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BHARAT DARSHAN REPORT

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Acknowledgement

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Additionally, I would like to convey my thanks to the Director of MCR HRD Institute for their indispensable support, which contributed significantly to the successful completion of this study tour.

Overview

Days	Place Visited
Day 1	1. Padmanabhaswamy Temple 2. Veli Village
Day 2	1. Kovalam Beach 2. Alleppey (Venice of the East)
Day 3	1. Periyar Tiger Reserve 2. Thekkady
Day 4	1. Munnar Tea Plantation 2. Eravikulam National Park
Day 5	1. Mattupetty Dams 2. Tata Tea Museum 3. Tea Estates
Day 6	1. Cherai Beach 2. Fort Kochi 3. Palace Mattancherry 4. St. Francis Church 5. NGO Visit

REPORT ON BHARAT DARSHAN-CUM-STUDY TOUR

By- Sachin Kumar

The present report is a compilation of the events, places visited and activities of 7 days study tour to Kerala organized by Dr. MCR HRD IT, From **28th April 2024 to 04th May 2024** with the aim to study the implementation of government policies, get familiarized with developmental and citizen centric activities in villages and to develop team spirit and time management.

We were a group of 61 students and 1 faculty member. 5 students were chosen as group leaders for smooth conductance of the tour.

Faculty member: Sri Saka Venkateswara Rao

Group leaders: Deepak Joshi, Vijay Kumar Verma, Kavyanshu Soni, Subhash Singh, Satyendra Singh.

Day 1

On 28th April at 06:10 hours, our group of 62 members boarded flight 6E 5278 of Indigo from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad to Thiruvananthpuram. We reached Thiruvananthpuram International Airport at 07:45 hours. The weather was hot and humid, and the temperature was around 35°C.

Padmanabhaswamy temple:



The first point in our itinerary was Padmanabhaswamy temple. The temple has a dress code for men and women. Women are required to wear sarees, Mundum Neriyathum (set-mundu), skirt and blouse, or half-saree. Young girls below the age of 12 may wear gowns. Men are similarly required to wear mundu or dhoti and bare their torso. Dhotis are easily available for rent at the entrance. We wore the attire and proceeded towards the temple. The temple is located in the East fort of Trivandrum. After entering east fort, there

is pond, padmatheertham on the right hand side of the path and Kuthirmalika Palace on left hand side of the path. The temple is built in an intricate fusion of the Kerala style and the Dravidian style of architecture, featuring high walls and a 16th century gopuram. The gopuram of temple is 100 foot(30 m) high, it has 7-tier and it is built in Pandyan style. The temple has 4 entrances- kizakke nada, padinjare nada, vadakke nada and thekke nada" (means East,west,north & south). But the main entrance is Kizakke nada (East Entrance). The temple has a corridor with 365 and one-quarter sculptured granite-stone pillars with elaborate carvings. This corridor extends from the eastern side into the sanctum sanctorum. As it was Sunday, the temple had a lot of rush and the queue was very long. The queue runs through the corridor and then into the sanctum sanctorum. By the time we reached sanctum sanctorum, it was time for madhyanya Pooja or , so we had to wait for another 45 minutes for darshan. In the Grabhagriha, Padmanabha reclines on the serpent. The deity is visible through three doors – the visage of the reclining Padmanabha and Siva Linga underneath his hand is seen through the first door; Sridevi and Bhrigu Muni in Katusarkara, Brahma seated on a lotus emanating from the deity's navel, hence the name, "Padmanabha", gold abhisheka moorthies of Padmanabha, Sridevi and Bhudevi, and silver utsava moorthi of Padmanabha through the second door; the deity's feet, and Bhudevi and Markandeya Muni in Katusarkara through the third door. Inside the Temple, there are two other important shrines, Thekkedom and Thiruvambadi, for the Deities, Ugra Narasimha and Krishna Swami respectively. After having darshan we went to our buses. The time was around 1pm and we proceeded towards our hotel.

Veli village



Everyone was feeling full of energy after having lunch and taking some rest. In the evening we proceeded towards veli village. Veli tourist village lies where the veli lake meets the Arabian sea. It provides unique boating and picnicking opportunities. We returned from veli village by around 8pm and after having our dinner we took a good sleep.

Day 2

Kovalam beach



In the early morning we went to kovalam beach to see sunrise. There we had the opportunity to meet some local fisherman. Fishing is one of the major business in Kerala. The catch consists of King Fish, Red Snappers, Pomfrets, shrimps, etc. They sell their lot mostly to local market.

Alleppey (venice of the east)



At around 9am we departed from Trivandrum to alleppey. We reached our destination at 2pm. Alleppey is famous for its canals, backwaters, beaches and lagoons. We had booked a backwater cruise to see the scenic man made islands and beautiful sights of coconut fringed backwaters and paddy fields. All the staff of the cruiseboat was local and they acted as our guide for the backwaters journey. The cruise started from pamba river and went upto vembanad lake. Total distance covered was around 15km (to and fro). The path traversed by us is part of national waterway 3. The scope of road and railways development in alleppey is limited and that's why the development of waterway in this area has proved to be a boon for traditional industries such as coir, cashew and fishing. It is the first national waterway in the country with 24 hour navigation facilities along the entire stretch.

The economy of alleppey is based on paddy farming, tourism and coir industry. Alleppey is part of Kuttanad region, this region has

the lowest altitude in India, and is one of the few places in the world where farming is carried on around 1.2 to 3.0 metres below sea level. The region is known as the rice bowl of Kerala and it is also the part of second largest Ramsar site in India. To stop the saltwater intrusion into the Kuttanad, a 1252m long saltwater barrier, Thanneermukkom has been built on Vembanad lake.

Besides its backwaters, alleppey is also famous for its coir industry. Coir is extracted from the outer husk of coconut and is used to make ropes, twine, brooms and brushes, doormats, etc.

After disembarking from the boat, we went to our hotel and later in the evening we went to some coir shops to see the coir products.

Day 3 (Thekkady & Periyar Tiger Reserve)



At around 8am we proceeded towards Thekkady to visit Periyar National Park. People-oriented and park-centered community-based ecotourism is the hallmark of Periyar Tiger Reserve. These programmes are conducted by local people responsible for the surveillance of the vulnerable parts of the reserve. Community-based and protection-oriented ecotourism programmes (CBET) were initiated in PTR during the IEDP. These programmes were developed to ensure livelihood security and to reduce negative dependency on forests. Tickets for boating at Periyar lake were already booked by us. On reaching Thekkady, a bus of national park took us from our stop to Periyar National Park. There were 4 double decker boats waiting for the tourists at the lake. The boat journey was of 1 hour and during this boat journey we witnessed herd of deer, elephants, wild goats

and wild buffaloes. There was no sight of tiger. On inquiring forest official about this, he said that it is a rare sight and in his 24 years of service, he has witnessed tiger only 12 times. The reason for this is that 925 sq km of Periyar National Park is home to only 40 tigers. The forests of Periyar tiger reserve are pristine and unaffected from all outside disturbances, even after accommodating thousands of tourists every year. This is because of the management effectiveness of periyar tiger reserve. It also bagged first prize in the management effectiveness evaluation (MEE) of tiger reserves in India for the year 2022, released by ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

From Periyar tiger reserve, we proceeded to our next destination Munnar and reached there by 11pm. On the way from Thekkady to Munnar we witnessed many tea, spice and rubber plantations.

Day 4

Eravikulam National Park



In the morning, we departed for Eravikulam national park which was 15km from our hotel. It is situated in the Kannan Devan Hills of

the southern western ghats. The wildlife park has an area of 97 sq. km. and it is the first national park in Kerala. It is divided into three regions- the core area, the buffer area and the tourism area. Visitors are allowed only to the tourism area. After reaching main entrance of tourism area, a bus of Kerala forest and wildlife department took us to the starting point of Kurinji trail. The magnificent view of beautiful tea plantations on our way was a sight to behold. The trek from to kurinji is of one hour and the on the way one can witness herds of nilgiri tahr, the endangered mountain goat, for which Eravikulam is a natural habitat. The national park has the highest density and largest population of Nilgiri Tahr. The trekking journey also provides a mesmerizing view of the largest stretch of undisturbed montane shola-grassland eco system in the western ghats. Anamudy (2695m), the highest peak south of Himalayas, is also located within the park.

At the ending of the trek is the highly admired plant species *Strobilanthes kunthiana*, which is locally known as Neelakurinji. Neelakurinji is an endemic species of Western Ghats and it is under threat because of being plundered from the grasslands of High Ranges by ignorant/berserk people. It blooms once in 12 years. It last bloom in 2018 and hence it will bloom again in 2030. After spending some time on the top, we came back to the starting point of the trek and visited “story of the park”. it shows brief history of the park and the flora and fauna which are found in the park with special attention to niligiri tahr.

Day 5

(Mattupetty Dams, Tata Tea Musuem & tea Estates)



In the morning we visited Mattupetty dam. Mattupetty is more than just a water storage facility. The water body that forms as a result of this gravity dam is often termed as Mattupetty lake. Mattupetty lake is a perennial lake which never dries up even in the summers. the dam is an important source of electricity and the lake hosts various water based recreational activities which adds to the tourism. The water of mattupetty lake is also used for irrigation purpose in the nearby fields.

Tata tea museum



Tea has played an integral part in the history of Munnar. Tata tea museum has photographs and machineries, which chronicle the journey of tea in the area. The museum set up at the Nallathanni Estate of Tata Tea ensures that the legacy of those who worked hard to ensure the tea plantations survived this long is recognised publicly. We got to watch the transition from the rudimentary tea roller to the modern fully automated tea factory. Various stages of tea processing can be seen, which includes the making of black tea. There was a sundial, placed on a granite block, which was made in 1913 by the Art

Industrial School at Nazareth, Tamil Nadu. It has other attractions like the 'Pelton Wheel' used in the power generation plant in the 1920s, tea roller and a rail engine wheel of the Kundale Valley Light Railway.

A demonstration room for tea tasting is another attraction where we came across different varieties of tea. We tasted some of the most exotic varieties of tea available around the world here.

Tea estates

The tea museum is situated in the Nallathanni Estate, which is owned by Kanan Devan Hills Plantations Company Private Limited. Some of the plantations of KDHP are open to public. We visited some of the tea estates and saw how the tea workers plucked tea leaves. For plucking the pluckers take first two leaves and a bud. Plucking is a labour intensive business and hand plucking is economical than machine plucking.

Day 6 & 7

Cherai Beach



In the Kochi we spent 2 days. On first day at 8am we left for Cherai Beach. Cherai Beach is a beautiful stretch of shoreline located in Kerala, India. It's known for its pristine sandy beaches, calm waters, and picturesque surroundings. The beach offers opportunities for swimming, sunbathing, and water sports. Additionally, there are resorts, cafes, and souvenir shops nearby, making it a popular destination for both tourists and locals alike. Cherai Beach is also famous for its scenic sunsets, making it a must-visit spot for nature lovers and photographers.

Fort Kochi



After visiting Cherai Beach, we moved towards Fort Kochi. Fort Kochi is a neighbourhood of Cochin city. Fort Kochi takes its name from Fort Manuel of Cochin. It was the first European Fort on Indian soil and was controlled by the Portugese East Indies. The European architecture of many buildings and structures can still be seen in Fort Kochi. Various cultures blend at Fort Kochi. More than 30 communities co-exist here and more than 16 languages are spoken in the town. The influence of various European colonies can be seen here.eg-

a.The portugese influence-it can be seen in Fort Manuel of Cochin and St. Francis Church (one of the oldest churches in India). Both these structures are extremely beautiful.

b.The Dutch influence-it can be found in Dutch cemetery near St. Francis Church and Bolgatty palace.

c.The British influence-it can be seen at Jew town and Princess Street.

Mattancherry Palace



This palace is popularly known as the Dutch Palace. It is a quadrangular structure built in Nalukettu style, the traditional Kerala style of architecture, with a courtyard in the middle. Certain elements of architecture, as for example the nature of its arches and the proportion of its chambers are indicative of European influence in basic Nalukettu style. There is large number of murals on the walls of the palace, executed in the traditions of Hindu temple art, which are religious, decorative and stylized.

St. Francis church



St. Francis Church, located in Kochi, Kerala, is one of the oldest European churches in India. Built by the Portuguese in the early 16th century, it holds great historical significance. It was originally constructed in 1503 and later rebuilt in 1516 by the Franciscan friars under the patronage of the Portuguese viceroy, Dom Francisco de Almeida.

The church is renowned for its architecture, which blends elements of European and Indian styles. Its interior features beautiful wooden ceilings, intricate murals, and ancient artifacts. One notable attraction is the tombstone of Vasco da Gama, the legendary Portuguese explorer who was initially buried here before his remains were later transferred to Portugal.

Conclusion

In reflection, my Bharat Darshan journey has been a captivating odyssey through the heart of South India, a tapestry woven with threads of history, culture, and the untamed beauty of nature. Each day unfolded a new chapter, revealing the diverse facets that make this region a treasure trove of experiences.

From the regal elegance of Padmanabhaswamy temple to the tranquil landscapes of Munnar, the journey took me through the corridors of time and the soothing embrace of nature. Periyar Tiger Reserve and the Eravikulam National Park in Munnar painted a canvas of natural wonders, while The Tea Estate & The Tea Museum in Munnar brought to life the cultural significance of tea cultivation.

Periyar Tiger Reserve, despite missing the safari, provided a profound insight into the delicate balance required for the coexistence of wildlife and humanity. The diverse flora and fauna underscored the need for responsible conservation practices.

As I conclude my Bharat Darshan, I am left with indelible memories of panoramic views, regal palaces, fragrant tea plantations, and the harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity. This journey has not merely been a sightseeing adventure; it has been a profound exploration, a celebration of the myriad hues that paint the cultural and geographical landscape of South India. Each destination, with its unique narrative, has contributed to a richer understanding of the diversity and beauty that define the soul of our incredible country. Bharat Darshan has been more than a trip; it has been a transformative experience, leaving an everlasting imprint on my heart and mind.