The expansion of tourism in Kuttanad in neoliberalism brings a new dynamics of spatial relations. Its spatial practices marginalise labour and subaltern people from their land holdings and economic activities. Women and dalits undergo deeper marginalisations. The environmental discourses emerging from SCR, 2007 are rationales for capital expansion and labour control, that fail to problematise or contextualise environment within day-to-day requirements of the people. Resistance to some issues of tourism by Left political groups, and environmental and civil society groups, is highly localised, even as neoliberal capital gears up for large scales of operations through 'special zones' in Kuttanad. Solidarity among different resisting organisations are being recognised in some pockets, which needs to expand further as a necessary praxis.

Introduction

For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead coloured cloud hanging over the horizon...Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke...Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black 'unparliamentary' smoke, and sufficiently accounting for the cloud which Margaret had taken to foretell rain (Gaskell, 1855: 96)

Bessy moved uneasily; then she said: '...it comes back upon me—oh! so bad! And I think, if this should be th' end of all, and if all I've been born for is just to work my heart and my life away, and to stickeen I' this dree place, wi' the fluff filling my lungs, until I thrist to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air yo' speak on...— I think if this life is th' end, and there's no God to wipe away all tears from my eyes...' (Gaskell 1855 : 145)

These two passages are from the novel, North and South, written in 1855, which presents a story with a strong undercurrent of industrial unrest and misery of the 19th century. The passages quoted above were selected for the depiction of two important relationships of capitalist production: labour and environment. Several European novels of the 19th century narrate the deprivations of urban labourers and the robbing of landscapes that became unaesthetic, ugly and unclean; turning everything in to the contradictory image of what is generally associated with justice, beauty and rejuvenation.
Yet, it is the aesthetics of nature and the need for leisure that are being sold by the tourism industry. The commodification associated with tourism overwhelmingly works on imageries of nature, uncontaminated by industrialisation. In these contexts, it is amazing how capital can twist every contradiction and yearning of its own making, into an industry to further its profits. Tourism was also enhanced by the development of mass transportation through railways and ocean liners in the mid 19th century. The initial formulations of tourism, through the organisations of foreign and domestic travel, can be traced to a company called Thomas Cook and Sons, who met with much success in their enterprise. Gyr (2010) notes that touristic travel remained an activity of the privileged sections of the population, and it was another century before the lower middle class could go on holiday. Some scholars call this phase as that of the decline of the traveller and the rise of the tourist:

"The traveler...was working at something; the tourist was a pleasure seeker. The traveler was active; he went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes 'sight-seeing' (a word, by the way, which came in at about the same time, with its first use recorded in 1847). He expects everything to be done to him and for him. Thus foreign travel ceased to be an activity—an experience, an undertaking—and became instead a commodity (Boorstin cited from Culler J. 1990)

Gyr (2010) records that the apex of European tourism began in the 1960s: in response to the economic situation and strategic innovations in the market economy, commercial tour operators and travel companies transformed the nature of competition through increasingly cheaper offers, propelling it in the direction of mass tourism, introducing new destinations and modes of holidaying. Since the 1990s, holidays and travel were becoming accessible to an ever broadening strata of the population. According to World Tourism Organisation (WTO), tourism is currently the world’s largest industry with annual revenues of over 3 trillion dollars (Ankit and Avishek, 2003). After a decade, the figures more than doubled: by 2014, the global annual revenue through tourism was estimated to be 7.58 trillion dollars (www.statista.com).

All possible aspects of the inter-relationships of nature, labour and culture, are created as imageries for tourism thereby evolving categorisations like historical-, medical-, and sex-tourism. In Kerala such categories are developed within a predominance of marketing its tropical geography. Tourist regions of Kerala can be identified as follows:

1. Highland tourism- operates through National Parks and Wild Life Sanctuaries in the Western Ghats. The traditional tree houses of the tribal communities of the region are adapted to build tree top resorts for tourists, offering an imagery of ethnic architectural experience.
2. Backwater Tourism- where paddy, coconut palms and abundant waters as in Kuttanad provide the visual imageries for tourism. Here the architectural features of the traditional boats used for transportation of goods are adapted for building tourist house boats.

3. Beach tourism – The coastline of Kerala contains several good beaches, some of which have been transformed in to prominent destinations of international tourism.

Specifically in the last ten to fifteen years tourism has seen a conspicuous expansion in the backwaters of Kuttanad. What new spaces are created, and what are the implications on the previous spaces evolved from agriculture, fishery, and so on? How do people in the region perceive these processes that sell through imageries drawn from the historic shaping of their region? What spatio-social implications unfold for labour in general, and for dalits and women within it? These questions lead the writing of the present chapter.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, approved a special rehabilitation package for the farmers of 31 districts of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra in the context of farmer suicides in large numbers in the country. Along with this the Government approved a special plan of action for improving farming conditions in Alappuzha and Idukki districts of Kerala. The Government requested M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation to suggest programmes for strengthening the ecological and livelihoods security of Kuttanad wetlands in Alappuzha district. The report submitted by the Foundation in 2007, is titled 'Measures to mitigate agrarian distress in Alappuzha and Kuttanad wetland ecosystem', and is generally called Swaminathan Committee Report (SCR). This document was discussed in Chapter 6 in the context of agriculture. It would be reviewed in the present chapter as it is a neoliberal document for the development of tourism in Kuttanad. It carries a vision to reorient the region, a possible blueprint for the 'representations of space' or 'planned space'(using Lefebvre 1991).

**Planned Space**

'Representations of space' or planned space form the dominant space in any society/mode of production'. The planned space of tourism in Kuttanad operates through spatial infrastructures like tourist resorts and roads, the houseboats, and the imageries created by advertisers and tourism promoters.

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1 This is the abstract space of capitalism, the space of the scientists, planners, technocrats and social engineers.
The house boats and resorts

The tourist house-boats that ply the waters of the Vembanad Lake, the canals and the rivers of Kuttanad seem to have very little regulations as judged by their large numbers. Karlaganis and Narayanan (2014: 9) report that registered houseboats (357 in Alleppey and 150 in Kumarakom) total to 507 and along with motor boats, speed boats; and bargers, there are 1014 registered boats. There are 500 unregistered house-boats\(^2\), whose high numbers indicate the fast growing status of the house-boat industry.

Fig 7.1 : A Tourist House-boat in Kuttanad

Kumarakom and Alleppey are two important destinations of tourists in the Kuttanad region. These towns host a number of hotels and resorts, that also act as centres for arranging of tourist houseboats.

Mohan Kumar who made a documentary film in 1992 on environmental pollution in Kuttanad, recalls\(^3\) that there was not a single house boat on the Vembanad at that time. It is in the last 10 to 15 years that backwater tourism developed and expanded in Kuttanad. Its horizontal and vertical extensions increased especially in the last decade. The new industry of tourism makes spatial changes by building tourist resorts, and through usage of the water bodies for houseboat tourism. These spatial processes have given way to social and ecological restructuring and contestations.

\(^2\) The numbers were obtained by the authors from the details of inland vessels registered as per Kerala Inland Vessels Rules in Alapuzha Port, by the Port office, Alapuzha, February, 1, 2013: and through interviews with the Port Officer-in-charge.

\(^3\) In my interview with him
Imageries for Tourism

'Imagining Kuttanad' was examined in Chapter 1, but its contexts and nature differ starkly from the imageries that are created for tourism. The difference lies in the latter's need to attract a particular audience, for whom the region does not mean a matter of everyday life, but of a brief encounter, that can be bought. The imageries for tourism function through planned selections that include and exclude reality as per the perceived tastes of the tourists. Hence the rearrangement of space is done in ways that differs much from those of agriculture and of modern industries:

...tourists' desires and expectations change the places they visit, reforming them according to their visitors' imagination...when reality differs from the model, it is reality-not the model- that is expected to change (Brockington, Duffy, Igoe 2012: 193)

The official web portal of Government of Kerala records that a major change witnessed in the 1980s was a shift in the emphasis from hospitality management to tourism planning, development, and marketing. The budget pattern underwent a sea change by the 1990s to provide more for tourism development. The State's Tourism Corporation advertises through a catching caption of Kerala as 'God's own country'. The imagery, as the caption suggests, is of nothing amiss in the country offered to the tourists. The social cohesions and tensions are not of any consequence in this context. This portrayal of places and regions is in contradistinction to imageries of places in all other contexts, including literature, art, theatre and films.

A perusal of tourist websites⁴ provides imageries of Kuttanad that emphasise nature's beauty, romance and pleasure, local traditions and a world uncontaminated by modern developments, yet equipped with modern transportation and boarding (houseboats and hotels) infrastructures. And often these imageries contain unreal and distorted imageries. These are summarised as follows:

(1) Nature's beauty

Palm-fringed backwaters, the pride of Kerala

Kumarakom- This little backwater village shot up to glory because of its enchanting backwaters, intricate canal networks, mangrove forests, emerald green paddy fields and coconut groves.

Alleppey- flawless beauty. The heart of backwater land is Allappuzha (Alleppey) known popularly as the Venice of the east.

This comparison with Venice originated in times gone by, attributed by some European then visiting Alleppey, which is put to use for added touristic value.

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⁴ Mostly from www.kerala holiday planner.com; and 'Make my trip' packages for Kerala travel
(2) A combination of uncontaminated nature and modern infrastructure

Kumarakom houses some of the excellent resorts which provide comfortable accommodation. A day at one of these spas works like magic on your body and spirit, ridding you of tension and negative energy; and ‘...boating, swimming and fishing facilities.

(3) Traditions as ethnic attributes:

Traditional country crafts, house-boats and canoes will take one through the heart of this little water world.

Ayurvedic massages, yoga, meditation..

The boat races will take you to the age of ancient naval warfare which these water crafts trace back its origin to.

(4) Romance and pleasure

One of the must-do things in Alleppey is to board one of the many magnificent house-boats and go on a cruise of utter pleasure and romance...In a fully equipped floating house-boat, you can enjoy the beautiful scenery around in the company of your loved one.

(5) Distortions in the creation of imageries

The only way of communication and contact with the outside world for the people there is through the water. Most families have small canoes in which children go to school and elders go for drinking water and to the market.

Large cargo boats drifting leisurely with their sail spread

Women buried neck-deep under water catching prawns and fishes.

It is true that people still rely on small canoes. But as examined in Chapter 6, roads and bridges have considerably reduced the dependence on water for transportation. Large cargo boats of Kuttanad are realities of a past, that has disappeared from the region long ago, but such imageries add to the element of romance as well as to an image of being relatively 'one with nature' and being far from what is modern. Similarly men and women buried neck-deep in water is a description of mussel- collection, in which the presence of women today is nil.

**Lived Space**

This is the space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols. This is the space of inhabitants, users, writers and artists; this is the dominated space. This contains non-verbal symbols and signs.

**Literature and films**

This is Kuttanad,
the rice granary of Kerala...

Times have changed...

granaries have no grains:

Curved roofs of the boat that carried grains

were elongated; a bed was laid,

to embrace and sleep-

That's the first house boat!

Women who sang and harvested,

instead cut karimeen⁵ and peeled prawns

to feed the sayip⁶;

Men who fished and dug out clay,

took the steering and became drivers

of house boats; others trimmed their mundu⁷-

and wrapped around the neck; wore shirt- pants.

Teenagers who managed their 10th grade,

gathered 'is' and 'was', went

off to tourist centre- Alleppey;

changed their looks & became

New generation!

The Malayalam film, *Pullipulikalum Aattinkuttiyum*⁸ by Lal Jose, opens with the above-mentioned lines. As implied by the satirical opening, it portrays the convulsions of a society in a transiting economy. The gimmicks and artificiality that accompanies the struggles to woo the international tourists, specifically highlight the small entrepreneur vis-a-vis the large house boat owners. It is a pathetic struggle for livelihood for many ordinary people, placed at a juncture of dispossession of agricultural labour.

Art forms and literature need not portray reality as it is, there are selections- made in telling a story, for which there is some inspiration, objective, perspective or idea. If we are to compare these with the tourist brochures and websites, there is a starkness in the latter emerging from

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⁵ Pearl spot fish

⁶ White- skinned European/ American

⁷ Traditional dress of men

⁸ Translates as 'The leopards and the lamb'
the passion to sell. Films and literature also sell, but the basic difference of these from the
imageries created by the tourism industry, lies in an overwhelming involvement with and
concerns of the former on the social and political situations, and a yearning to stage them in
the minds of the people through those media:

... in 1944, 'progressive literary organization' came into being which was very different
from the old literary associations. Even though political changes of the post-independent
period caused the decline of its organizational form, its contribution in giving shape to
the modern democratic cultural atmosphere is great and invaluable. In 1950s a large
number of artists and literary luminaries drawing inspiration from this movement
produced dramas, stories and poems which became a part of the life of the common man.
In that way the art and literature confined within the affluent and academic circles came
to the laity and through that they were able to make major contributions to raise the
populace into a 'civil society' imbued with a high degree of self-awareness (Rajeevan
1999: 19).

In the context of Kuttanad, the writings of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (discussed in Chapter
5) is a humane example of the intense relationship of literature with the lives of people. This
is beautifully brought out in an obituary to Thakazhi in 1999:

"He's gone, gone away, leaving us all behind," murmured his wife Kathamma to herself,
as I moved over to her by the side of the hero whom she had looked after, silently and
wistfully, for over sixty years. "He'll never go away, he's always with us, will be so, in
our hearts, for all time to come," I whispered to myself, for it was what everybody there
felt. They had all, it seemed, walked out of his stories and novels, the humble and the
lowly, the little men and women, who could never aim at superhuman proportions. Here
was life indistinct from the literature that grew out of it and in turn created it. He is now
part of the memory of the land, which memory he himself had enshrined in his immortal
writings (Panicker, Frontline, April 24- May 7, 1999).

Thus literature such as Thakazhi's emerge from a deep regard for and concern on the lives of
people of Kuttanad. In contradistinction, the imageries of the region created for tourism by
texts and visuals, convert the region in to a commodity. The imagination of a place/ region
offered to the tourists is delineated from the social and ecological dynamics that sustain and
challenge the socio-economic lives of people in the region.

Everyday Spatial Experiences

For the people of Kuttanad, the houseboats are visually constant reminders of the septic and
other wastes, that are dumped from the house boats into the water bodies. The water bodies
are like the veins of Kuttanad, on which people are still dependent for many aspects of
everyday life. It can be seen that ordinary people are caught in a dilemma through the
transition from centuries of paddy cultivation to the new entrant, tourism on the Vembanad
Lake. A small part of the displaced sector of agricultural labour finds some solace through ad
hoc employment in houseboats. Yet, across board, there is a high amount of critique on the
industry- especially that which is experienced as causing intolerable pollution, and of hiking
up the prices of commodities of everyday use, like fish, and also of hiking land prices.
It is not as though the pollution in the water bodies of Kuttanad are caused exclusively by the house-boats. Endosulfan and other chemicals used in the plantations of the Western Ghats flow downstream in to Kuttanad. River Pamba brings down wastes to Kuttanad from Sabarimala pilgrimage centre on the Western Ghats (see Map 1.1). Karlaganis and Narayanan (2014) report that the months of January to March are particularly notorious for high levels of pollution in the waters. Three seasonal aspects coincide to create the highest levels of coliform bacteria in the waters during those months. This is the time when TSWB is closed, so the water remains stagnant, not being able to flow out (and carry the wastes to the Sea). During these months 40-50 million pilgrims visit Sabarimala, and these are the months when tourism peaks in the backwaters of Kuttanad.

Pollution in the Lake is also caused by the pesticides used in the paddy fields, that are reported to be of alarmingly high concentrations. On the western side of the Lake, the city of Kochi generates urban sewage, that directly enters the Lake. Other urban wastes like those from hospitals and slaughter houses also reach the Lake. Ten years ago pollution from various sources mentioned were already prevalent, but in the last ten years house-boat tourism has increased, adding to the already existing pollution (Karlaganis and Narayanan, 2014). Florence (2012) records distillery waste from the Mc Dowell Company at Varanadu discharging in to the Vembanad Lake, and causing ill effects to the locality and its fishery resources. Moreover, indiscriminate sand mining rampant in the Lake have brought major changes in the lake ecology resulting in dwindling fishery.

Kainakary village, located at the mouth of River Pamba joining the Vembanad Lake, is intensely impacted by pollution and other changes happening through tourism. A cross-section of people of Kainakary were interviewed, who voice their lived experiences. They reported that some water space in the village is planned to be allotted for parking of house-boats. By 6 PM the house-boats have to stop plying and stay put for the night, a government regulation for safety from the strong winds over the Lake at night. People are apprehensive that the new parking arrangement would bring in more pollution to the area. Given below is a discussion with a group of toddy tappers:

Person 1: You can see the wastes dumped in polythene bags

Person 2: The tourists often say that the chicken and fish should be fresh. Hence the processing and cooking done in the boats, generate much kitchen wastes. These are packed in polythene, and then thrown out in some corner as you can see them here.

(In the bend of the river where we were standing, such polythene-packed waste were lying around)
Person 1: Then of course there are toilet wastes dumped in to the water from the house boats.

Person 2: Even though there are rules and regulations, the boat owners often find loop holes through corruption.

Kamala, a 74-years old agricultural labourer talks of the impact of the pollution in the waters on the day-to-day lives of people:

This was the water we used for cooking and drinking, but that's a thing of the past. Today we are not in a situation even to bathe in this water. The house boats pollute a lot and that water also flows in to the fields.

Manoj, who is a 41 year old mussel gatherer observes:

Even though tourism has brought in development here, it has also brought in lots of problems. We do not know how much of the latrine wastes from the boats are actually dumped in the sewage treatment plant, and how much are dumped in to the waters!

As of date there is only one sewage treatment plant in the region, located at Kumarakom. Another one is planned to be built at R-Block in Kainakary panchayat. Often it becomes economically unviable, especially for small-scale operators of boats, to move from one end of the Lake to another to release the sewage. So the lack of sufficient infrastructure becomes a crucial factor in increasing the pollution of the Lake.

The diesel and kerosene used in the boats spill in to the water. And their scale is quite high – more than 1000 boats ply from Alleppey alone. Now-a-days we are not able to use the water here as we used to in the past. Drinking water is supplied by the Corporation. Sometimes there is no supply! (Manoj)

Kuttanad does not have wells. The reason for this might have been the high water level (Kuttanad being located at elevations below sea level) that makes the water saline everywhere during some months. So there would not be much difference between the water in the well and that in the canals and rivers. My mother recalls an attempt made by my father to get a well dug at my paternal home in Thayankary, in spite of my grandmother's warning that it would not be useful. The well was dug and the water used, but during the pre-monsoon months the water in the well also became saline. This was in the 1960s prior to the construction of the TSWB.

Today even as the salinity is constrained through TSWB, the water in the rivers, the canals and the Lake have become too polluted to be used for drinking and other everyday purposes. There were many human- made ponds in Kuttanad, whose waters become salty in the pre-monsoon months. But there were some occasional ponds, like a temple pond, that had potable water all through the year. Drinking water becomes a serious issue in the region, marking a paradox of water abundance, coupled with extreme scarcity of drinking water.
People generally have more qualms on the pollutions through tourism than on that caused by agriculture:

Q: The fertilizers and pesticides used in cultivation are also pollutants. Does that impact the mussels?

Manoj: We can't say that because what impacts the fish and mussels is the diesel and kerosene used in the boats.

Similar opinions were very frequently heard. For instance, Vasudevan, a toddy tapper, observed that it is the tourism sector that creates the largest problems. Josichen, a farmer, says that tourism has drastically changed Kuttanad through dumping wastes in the water, that creates an aversion for the water that had been on everyday usage by people. Rajiv, of White clam co-operative society, also observes that house-boats are the major cause of pollution of the water bodies:

Q: Don't you see the chemicals from paddy cultivation as a major pollutant?

Rajiv: Yes, I do. But whenever the TSWB is opened, it flows off with the water. But the septic wastes of the house-boats stay and cause several diseases.

Josichen: Kainakary is a low-lying area, where the river joins the lake. So the waste accumulates here; as TSWB is closed most of the time, there is a lot of accumulation occurring in this part of Kuttanad.

Apart from problems of pollution and drinking water scarcity, there are several socio-cultural impacts of tourism. For instance, Jayan, a KSSP activist, says that the social changes through tourism include the enhancement of sex-trade. This was also voiced by Sasidharan, a driver of a tourist canoe, who points out the dilemma caused through socio-cultural differences between the tourists and the hosts:

There is a lot of cultural difference between the tourists and us. It's difficult to talk of all those things...they do everything in the open-not good for our children to see. Especially when the night parking sites of the house boats are close to our homes, it becomes very troublesome. Often people are forced to permanently close down the windows on the water-side! It is not a good sector for youngsters to be employed.

National Human Rights Commission (2006) reports house-boat sex tourism as a new and thriving concept in places like Alleppey where foreign tourists are abundant. This is a safe method, as there are hardly any raids on house-boats (EQUATIONS 2008).

Roy (2008)'s observations of environmental and social problems caused by tourism in Kuttanad, were also voiced by environmentalists and people living in the region: (1) Several species of mangroves are found in the region and they perform an important role in maintaining the ecology of Kuttanad, but the construction of tourist resorts have led to their destruction (2) Cutting down of trees and vegetation cause decline in the numbers of birds in Kuttanad, which is a habitat for a large number of birds, including migrant ones (3) plastic
bottles and syringes used for injecting drugs, are accumulating in large numbers in the water bodies (4) Women who wash and bathe in the water bodies, report that the large numbers of boats and houseboats plying the waters are disturbing their privacy of everyday life.

Spatial Practices

Spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space. The house-boats and tourist resorts have visually and dominantly taken over the Vembanad Lake, as a symbol of new prosperity, owned by members of the erstwhile large farmer families, through NRI remittances, or from investors outside the region. Even as members of the lower castes also own houseboats, where government loans have often helped in the purchase, the majority of the large houseboat owners are from the Syrian Christian community. Small investors belong to the Ezhava community and there are some dalits, Roman and Latin Catholics, and a few Muslims (Karlaganis and Narayanan 2013: 9). The tourist resorts contain ownerships of large corporates of the country.

Two major spatial interfaces of tourism evolve with agriculture, and with fishing. Land use shifts for tourism impact agriculture. In fishing there is a direct spatial overlap in the Vembanad Lake. The increasing pollution of the water bodies become yet another process of contamination impacting fishing and mussel gathering. At the same time, the tourism industry depends on agriculture and fishing for its 'raw materials' in terms of visual richness as produced by cultivation, and in terms of local cuisines in which fish and mussels play significant roles.

Interface with Agriculture

Chapter 6 examined the state legislations for the protection of cultivation of lands and the enhancement of cultivation in fallow lands, seeking to restrict land use shifts. Yet, through illegal means and loopholes explored in the legislations, land use shifts take place, in which the tourism industry plays the most prominent role. Some instances are given below:

Jayan observes that many people in Kuttanad find it inconvenient to live by the Lake, the perception is mainly with regard to travel time required for various purposes. So when they get good price for the land, they opt to sell. The resort builders offer prices that are higher than the usual market rates. By selling the land, the erstwhile land holders see it as a way to improve their lives. There are small islands on the lake housing 6-7 families, like the houses I

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9 The information is based on discussions of the authors with the office bearers of 'Houseboat owners and operators Samithy'.
had visited to meet the mussel gatherers and fishers in Kainakary. For tourist resorts, such locations are highly priced for its natural-aesthetic values. These were the traditionally marginalised spaces, occupied by the less powerful castes of Kuttanad. But the tourist value of such locations, and the 'inconvenient' locational perception of the residents, act in complementarity, triggering the sale of land and thereby shifts in the land use.

In Kainakary panchayat, Thomas Chandy bought some land to build a tourist resort. He is popularly called 'Kuwait Chandy' because of money made through immigration. He is very much in to the tourism business and has built an elaborate resort in Kuttanad at Punnamada
kayal. Aniruddhan of Chettutozhilali union says that those were cultivated lands and that this is an example of how legal understandings are foregone by influential powers. Chandy who had politically aligned himself earlier with the Congress, shifted to the DIC(K)\(^{10}\) of which he was the lone MLA and was part of the UDF in the 2006 elections, which later merged with the NCP and then aligned with the LDF for the 2011 elections. Based on the declaration of assets filed at the time of the elections, he was the richest MLA in the assembly with assets of over 450 Million Indian Rupees.

In 2013 during my field visits to the area, there was some land-filling going on in the vicinity of Punnamada Kayal. It was gathered that it was a site for the construction of a tourist resort. The land had belonged to a large number of small farmers. They were offered prices for the land that were many-fold higher than the current price of land in the locality. Sasidharan reports that this offer seemed quite lucrative for the land-holders. They planned to either buy land elsewhere, or to move to Alleppey and build a house in the town. These cases mostly implied an outmigration from agriculture.

Low-lying water-front areas, being more prone to floods were historically resided by or reclaimed on small basis by the subaltern people. They were not considered the best sites for building houses of the elites. But in contemporary times, they have high tourist value, the purchase of these lands for tourism becomes a process of displacement of the subaltern people from the region. Purchase of productive farm lands are relatively difficult, more so in the case of large holdings.

**Spatial Conflicts with Fishery**

Green revolution, has extended ecological and social impacts on other branches of production in the region (examined in Chapter 6). TSWB emerged as a major point of contention because on one hand, it radically boosted the commercialisation of paddy and on the other it detrimentally impacted the livelihoods of the fisher communities and others based on the Vembanad Lake. Tourism brings in a process of further marginalisation of these sectors and people. There is a spatial tussle, a process of making space, that operates through competition and non-compliance. Fish as a source of protein for the people has dwindled because of the deterioration of the water bodies. The shortage of fresh water fish is compensated by sea fish marketed by vendors. Florence (2012: 246) reports that the reason for low income of the fisher-folk is attributed to the loss of fishing days. Only around 162 fishing days are available, whereas fisher-folk consider that at least 275-300 days are required annually to fulfill their

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\(^{10}\) Democratic Indira Congress (Karunakaran) founded in 2005
basic life requirements. Poor catch seems to be the largest reason for the lesser number of fishing days. Ecological deterioration and overfishing contribute to the situation. Indiscriminate fishing during spawning season, and unsustainable practices have developed in the present situations of uncertainty of catch. She notes that out of the total sample population who are engaged in fish harvesting and mussel collection in the lake, the percentage of mussel collection group is highest (40.52), whereas the percentage of 'fish catch only' category has come down to 19.61. This change implies that dwindling fish catches have diverted most of the fishermen to turn to mussel collection, or to both activities, for survival. The collection, processing and marketing of mussels is a tedious job, as it involves more time and effort in earning income out of this activity.

The decline of fishery is also reported by a team\textsuperscript{11} that visited the region to review the implementation of National Wetland Conservation and Management Programme in 2008. Fishing activity was found to take place only near the main lake area just below the Thanneermukhom bund and not anywhere inside the southern part of the lake, indicating that this part of the lake is virtually dead – a biological desert, in all probability due to high levels of eutrophication and low levels of dissolved oxygen (anoxic conditions reported at Punnamada area) and acidic Ph.

Florence (2012) notes that no traditional fishermen have turned to tourism related activities. But my own field observations do not tally with this finding because it is seen that there is a tendency among the younger generation to move away from the traditional livelihood and economic engagements of their parents and to move to avenues like tourism. For instance, Sateesh of Kainakary had followed his father’s occupation of fishing in the Vembanad Lake. But his sons have taken on a different career route which he says is an impact of their education. He has two sons who are both graduates and they work in tourist houseboats. It is noted that there is a growing trend of youth from such families moving out of fishing and mussel gathering and seeking jobs in the tourist house boats.

A number of activities of the tourism industry has impacted the ecology of the Lake. Planning Commission (2008) makes a note of the high numbers of houseboats and transport boats creating a lasting impact on the lake ecosystem. Florence (2012) observes that the big walls around large tourist resorts stretching for several kilometers forbid the fish workers from many of the services they had been accessing from the Lake earlier.

\textsuperscript{11} on behalf of the Planning Commission, Govt of India
The traditional method of mussel collection by dipping bodily in to the waters, is creating many diseases among the mussel collectors. They have to spend much for medical purposes. Sateesh notes that he and many others therefore adopt new methods like the rod and net and ply the lake in a canoe for mussel collection (discussed in Chapter 5). This protects them from the contaminated water and is also a less tiresome way to work.

**Employment and Sales**

By and large, people of Kuttanad have a lot of critique on the tourism industry, but the house-boats provide employment to some persons. Each houseboat employs a driver, a cook and a helper, all of which are men. Young men, with some education, find it respectable to be employed in house-boats or tourist resorts, as compared to being agricultural labourers, the latter option that is anyway not being available. Moreover the rich tourists make extra payments or 'tips' to the houseboat employees.

I met Aji in Kainakary, who is 34 years old and a houseboat driver, a job he engages with since the past 13 years. He studied up to pre-degree, after which he pursued different economic engagements such as auto rickshaw driving and agricultural labour. Today he earns Rs 6000 as monthly salary, even in tourist off-seasons. In addition to the salary, he gets a daily allowance. The boat driven by Aji halts the night at Kainakary.

Sateesh, a fisherman of Kainakary lives with his wife and two sons. He has been fishing since the last 27 years. His sons are graduates and work in tourist house boats, each earning Rs 8500 per month. In addition they get Rs 170 as daily allowance when ever there is a trip. Tourists often give them tips as well.

Public opinion in Kuttanad generally do not favour the fast-growing advent of tourism that causes detrimental impacts in their day-to-day lives. But it holds hopes of employment:

*Kamala:* If there are 100 house boats then 300 persons can get jobs

*Sheeja:* Their families can earn a living

*Kamala:* Even as it offers jobs, the pollution is too much to bear.

*Sheeja:* The future generations will face the brunt of that.

*A senior woman:* When 400 persons get jobs, 4000 persons become ill.

The employment possibilities of persons like Aji in tourist resorts are not bright. They employ persons qualified in hotel management, and the owners employ persons from outside even for odd jobs.
Small hotels and tea shops have emerged in locations through which the boats ply. Aji notes that small traders have increased in Kuttanad since the past 10-15 years. There is a shift of labour force towards tourist-enhanced opportunities. He notes that paddy production in Kuttanad is a necessary condition for the tourism industry to thrive:

*What tourists like best in Kuttanad is its widespread greenery and waters. If people leave land fallow, then the greenery would be lost. It is the greenery that sustains tourism in Kuttanad (Aji, Kainakary).*

Sasi, a duck rearer hailing from Karuvatta, says that tourism has increased the sales of ducks. The hotels buy ducks for meat, which is a well-known cuisine of Kuttanad. Ducks are also purchased on whole sale rates by agents who then sell them to tourist centres like Kovalam near Trivandrum. One such agent said, “Ducks are more in demand among overseas tourists. They have lots of money, in dollars!”

**Contestations on Spatial Practice**

The people of Kuttanad assess tourism through the following aspects: (1) pollution of their environs, where they live on a day-to-day basis (2) employment provided by houseboats (3) threat of livelihoods of fisher communities; and (4) issues around trafficking. Trade unions, youth organisations, environmental organisations, and civil society have been responding to these socio-economic challenges. Some examples are given below:

Paathiramanal is a small island on the Vembanad Lake, about 15 km from Alleppey town, in Muhamma panchayat. With an enchanting name that translates to 'sands of midnight', and extending to approximately 20 hectares, it is resided by large numbers of birds, and known for several rare migrant birds. The waters around the island also have large numbers of fish species. In 2001, the state government decided to lease out the island to Oberoi group of hotels and resorts. Jayan narrates that there were protests and strikes against the move. The then Panchayat President, C.K.Bhaskaran, with the support of the people, could make a meaningful intervention and stop the handing over of the island to the private company.

The resistance to the situations, if compared with an earlier phase of vibrant trade union movements in the agricultural sector, can be understood only through the varying contexts of the problems and their structural differences. Agricultural labourers had resisted the landed sections, and demanded a larger share of the surplus production. But in the case of tourism, environmental pollution, as brought forth through houseboats, is resisted through an organised effort of concerned people of the region. Recent years have seen the emergence of local environmental groups, especially in Kumarakom, whose interventions have been of creating environmental awareness.
The CPI(M) has demanded a reservation of 30% of jobs in tourism for people of the region. They have a trade union of fish workers. There are trade unions of workers in the house boats. The small scale boat operators also align with the CPI(M)'s trade union as their needs and that of the workers are similar, in contradistinction to the situations of the large scale operators. DYFI, the youth wing of CPI(M) was able to protest successfully to close down illegal massage parlours in Kumarakom. They also attempt to create awareness on environmental issues like encroachment of tourist resorts in to the Lake.

KSSP holds camps and workshops in different parts of the region to discuss issues like pollution and encroachments in the Vembanad Lake. During discussions on an action plan being prepared on Vembanad Lake, Jayan of KSSP mentioned that people would be consulted in the process. But would there not be clash of interests, say between people who run the resorts and house-boats and the fisher folk?

*Our stand would be with the ordinary people. This is a political stand. If we need to take a stand against tourism to save the livelihood of the fisher folk, we would do that. When*
we look at the development of the region and the economy, tourism holds a possibility. But that does not mean that it can be done at the expense of the ordinary people, the working class (Jayan).

There are innovations being done by NGOs, for instance, the creation of a protected fish sanctuary in Vembanad Lake at Kumarakam by the 'Lake Protection Forum', with financial and technical aid from ATREE\textsuperscript{12}. This is intended to provide nesting surfaces for fish and prawns to enhance fishery recruitments and production. EQUATIONS\textsuperscript{13} has done insightful studies on the social impacts of tourism in Kuttanad. So we witness a wide range of responses to tourism, ranging from protests to studies and innovations. These organisations and institutions are responding to the changing spatial situations emerging through tourism.

Whereas relatively larger numbers of house boats ply from Alleppey as compared to Kumarakom, hotels and resorts are seen to be much more in the latter. The situatedness of tourist activities contributes to the occurrence of larger contestations at Kumarakom. The issues raised and the protests are localised. It was therefore not surprising that my field inquiries that focussed on Alleppey town, and Kainakary and Nedumudy villages did not at any point, come across the protests against any issue related to tourism. The people were familiar with KSSP and its activities, but not with other voluntary organisations or NGOs. People of these areas were conversant only with the organised efforts and mobilisations of KSKTU.

**Role of the State and of Governance**

The nature of governance is examined through a few documents that have immediate relevance for Kuttanad because of the NL thrusts of tourism. For instance, the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-12), Planning Commission of India, focuses on marketing, promotion, investment and infrastructure support for the expansion of tourism (EQUATIONS, 2009). There is an exclusive focus on economic factors such as the revenues from tourism, the foreign exchange earnings, the employment created, the income generated and so on:

The most glaring feature of the... document is its complete disregard of the many recorded negative impacts of tourism development in India...exploitation of children and women, environmental degradation as a result of unplanned and unregulated development, limiting right to access of local communities to available natural resources affecting their livelihood options, substituting decentralised planning processes with tourism development plans, enclavisation etc have not been acknowledged or even mentioned (EQUATIONS 2009: 18).

\textsuperscript{12} Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment

\textsuperscript{13} Equitable Tourism Options
It is further noted that in the expanding policy shifts toward investment-oriented planning, tourism projects no longer conduct the environmental impact assessment as per the EIA Notification, 2006. The international financial institutions have also started taking advantage of the situation. For instance, in contradistinction to the practices till the last decade, we now see a trend of granting direct tourism loans.

The Kerala Tourism (Conservation and Preservation of Areas) Act was enacted by the state government in 2005. Through this enactment the government can declare any area which have or likely to have the importance of tourism within the State as “Special Tourism Zone” (STZ), and form centralized committees that could decide on the tourism development within the STZ. Through this Act, Kumarakom has been declared as a STZ and the Act could be used as a tool to usurp the powers of the Functional Committees constituted as per the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act nonfunctional. The grama panchayat has already voiced their concerns that the Act is violating the spirit of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act14, and declared that they would not allow the state government to strip their powers15. The Act clearly bypasses the constitutional mandate and provisions of Kerala Panchayat Raj Act of 199416 and makes them redundant in declared special tourism areas.

STZs ensure a spatial exclusion for tourism and its capital expansion. All other socio-economic processes of the region is restrained. Such a model bypasses the existing economic, environmental and cultural processes of the region, and cannot be sustainable in the contexts of the people of the region. So the discourses on sustainability can only imply sustainability of corporates and private companies/individuals and not of the local communities. Apart from the contradictions emerging from the claims of sustainability, other contradictions are noted like tourist locations being converted into exclusive “islands”, isolating tourists from the realities of the local environment, culture and economy (EQUATIONS 2009: 21). But even as such isolation is designed, tourism seeks to artificially create locally specific ‘environment’:

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14 With the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act passed in 1993, the division of powers and functions have further trickled down to the panchayat at the village level, and the Municipality/ Municipal Corporation at the town and city levels respectively

15 www.keralatourismwatch.org/node/87

16 The Act laid the provision of a three tier system of Panchayat for the first time in the village, block and district level in the rural areas and one tier system of urban local government such as Municipality in the less urbanized areas or Municipal Corporation in the more urbanized areas. Local governments were vested with the powers and responsibilities of economic development and social justice in their respective areas.
The Team then reached Kumarakom, where there are a number of resorts in the backwater setting. The Team visited one such resort “Coconut Lagoon”, which has won the KPCB award for the best eco-friendly resort, as it hosts a butterfly garden, wherein 90 species of butterflies are reported to have been recorded; different birds like Indian koel, small green barbet, sunbirds, tailor bird, plain-wren warbler, magpie robin, etc., and different species of wasps, spiders, bees including honeybees, dragon and damsel flies. An extensive garden with a good collection of rare and endangered species of trees and plants numbering about 190 species, is also there in the resort. There is also a fish sanctuary in the Resort, where the breeding of pearl spot..., a delicacy for Keralites, is taken up. The Vechur cow, an endemic species to the region, which is threatened, is being rehabilitated at the resort in collaboration with the Centre for Advanced Studies in Animal Genetic and Breeding under the Kerala Agricultural University, Mannuthy (EQUATIONS 2009: 21).

Here the connotations of ‘environment’ are that which can be created based on the natural possibilities of the life world. Hence it takes on a new dimension that differs from houseboat tourism of enhancing views of the ‘scene’ that is a product of the ways of life and the natural environment of the region. The new layering, which also enclaves spaces through STZs, is a spatial process that excludes local people.

**SCR: Vision of Restructuring in Neoliberalism**

It is interesting to note that there is a widespread notion that the 'Kuttanad package' as SCR is widely known, is a package that targets the benefits of the farmers. But a close reading of the document shows that it prioritises tourism, even as there are ample suggestions for the agricultural sector. So there is sufficient confusion on the intent of the document and this confusion becomes very concrete because (1) the context of formulating and visualising a plan for Kuttanad that was entrusted to M.S.Swaminathan Foundation, was the agrarian distress in different parts of the country; and (2) backwater tourism in Kuttanad depends on agriculture for providing the 'setting' of greenery.

SCR therefore represents an important document to be analysed- one that represents the neoliberal rationalisations and the relationships with the state in the process of redefining the region for deeper commercial benefits. The document opens with the sentence: 'Every calamity presents opportunities for progress provided we learn appropriate lessons from the calamity and apply effective remedies to prevent its recurrence'. Here the calamity referred to is the agrarian distress, and the opportunity is of spatial restructuring for tourism, for which the improvement of the environment, and the maintenance of agriculture are necessary pre-conditions. Hence three factors - environment, agriculture and tourism, are enmeshed in the document; a reading of the document needs to take cognizance of their interconnections, otherwise it loses its real import of economic restructuring. The document is a blueprint to

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17 On behalf of the Planning Commission, a team visited Vembanad Lake and its vicinity in 2008, to review the implementation of National Wetland Conservation and Management Programme
develop a spatial and economic relationship of primacy for tourism. A review of SCR is done to analyse the proposed restructuring in terms of capital, labour and environment. It is also attempted to examine the nature of neoliberal discourse on environment in the document.

**Spatial Enclaving: 'Special Agricultural Zone'**

SCR takes a strong cognizance of the ecological relationships in Kuttanad. The sharp difference between the document and the ethos of green revolution in an earlier phase\(^\text{18}\) is that green revolution had destroyed ecological interlinkages. As it operated within the logic of food security, the primacy of paddy was developed to such an extent in Kuttanad that it destroyed the interlinkages that had existed with other branches of production in the region like coconut, fish, mussels and duck. SCR aspires to restore the lost interlinkages of ecology and that between different branches of production, and suggests an 'evergreen revolution' that can be ushered in through organic farming and green agriculture with integrated pest management, nutrient supply and natural resource management. It is derived that the 'green' revolution of cultivation is critiqued to give way to 'evergreen' revolution that implies sustainability. But this has to be assessed in the background of the emphasis of global capital in NL is on export-oriented agricultural production in the third world (discussed in Chapter 5). This is often sought to be done through enclaving lands as 'special zones'. Swaminathan (2014), as the Chairperson of National Farmers' Commission, has been recommending that the land acquisition law should strictly classify all good farmlands in India as 'Special Agricultural Zone' (SAZ). In SCR, one of the most prominent recommendations is the declaration of Kuttanad as SAZ. Conceptually 'Special Zones' emphasise linkage with the international market. By enclaving land as 'Special Zones', it gives full authority to the corporate sector:

‘India’s new farmers!’ screams a glossy business magazine cover, with pictures of industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Sunil Mittal. ‘The Big Indian Land Rush’ is the cover of another business weekly, with highlights, in red, on how much land corporate houses are acquiring for Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Along with agribusiness, SEZ is the big new buzzword in corporate circles, and in the media too... While these new Indian farmers are being hailed, the existing ones seem all but forgotten. However, farmers’ struggles are intensifying...(Menon 2007: 1)

SCR (2007: 118) attempts to be cautious about the widespread protests on SEZs: 'It is clarified that SAZ unlike the SEZ does neither displace farmers nor lead to deprivation of their land, but facilitate to receive regular support from Central and State governments for infrastructure and agricultural prosperity'. As far as the farmers are concerned, what SCR says would be true, but in evaluating special zones for structural reforms, Suzuki (2005) clearly

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\(^{18}\) in which Swaminathan had played a significant role in its rationalisations
demonstrates that the plan in 'agricultural zones' is to encourage companies to engage in agribusiness, to take preferential measures for agricultural land to be used for allotment gardens, and to extend approval for acquisition of agricultural land.

**Discourse on Environment**

In NL 'environment' is a new entrant in the contestations between labour and capital, which is not only a real issue for the people, but also a crisis for capital itself. Hence on one hand, people organise around the issue of environment deterioration and enclavisation of spaces, and on the other, capital builds new rationalisations based on environment conservation and rejuvenation. The nuances of environmental discourse in NL can be gathered from the main recommendations for Kuttanad in SCR, which uses it to promote Kuttanad as a tourism zone.

Environmental conservation is sought in the following ways:

1. Building of natural- ecological linkages lost through an earlier phase of commercial agriculture
2. restoring of the ecology of Kuttanad
3. 'cleaning up' the water weeds from the waterways and regular opening of TSWB
4. transition to organic farming
5. revival of coconut cultivation
6. integration of paddy cultivation with fish production
7. integration of coconut cultivation with vegetable cultivation and livestock rearing

The suggestions made for paddy cultivation are:

1. revival of paddy cultivation through mechanisation
2. training of labour to handle machines and to organise knowledge centres
3. transit from double cropping to single cropping of paddy with fish/duck integration
4. role of state government to support farmers through subsidies and infrastructure development

The linkages made with development of tourism are:

1. tourism would get a good base with the above mentioned developments
2. expansion of tourism through the development of 'farm tourism' along with the existing 'water tourism'

SCR supports paddy cultivation as a prerequisite for tourism. The rejuvenation of environment and agriculture become the two most important conditions:

The challenge now is to conserve and enhance the beauty and bounty of this ecosystem by creating an economic stake in its conservation. This will imply that the livelihood security of the farm, fisher and other families living in this area must be strengthened through better infrastructure and multiple avenues of market driven income earning opportunities. The ecological regeneration would hopefully make the Vembanad Kayal one of the most beautiful Ramsar Sites in the world, a paradise for those who love the beauty and diversity of Nature. Alappuzha district should rediscover its economic glory of the past with all its agricultural resources put to optimum sustainable use for agrarian prosperity and to emerge as the jewel in God’s own country (SCR 2007: 25).

Tourism is symbolised by the caption 'God’s own country'. SCR states that the impoverished soil, contaminated water and fallow fields have created a land exhausted from a former boom of high production. In the case of Kuttanad, the environment discourse is on a region that is neither pristine nor occupied by tribal societies. It is a region that is ecologically degraded by long years of chemical usage in cultivation. Kuttanad cannot sell tourism without an ecological rejuvenation. SCR recommends the restructuring of the region through SAZ, ‘as an institutional mechanism, which will help to address in a holistic manner all links in the conservation, cultivation, consumption and commerce chain’. Its aesthetics can be repainted (‘taking Kuttanad to its old glory’) only through green paddy field, coconut palms and clean waters.

With tourism being the largest industry in the neoliberal world, SCR offers a blueprint for restructuring Kuttanad through tourism. The integrated approach recommended contradicts the practices of the previous phase of capital (of agriculture). SCR suggests decreased usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and the adoption of organic farming. This can promote agribusiness, the marketing of organic products that have a high-end market locally, nationally and internationally.

The Question of Agricultural Labour

Commercial production of paddy had exhausted Kuttanad's environs; capital now gears up to restructure the region for another phase of production. The discourse on environment becomes very useful to:

...transform Kuttanad from being an agrarian hot spot to a Green Pride of India in God’s own country (SCR 2007: 25)

Restructuring of Kuttanad in SCR seeks a transition from an agrarian to a tourist Kuttanad. Yet, as the former provides the raw materials in the form of visual appeal for the latter to
operate, agriculture needs to be maintained. But in what ways? Through SAZ, an atmosphere can be maintained in favour of capital vis-a-vis labour in agriculture. Labour in Kuttanad had successfully organised, whose quality is referred to in the document as 'agrarian hotspot'. The trade union assertions had been especially vibrant in the 1970s, when agricultural production was also at its peak. There is a fear of labour unrest as Swaminathan (2008) observes, '...jobless growth in industry and stagnant farm growth will lead to social unrest as witnessed in many states... where Maoists are spreading their tentacles'. SCR (2007: 16) recommends the depoliticisation of padashekaram samithies. Employment and income generation is sought to be expanded by training the labour force to handle agricultural machines, the integration of paddy with other branches of production, and the enhancement of secondary production from coconut and coir.

The Question of Fishery

Tourism overpowers the fishing activity by being a powerful player in the same space—of Vembanad Lake. Even as there are suggestions made for the fisher folk and they are dealt with a lot of sympathy in SCR, like 'free rations be distributed among them during the times when TSWB is closed' (pp 30), a critical appraisal of TSWB is not done. There are recommendations of strengthening it, and not much negotiations are emerging in favour of the fishing sector. Moreover in many instances, fishery is linked more with tourism than with the problems of traditional fishing:

It is important that the Rani (T block) and Chithira (Q block) padasekharams (402 ha), now being left abandoned and abused by dredging are immediately restored for paddy cultivation. The investment being made on their infrastructure will not be justified if this return does not happen. In case the land is not to be used for regular paddy cultivation, these padasekharams may be converted into a major fishery sanctuary for conservation and enriching of endemic fish species and black clam (SCR 2007: 48-9).

Environment in Daily Lives vis-A-vis Environment Discourse

By the year 2007 when SCR was prepared, tourism had already made a notable entry in Kuttanad through house-boats and resorts. It is not only pollution, but the conflicting situations of tourism development with the traditional fishing sector, the destruction of fishing nets through tourist boats, interventions in to the privacy of people in everyday life, the destruction of mangroves through tourist resorts, increasing problems of drinking water, price hikes of daily consumption food items like fish, and trafficking are serious issues in the region emerging through tourism. But we do not find discussions of these problems in SCR, even as the document recommends a deepening of tourism industry in the region.

Environment becomes a terminology that would create the right ambience for tourism, it is this connotation that is utilised in SCR. On the other hand, there are real issues of survival of
people who have either been displaced from farm labour or who are marginalised from traditional fishing and other livelihoods. 'Environment' protection for these people mean regulations and rejuvenation of the ecology so as to enable them to live decently, and be able to take care of at least the basic necessities of life.

The two aspects mentioned above represent the two ends of the spectrum of visioning the environment, one by capital and the other by labour, which are placed in contradictory relationships in capitalism. It is clearly the former connotation of environment that is represented by SCR. From the field there are mixed responses to SCR. Whereas many see it as a possibility of rejuvenation of the environment, some environment groups have been voicing opposition to the agenda of tourism. The contesting ideological positions become complex as ‘environment’ emerges as a common concern, but with different political implications.

**The Spatial Becomes The Social: Caste And Gender Implications**

Adding to the historic layerings of caste and gender (examined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6) we have a new layering being developed through tourism. In these developments, the spatial evolves with well-defined social implications:

Tourist resorts: In the times when agriculture held spatio-economic primacy in the region (up to early 2000s), the prime economic lands were those which were good for paddy cultivation. In this spatial pattern, fringe lands consisted of small and numerous islands in the Vembanad Lake, generally occupied by the lower socio-economic strata. As tourism developed at a fast pace since the early 2000s, the fringe lands became prime for building tourist resorts due to their locational advantages of the ‘scene’ (Pred 1985). This process brings forth a systematic elimination of land ownership by the lower socio-economic strata of people.

In the land use shifts of agricultural lands for tourism industry, these are mostly happening on the lands of small land holders, belonging to the lower socio-economic strata. Hence the physical spaces that are being shaped for tourism is a process of displacement from land of the lower caste and class.

House-boat tourism – This activity that now has a predominant presence in the Vembanad Lake, overlaps with the ecological and economic spaces of the fishers and mussel gatherers. The pollution of the Lake impacts the health of mussel gatherers, they are also impacted through the destruction of fishing nets by house boats. There are many instances in recent times of resistance by the fisher folk against the launching of tourist water sport activities in the Lake.
Special zones - The special zones that have actualised in Kuttanad and that which are being proposed have the potential threat of cutting at the base of local/ panchayat level processes that have not only been looked upon as desired and achieved democratic processes in the state, but also as potential and actual processes that have the capacity to tackle local level problems faced by the people. Local bodies have mobilised as those who understand local level ecological, economic, social and cultural problems, which are under threat through special zones. The impacts would be most for the lower socio-economic strata and women.

Paddy cultivation and tourism - The landed class of people and those who are dealing with paddy cultivation at large scales of operation, are not seriously threatened by tourism. They do hold a shared regional concern on the environment and perhaps also hold a perceived threat of spatial competition which is new for Kuttanad that has so far been operating through the primacy of paddy cultivation. With the NL visioning of Kuttanad in SCR, capital seeks to build a spatially complimentary and co-operative attitude between the emerging and expanding commercial relations in cultivation and tourism. These processes have already set in a rearticulation of class and caste. The lack of employment options for women and sex-tourism aspects are evident. But the operation of patriarchy needs to be explored more to obtain the nuances of the tourism sector. The two economic activities that now share primacy, deal with large capital and turnover. The employment that they offer to local people is very low. The meagre labour market, is absorbed by the OBCs, with hardly any absorption of women and dalits.

Women and Dalits with in Labour

Spaces of employment - Dalits and women do not figure anywhere in the commercial processes described above. Even as house boats employ some persons from the locality, women and dalits are not included in the category. Women are absent because of the male dominated labour absorption that pertains not only to machine related activities like driving, but also to those like cooking, which are within the traditional social divisions of labour, considered as women's work. But in the transition of such work from the family arena to the market, they are inevitably entrusted on male hands. Such processes entail the moving in of women in to the family arena, especially of the OBC category. The social dignity of women is perceived to be enhanced by confinement to homes (an upper caste-class value), which is patriarchal. The social dignity of dalit men and women are perceived by themselves as being enhanced by moving out of suppressive labour spaces designed by caste. This move is something emerging out of dalit consciousness. But the newly emerging tourism sector does not offer them any employment.
Environmental impacts - Even as the environmental problem of water pollution impacts the entire region, the people who have the least resources and thereby directly more dependent on the environment in day-to-day life, are more crucially impacted. For instance, potable water becomes a greater problem for the poor and the dalits, the two categories that most often overlap. Women often have to walk for 2 km to fetch water for drinking and cooking purposes.

**Conclusion**

In the last 15 years, new spaces created through tourism imply the process of 'accumulation by dispossession', encroaching upon prior spaces of production. The lands of the subalterns, are being purchased by tourist entrepreneurs and corporates. At the same time, the space of economic operation of fishers and mussel gatherers confront a direct conflict with tourism in Vembanad Lake. A KSSP activist in Kuttanad had compared the plight of the fisher-folk with that of the tribal society being displaced with accelerated intensity in NL: 'Just as the forests are to the adivasis, the lakes are to the fisher-folk...'

In tourism, there is a reification that seeks to establish environment as an object so it appears as a relation between things:

...value is an expression, not of any physical-technical characteristic of the object, but the social relations with which it is connected in the commodity economy (Ollman 2003: 4).

In the process of reification that causes multiple connotations of the term 'environment', it becomes on one hand a commodity for capital and on the other, an embedded reality for people living in Kuttanad. This emerges very prominently from the study. Tourism does not convert environment to produce in the way that agriculture and industries do. Instead it operates through sensuousness which tourists can buy, say the experiencing of nature. Hence the role played by labour is of hospitality, and sale is promoted by advertising imageries of the region, created for the purpose. Environment becomes a truncated imagery, in which its social relations are excluded. This aspect gets deepened in NL as special zones create an ambience for tourism, and at the same time spatially exclude local people from the zones, and their rights to environment and livelihood.

From the field observations and discussions with people, it is evident that the adverse environmental and cultural consequences are not an opinion predicted only by a minority of critics (as observed by Karlaganis and Narayan 2014), but recognised by a wide section of people living in Kuttanad. But they are caught in a dilemma of a deep experience of environmental pollution and recognition of its causes on one hand, and the employment possibilities in tourism giving hope in a situation of closure of labour possibilities in
agriculture and the absence of any other job opportunities in the region. There is a deep
cultural problematisation of sex trade in house boats, and of toilet wastes dumped in the water
bodies.

Unlike paddy cultivation that had traditionally created a strong bond between land, capital
and labour, labour is not defined by such marked characters of time and space in tourism. The
local bonding of labour with the industry is very partial and ad hoc. The tourism industry
qualifies itself with a non-uniform and hierarchical structure of labour consisting of high-end
labour in the tourist resorts (often equipped with management degrees) and the low-end
labour of tourist house-boats. In terms of space (location) and in terms of time (ad hocism of
employment), labour in tourism represents a highly disintegrated sector. Hence they are not
likely to identify themselves collectively as a class of labour or assert their rights as happened
in agriculture.

The neoliberal impact on women and dalits through tourism, is one of further shrinkage of
economic spaces. Dalits who have been displaced from agriculture, are not seen to be
absorbed in tourism. The younger generation women gets confined to homes (mainly OBCs),
are employed as sales girls, or become part of sex tourism. They are alienated from any
political or social organisations, reflecting Chakravarti’s (2009) analysis of subordination and
compliance of the lives of women located at the intersections of class, caste and patriarchy.

The primacy of production activities in contemporary Kuttanad defined by paddy cultivation
and tourism are together reorienting the spatial and social structures of the region through
capital accumulation from both the activities being vested in the hands of upper class-caste
and men. The ecological and economic linkages to the region through these as well as other
activities through medium and small enterprises and through labour have overwhelmingly
eliminated women and dalits, and are occupied by OBC men.

SCR demonstrates the paradoxes of environmental discourses in NL. It does not take
cognizance of the real life challenges of people, even as it champions the cause of
environmental conservation. Moreover, the recommendations on labour are done without any
camouflage: labour needs to be given some space, so that they do not rebel. SCR visions
Kuttanad as a space to be reoriented in a large scale for capital. Except for resistance to SCR
from local environmental groups on the issue of the document being a promoter of tourism,
this is something that has not obtained sufficient analysis from the Left political groups, civil
society or women’s groups. This situation is not very surprising, because the document is
based on a thorough grounding on the region, and it has consulted various organisations and
people in the process of its preparation. The farmers see the process as an attempt to address
their problems. But what is evident, and can come out only through a political reading of
Restructuring of regions in NL, is that a new spatial layering of capital is suggested, in which both tourism and agriculture link to the global market. The document recognises the ecological and region-specific dependence of tourism on agriculture in Kuttanad, and works out a NL vision by building on that relationship, which cannot be foregone if tourism is to flourish.

The organised movements for environment protection, labour rights and resistance to encroachment of spaces, by CPI(M), its youth wing, DYFI, civil society groups like KSSP and environmental groups, are localised. These are yet to make an impact on the whole region. As compared to the agrarian movements of the past, the contemporary struggles have smaller scales of operation, even as neoliberal capital is geared up for large scales of impact. The contemporary solidarity in spatial struggles of Left-political and environment groups in Kuttanad require special mention, as a very encouraging scenario that shows labour and environment as two sides of the same coin. Such solidarity and dialogue needs to be built across dalit, Left-political, environmental and women's groups to strengthen the struggles for reclaiming social spaces in Kuttanad for labour, dalits and women.