CONCLUSION
Ecotourism is 'environment- friendly' tourism which promises to fulfill dual goals of economic development and the conservation of natural environment. It is the fastest growing segment of international tourism, which contributes to the environmental protection and calls for the sustainable use of natural resources for tourism development. It is also known as responsible tourism that values natural environment and respects the host culture.

Ecotourism stresses on greater public participation in planning and decision-making concerning resource use. The communities form a critical part of ecotourism for the development and the conservation of natural resources, hence it embraces 'community- friendly' tourism. It ensures the socio- economic development through human resource development to benefit and empower the local communities. As it emphasizes on public participation and pays back handsomely it is also known as 'market- friendly' tourism.

Ecotourism has the potential for economic development in general and tourism development in particular. It has the advantage of maximum value- addition, as costs of inputs are low. It also serves as a means to promote sustainable development while at the same time creates an economic justification for the preservation of natural areas and well being of local people. In principle, ecotourism ensures economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability.

This study deals with two island economies that are much separated geographically but share certain common issues and problems related to their development. Both the countries are heavily depending on tourism thus any threat to the sustainability of the tourism bound to affect their
economic growth. Few years ago, both the countries adopted ecotourism as development strategy to boost their economy. Fiji in this regard is much advance and ahead of Maldives. There is a remarkable difference in the approach and stages at which they have reached and the results that have achieved by using the same principle. But still the task remains a highly challenging one for both the economies. Comparatively, Fiji adopted ecotourism in 1989 whereas Maldives is still depending more on the conventional tourism principles. It is only recently that Maldivian policymakers realized the significant role of ecotourism in the development of economy without destroying/degrading the limited natural resources that they possess.

The scarcity of natural resources, vulnerability and fragility of the ecosystem and limited development options of both the economies have brought a sea change in the policy makers' mind. Fiji has already drafted a well-balanced village based policy for ecotourism.

The Ministry of Tourism and Fiji Visitors Bureau has introduced numerous positive steps regarding ecotourism into its tourism planning. They have classified their ecotourism products into natural, historical and cultural resources and are promoting village based ecotourism projects and programs. With the financial assistance and aid from New Zealand government Fiji has developed ecotourism in rural areas of Viti Levu and surrounding highlands. The villagers are working in close coordination with the government officials and NGO’s that are operational ecotourism in their areas. It has been observed during the fieldwork that the village based ecotourism projects does not require large-scale investment and expensive infrastructure like luxury hotels and sports
facilities. The ranges of tourists who visit Fiji are mostly small female group, honeymooners, students and retired couples.

For human resource development the locals have been trained as eco-guides. The visitors centre and guides play a vital role for raising awareness among tourists about indigenous, folklore, lifestyle and the crafts. Various efforts have been made by the government in educating the people who have a direct or indirect involvement in the ecotourism programs and policies.

These positive efforts notwithstanding accompany with lot many bottlenecks and roadblocks are hampering the execution of the ecotourism draft plan. The major bottlenecks of the policy that have not been realized till date are: 1) within Fiji, tourism is concentrated only on the west of Viti Levu. 2) No distinction has been made between the densities allowed in the mainland and the island resorts by the department of town and country planning. 3) Although the guidelines have been formulated, there is no account of infrastructural provision for water, power, sewage and solid waste collection, treatment and disposal, staff housing and transport infrastructure of individual resorts. 4) Fiji has defined ecotourism in its own way but the term 'ecotourist' has not been defined in any of the policy document. 5) Fiji has identified its ecotourism products under three broad classes (cultural, historical and natural products) but documentation and listing of these products are nonexistent. 6) Lack of government funding (no funds are provided in Fiji's budget for the excavation and study of relics etc that requires protection). Adequate measures and proper management is lacking to protect cultural areas and historical structures. 7) There is no formal structure or organization through which the main stakeholders in village- based, nature- oriented tourism can come together
regularly and frequently to discuss issues of common concern or to inform or learn from other participants in the tourism industry.

An integrated as well as well designed national policy for cultural heritage and the arts in Fiji would be able to offer tourists a more vibrant cultural (heritage) experience.

In contrast to the Fijian natural setting and ecotourism products, Maldives has marine environment that is critical to its natural and cultural heritage. Tourism in Maldives is centered on the coral reefs. Reefs happen to be one of the most important products the resorts are trying to sell apart from sun, sand and the sea. It is famous for its unique marine environment and a significant portion of the tourists comes to Maldives to enjoy and admire the beauty of underwater gardens of corals and the colorful fishes. Diving, snorkelling, water- sports sun and white sandy beaches are the products sold for the tourists in Maldives. Maldives is trying to establish itself as the world class 'Premium Ecotourism Destination'. To mark this, Maldives hosted a 'WTO Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development of Ecotourism' in Male on 11th February 2002. The Government of Maldives is foresighted and embarked on the economic value of the tourism industry to achieve balanced, desired and sustainable results. For this Maldives has firm commitment to offer high value indigenous products, top priority to quality research and environmental programs and campaigns.

It is an imperative to Madivian tourism to encourage locals to enter and work in the tourism industry as the present size of the trained Maldivian work force available, is inadequate for the needs of the tourism industry. A number of initiatives to mobilize domestic and foreign capital have come up recently showing the Governments' resolve to make tourism
a focus area. Maldives in order to live up to the expectation of 'Premium Ecotourism Destination' needs to encourage the local construction industry to provide good quality accommodation to the tourists. For Maldives it is an imperative to maintain the reefs around the resorts in healthy conditions. In Maldives, although emphasis has been laid to achieve an image of Premium Ecotourism, there is no agreed criterion for defining a 'ecotourism product' and definition of ecotourism.

Despite the significant benefits and positive steps taken there are localized impacts of tourism. There is a dire need for greater public awareness about the natural and cultural resources. This will enable the smoother implementation of the policies drafted by the Government and will reap rich dividends for the Maldivian economy. The tourism industry in the Maldives is sustaining and prospering on corals, so proper management of the coral reef resources are of paramount importance.

The values of a community are most critical component in any scheme of environmental management and it can have tremendous impact and role in order to sensitize and raise public awareness. Public awareness, environmental education and training are indispensable for the successful running of ecotourism in both the island economies. Active participation by local people at every level starting from planning, evaluation, and implementation of ecotourism program can achieve sustainable results. This aspect of ecotourism cannot be ignored as it supports socio-cultural dimensions of an area. Along with the natural environment, the socio-cultural environment serves both as an attractive option and as a recipient of ecotourism impact. Ecotourism has also been considered as a potential tool to form a balance between environment development and conservation through environmental education programs and campaigns. For that matter
government and planners must share the responsibilities with various stakeholders' and the design of the future. There is a need to increase people's sensitivity and involvement in finding solutions, which will promote sustainable ecotourism development.

The Ecotourism plan should be people centered and aimed at poverty alleviation by generating productive employment framed by the ethos of sustainable economic growth. Ecotourism in most optimistic sense is seen as contributing to societal education, promoting the notion that the environment can and must be used on a sustainable basis. The strategy for the development of the ecotourism is based on the principle of low cost economy, higher levels of productivity, efficiency in use of infrastructure and provision of clean environment. Development strategies should be designed to achieve sound environmental management, a relatively stable pattern of employment, diversification of the economic base, and avoidance of sudden demographic fluctuations. Sustainable development requires multi-disciplinary scientific and technical approaches to identify potential opportunities for development available in specific island situations.

Ecotourism requires a judicious balance between the interests of hosts, visitors and the natural resources. Ecotourism resources are vulnerable and an appropriate regional planning based on conservation principles should meet three criteria-

a) Economic viability
b) Socio-cultural acceptability
c) Environmental sustainability.

Authorities should prepare physical and landuse zoning plans to expedite development of potential tourism resorts. The urgent measures
needed to effectively control and regulate such a growth is through landuse zoning expeditiously. The landuse-zoning plans should promote sustainable growth in potential resorts and prevent the unpleasant conflicting coastal land utilization. The expansion of ecotourism is desirable because of the pervasiveness of underdevelopment, the coherence of ecotourism to local circumstances and the relatively pristine state of the natural environment. A tourism database is essential to local bodies and authorities so that the social, economic and environmental impacts of ecotourism are well understood. More specific, social and environmental geodata is required. Maps and data of tourist bed nights or accommodation capacity will continue to be useful indicator for the geographical distribution and intensity of tourism.

An Ecotourism Research Working Group should be developed to have comprehensive knowledge on the economic, environmental and social aspects of tourism to ensure that these three are sustainable for the benefit for all present and future generation. Spectrum of research should encompass environmental issues, market research, economic impact, cultural and social issues and provision of publicly funded facilities.

Continual scientific monitoring with the help of remote sensing techniques of the fragile ecology of the atolls and reef can also be of great help in in order to ensure that tourism plays a positive role in the conservation of the environment. Remote Sensing techniques can be of immense help in regulating tourist stream, lessening the impact of environment degradation, eco-effective management, planning as well as monitoring population species and human activity concurrently, determining the changes in the number of species and the vegetation cover over time for establishing cause and effect.
Geographic Information System will further help in the identification of potential areas for tourism. The respect for cultural diversity and its conservation should be an important part of an overall conservation strategy and may be the only practical means to attain these goals.

Sustainable ecotourism development holds the promise of fairness to future generations. For the foreseeable future, tourism and tourism-related activities would remain a major source of income and employment in both the countries. To conclude, it is suggested that the principals and concept of ecotourism should be familiarized at the grassroot level. To achieve the goals of ecotourism and sustainable development it is further suggested that the external pressures cannot impose sustainable development, they must be rooted in the culture, the values, the interests and priorities of the people concerned.