

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISM IN INDIA

Mrs. G. Lalitha, M.A., M.Phil.
Head, Department of History,
Vice-Principal,
St. Ann's College for Women,
Malkapuram, Visakhapatnam

Abstract: *The history of tourism developed primarily through indirect sources in the ancient period. In India, in the ancient days of agricultural abundance, export of agricultural products created an important trade link. Manufacture of steel from iron-ore for weaponry was another important item of trade by the later Vedic people. Tools and clothing were other renowned Indian products. Contemporary Greek and Hebrew writers have made note of wonder of India and its abundant wealth. Owing to the predominance of trade routes overland, crossing over Asia and Europe, lead to the development of trade tours during ancient period.*

Key Words: *Indian products, Buddhist scriptures, trade and commerce.*

Introduction:

The history of tourism developed primarily through indirect sources in the ancient period. In India, in the ancient days of agricultural abundance, export of agricultural products created an important trade link. Manufacture of steel from iron-ore for weaponry was another important item of trade by the later Vedic people. Tools and clothing were other renowned Indian products. Contemporary Greek and Hebrew writers have made note of wonder of India and its abundant wealth. Owing to the predominance of trade routes overland, crossing over Asia and Europe, lead to the development of trade tours during ancient period.

Tourism in the ancient period

In the earlier days, pilgrimage assumed great importance. Ashoka the great, travelled across India to the spread the teachings of Lord Buddha. He covered places from Pataliputra to Lumbini on to Kapilavastu and Sarnath and finally to Gaya. Ashoka the great has set up special memorials at each spot and

set up rest houses for travellers to take rest. Trees were planted along the road sides to give shelter to travellers from hot sun. Kanishka the Great, was an emperor of the Kushan dynasty. His conquests and patronage of Buddhism played an important role in the development of the Silk Road. Silk Road played very important role in facilitating economic, cultural, political and religious interactions between the East and West. Harshavardhana was another great emperor who gently influenced by the Buddhist teachings, built institutions and Dharamsalas for the travellers. Rest houses were constructed in towns and countryside. A number of monasteries were built for religious tourists. By doing this travelling was very much improved and it was made convenient. Brahmadeya villages evolved into centres of learnings attracting scholars. At this time the Buddhist Sanga established the tradition of pilgrimage, when monks visited villages and courts preaching the teachings of Lord Buddha. Rest houses were provided for the travellers.



Monasteries also attracted the monks, middlemen and laymen

The Arthashastra of Kautilya mentions about the protection given to traders and their high status in the ancient society. Insurance and safe passage for goods, regulation of prices, weights and measures and the use of precious metals as rates of exchange also talk about a well evolved mode of trade and travel. Some of the first foreigners to travel to India, were perhaps the Persians. There is mention of caravans of Persians visiting India, in the inscriptions dating to the reign of the Persian King Darius. There is also evidence of trade, commerce and cultural exchanges between Persia and India. During the rule of Chandragupta Maurya, Persian customs have been practiced in the courts. Hieun-tsang, a devout Chinese Buddhist journeyed to India in 633 AD, his journey to India was difficult and hard. He came to India to collect and translate ancient Buddhist scriptures. Several expeditions from Greece via Persia or Mesopotamia came to India. Greek writings mention that in India, chariot roads were well laid out and horses, elephants and camels were a common mode of transport. Trees for shade, wells, rest houses and security were well organised.

The Arthashastra also reveals the importance of the travel infrastructure for the empire, classification of routes and types of vehicles. This is an indication that there was a well developed mode of travel in India for the military, the commercial traveller and the civilian. Travel on inland waterways was also under state protection and regulation. In cities, market places provided access to goods brought from the remote areas. Travellers were accommodated in

overnight places of stay, known as serais at the city gates where all services were provided to them. State regulations insisted on travellers carrying with them a note for safe passage from one territory to the other. Entertainment and dancing halls were allowed, gambling was licensed and was a source of income for the state.

Tourism in the modern period

The Rail network in India placed the needs for recreation within the reach of an increasingly large number of people who had leisure time and the enough resources to enjoy. Air India came into existence with the enactment of Air Corporations Act on 1st August, 1963, and the air transport industry in India was nationalised. At the beginning, Air India operated four weekly flights on the India/UK route and three flights fortnightly on the India/Nairobi route. Today, it has an extended network of air routes linking all the continents of the globe. Air India organised various programmes to project India internationally. Sooner Indian Airlines began to establish an air transport network to link the remotest places across India. As on date, Indian Airlines has expanded its wings to nearly all countries. They have introduced many attractive schemes and offers like the Discover India package. Leave Travel Concessions encouraged domestic tourism. Concessions for the youth and students also promoted travel within the country.

In the early 1960's The ITDC (India Tourism Development Corporation) was started to provide western comforts to International visitors. The ITDC played a major role for developing modern superstructure (eg, The Ashoka group of hotels) for International tourists. The government of India established Air India offices in



London and Frankfurt to promote tourism. The tourism cell in the Ministry of Aviation was upgraded into a department. The private sector was invited to establish luxury facilities to cater the needs of high spending tourist. The pioneer in this field was Mohan Singh Oberoi, who began his career in the hotel business with the Clarks Hotel in Shimla and the Grand Hotel in Calcutta.

Tourism Development

New Types of Tourism: Since the Eighth Five Year Plan, some of the new types of tourism were introduced which were different from the usual cultural tourism, religious tourism or leisure tourism. It was under Ninth Five Year Plan lot of work was initiated and focussed promotions were done on all these special interest holidays.

Business Tourism: Business executives and technicians had to travel to various locations on account of their work. Such visits can be for installation of equipment, inspection of goods, attending business meetings, conferences, participating in fairs and exhibitions, marketing of products, etc. Since the opening of the Indian Economy in 1991 for overseas investments, this became a growing segment in India. More and more business executives started coming to India for business purpose and started adding business with pleasure in their Indian sojourn. Convention facilities and car rentals gave a big boost to this segment.

Incentive Tourism: Incentive tourism has emerged as a popular means of rewarding the employees for special achievements and contributions by several business houses especially MNCs, Insurance Companies, Banks, Pharmaceutical firms, Engineering

houses, etc. The employees are given free tickets or holiday packages to selected destinations sponsored by the company. These are given as added perks to keep the interest of the executives who are the top performers of the company. The executives also get holiday on company account. Some times the packages are extended to entire family including special discount vouchers, etc. The incentive tourism has become very attractive for the tour operators as it generally includes premium rates with travellers who are out to enjoy the best. In the Ninth Five Year Plan, this segment has been referred to as MICE – Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. Special C.D.Rom has also been released to boost this segment.

Indigenous and Natural Health

Tourism: Excessive stress at the work place and busy life in big and crowded cities make people go to unknown destinations and unwind themselves. These are generally in the forms of weekend trips to nearby resorts or long haul travel to the interiors of natural environments in search of peace. India is famous and well known for ancient healing system called Ayurveda - knowledge of life – This system combines naturopathy with various natural therapies which is very invigorating. Yoga classes are included in these therapies. These have no side effects but very much rejuvenating. All around the World there is a greater interest in this Indian Traditional Medicine System and in the Tourism Marketing this Rejuvenation packages have been included. Kerala, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu have developed quite a number of resorts with Ayurveda packages which are getting world wide attention. Similarly around the metropolitan cities within 200-300 km distance weekend resorts have come



up. From Delhi one can visit Ananda Resort, near Rishikesh or from Kochi to Munnar or Spice Village or neighbourhood from Mumbai places like Lonawala, Mahabaleshwar, near Jaipur – Mandwa or near Bangalore – Jindal, Soukya etc.

Eco-friendly Tourism/ Back to nature: Hills, Island in the Sun, walk on the nature trail etc, are the places where new breed of tourists are keen to visit. The material well-being achieved by the modern day people with various technical developments in the 21st century extended holiday satisfaction. At the same time people are looking for clear water, clean air, clean beaches and clean environment. Quite distinct from the resort tourists are the wanderlust tourists who like to move around lesser known places, unknown places (away from the crowd of holidayers), meet new people, experience environment, see and appreciate unusual customs, traditions, festivals and local food. They also prefer mountaineering, river rafting, surfing, skiing, scuba diving etc. They like to travel to destinations where pollution is nil, activity oriented offering maximum excitement, natural environment and adequate facilities. This also covers Adventure tourism with various adventure tourism activities.

Wildlife Tourism: Viewing wildlife in its natural habitat is very popular and interesting tourism. These tourists are driven to forests and wildlife parks by their desire to be with nature and to have glimpse of their favourite animals in their natural surroundings. Group of such tourists also include bird watchers. There is special emphasis to promote wildlife tour packages as India has unique wildlife heritage in Tigers, Single horned Rhinos, Asiatic Lions, varied reptiles,

etc., and good number of wildlife resorts have been developed.

Spiritual tourism/ Pilgrimage tourism: Since ancient times places of worship have been the biggest centres of attractions to pilgrims. Pilgrim tourism constitute a large percentage (over 70%) of domestic tourism in India. Places like Kedarnath, Tirupathi, Ujjain, Varanasi, Ajmer, Sabarimala, Rameswaram, Mathura, Shirdi attract lakhs of tourists every year.

Heritage Tourism: India with vast cultural and religious heritage and varied natural attractions has immense potential of growth in the tourism sector. 25 travel circuits and destinations have been identified for development through joint efforts of the Central government, the State government and the private sector. State government of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Maharashtra and Union Territory Administration of Daman and Diu have declared Bekel Beach, Puri, Konark, Sindhudurg, Muttakahu, Mammallapuram and Diu as special tourist areas for integrated development. Refurbishment of Archaeological Survey of India monuments has been taken up to boost heritage tourism involving local authorities, trusts, etc, by restoring, preserving the heritage sites and maintaining the surroundings and providing world class tourist facilities, amenities and landscaping of area around important monuments in a phased manner.

Rural Tourism/ Village tourism: Rural tourism has been identified as one of the priority areas for development of Indian Tourism. The rural tourism should be attractive and sustainable for the host community. The experience must capture the uniqueness of the Indian



village with its traditional way of life and livelihood against the backdrop of rural India. It must also provide tourism facilities in terms of accessibility, accommodation, sanitation and security, etc. Sustainable tourism activity in the rural area must harmonise well with host community. While benefiting the community economically it must stand with the social fabric and improve the quality of life in the village.

Sports Tourism: A number of countries have world class facilities for certain kind of sports activities and they become destinations by virtue of those specific sports. People who are interested in such sports rush towards those destinations. Austria and France are known for Ski holidays, South Africa, Scotland and Portugal are popular with Golf holidayers, Red Sea area and Maldives are known for Scuba diving etc. Golfers are keen to visit those countries especially Japan where golfing facilities are developed. India offers excellent opportunity for golfing holidayers. Central Ministry of tourism had extended financial aid to the State Governments from Eighth Five Year Plan to promote Golf and some new Resorts were developed in New Delhi, Noida and facilities were improved in the existing ones. Angling, skiing, water sports are also being actively promoted by the State Government with infrastructural facilities developed through proper planning.

Social Tourism: Going back to your roots and exploring the country of your origin was actively promoted since the beginning of the Eighth Five Year Plan. India has good number of people settled abroad, who are known as NRIs and they have strong family ties in India specially those who have been separated from their

friends and relatives due to work or other reasons. With special packages worked out with the National carrier, India Tourism & Private hotel chains, they were motivated to visit their hometowns during the holidays. Many of them also visit India for social functions like Marriage, Birthday functions, festivals, etc. They mainly travel to discover their roots and get themselves familiarised with the environment in which their ancestors had lived. UK, USA, Canada, South Africa, Singapore, Malaysia, etc were targeted to attract NRI's visit to India.

Shopping Tourism: The trend for collection of souvenirs typical to the country and scores of handicrafts jewellery items by tourists are globally increasing. In fact some countries are projecting themselves as Shopping Destinations. India is an excellent destination for shopping with each state having something unique to offer. There are tourists from Eastern Europe and Central Asian countries who visit India for shopping. This segment was given boost by supporting State Government to organise festival and fairs, craft melas and shopping festivals. Most of the Tourism oriented festivals like Pushkar Mela, Suraj Kund Craft Mela, Taj Mahotsav, Lucknow Festival, etc., showcase various Indian handicrafts and thus become big attraction for shoppers.

Regional Circuits Tourism: Tourism is a natural product that is not limited by particular state or regional boundaries. Tourist normally visit various tourist places which suit their requirements, accessibility and distance parameters. The tourist circuit therefore extend over several states and include many destinations. A typical tourist who visits India has a minimum itinerary covering



two or three states and sometimes even more. In order to meet the needs of this feature of Indian Tourism, it is necessary to have a coordinated approach for the development of regional circuits. State Governments were requested to look in to this aspect and identify regional circuits for development keeping in view the requirement of the tourists and utilising favourable climate for private investment during the Tourism Ministers Conference held in September, 2001 in New Delhi.

Heritage Hotels: In the National Action Plan of Tourism, 1992, the Department of Tourism had envisaged a special category of hotels known as Heritage Hotels. Consequently a new classification under Heritage Hotels was introduced which covers the functioning/proposed Palace Havelis Castles, Forts or Residence built prior to 1950 converted into hotels. The basic idea was not only to create additional infrastructure by way of rooms available but also to conserve and preserve the country's rich heritage which otherwise might be lost forever due to vagaries of time and nature, due to financial inability of the owners to maintain these buildings. These units reflect the ambience and lifestyle of the bygone era and have become an instant success. A few State Governments have identified properties which are available for conversion into heritage hotels. In Rajasthan alone there are as many as properties which have become functional as hotels.

Government Incentive for the growth of the Tourism Sector in India

Ninth Five Year Plan granted Export House status to tourism units to give boost to foreign exchange earnings, employment and income generation through tourism activities. The Government has encouraged the effective

coordination of public and private sectors to achieve synergy in the development of tourism in India. In developing tourism, it was to be ensured that the sites are conserved and the environment is preserved. The major thrust areas in the Ninth Five Year Plan (1998-2002) are as follows

Indigenous and Natural Health Tourism

Rural and Village Tourism

Adventure Tourism

Heritage Tourism

Youth and Senior Citizens Packages

Conclusion:

In 1982 Government of India promulgated comprehensive tourism policy as an important instrument of economic development and highlighted the objectives of tourism sector in India. By 1986, tourism was recognised as an industry and it become eligible for several incentives and facilities including tax incentives, subsidies, priorities in the sanctioning of loans by the State Financial Institutions and preference for providing electricity and water connections. The report became a guiding force for subsequent revision of the Tourism Policy. In 1991, tourism was declared as a priority sector for foreign investment. A new National Tourism Policy was drafted and was discussed during the last held Tourism Ministers Conference in September, 2001 to take the advantage of the liberalised economic regime and the developments taking place around the world. The same is under consideration by the Government.



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