to be accountable in their core work. Corporate Social Responsibility is being seen as the means to this. However, what needs to be upheld is Corporate Accountability, which has been defined

by the Friends of the Earth as "Corporate accountability can be defined as the ability of those affected by a corporation to control that corporation's operations". (Friends of the Earth, 2005)

One way of doing this is for corporations to recognise and acknowledge that the local communities and their culture need to be respected while promoting tourism and that they are the primary holders of resources that the industry uses in the selling of a tourist experience.

The State through inclusion in policies and creation of appropriate regulatory mechanisms should ensure that communities are involved at the deepest levels in tourism development.

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