

CLOSED FOR BUSINESS: EVALUATING SOCIO-CULTURAL EFFECTS OF THE INDIAN TOURISM GEOGRAPHY ON LOCAL BUSINESSES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry in India has developed rapidly over the last two decades, with the advent of economic liberalization and globalization. While this has led to an increase in employment and economic growth in the country, India faces problems with respect to the creation of a tourism industry which is sustainable. The country faces problems of overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and environmental problems. It is important from a policy perspective to revamp the tourism industry to tackle these issues. Furthermore, there are adverse socio-cultural effects as globalization has led to the entry of multinational corporations, which has led to the closing down of local businesses which cannot compete. In the context of tourism, this is mostly in the case of rural areas, local artisans, and indigenous communities which cannot compete with the pace of urbanized tourism. Therefore, this paper will suggest policies to better include local businesses and communities into the tourism industry, to prevent the erasure of these identities in the pursuit of globalization.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, Indian tourism, Local businesses, Tourism industry

INTRODUCTION

As of data available in 2015, the travel and tourism industry contributed a total of 124.8 billion dollars to GDP in India, which accounted for approximately 6% of India's total GDP (ET Bureau, 2017). A 2014 study found that India is one of the fastest growing tourism destinations worldwide. Placed eleventh in the list, the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in India was expected to grow an average of 6.4% annually between 2014 and 2024 (ET Bureau, 2017). Tourism in India provided more than 23.5 million jobs in 2015, and over 7.7% of Indian employees work in the tourism industry (ET Bureau, 2017). The largest source market for visitors to India was the US, followed by Bangladesh and the UK. Outbound travel from India is also is forecasted to reach 1.41 million in 2020 (ET Bureau, 2017). Therefore, tourism is a

rapidly growing industry in India with vast potential for more employment and further development.

Globalization has made it easier for people across the world to travel over longer distances, and this has thus led to an influx of tourism in India. India has several monuments, hill stations and other destinations which are extremely popular for tourists. However, with the focus on these areas, tourism has not developed in a sustainable way, taking into account the environment and infrastructural development (Anandanatarajan and Antonyraj, 2017). The main thrust of the Eighth Five Year Plan had been the development of tourism in various aspects. However, globalization and liberalization has led to conflicts between hi-tech tourism and heritage tourism, and a conflict between the commercial appeal or urban areas which are putting local businesses and artisans in a position of difficulty (Anandanatarajan and Antonyraj, 2017; Chand, Your Article Library).

This paper will examine the effects of globalization on the development of the tourism industry in India, with particular focus on local businesses. The paper will then examine the socio cultural and economic consequences on local businesses in India, and the policies implemented by the government to counteract the effects of globalization. The paper will then pose certain policy recommendations to further empower local businesses and industries, and to maintain the Indian identity of the tourism industry and prevent it from being subsumed by the Western or globalized narratives.

BACKGROUND

There has been significant growth of the tourism industry over the last two decades. The Indian government's "Incredible India" tourism campaign and the information technology growth in India have been attracting millions of foreign tourists and business tourists to India. Medical tourism has also recently mushroomed in India (Anandanatarajan and Antonyraj, 2017). The Tourism Development Corporation, Tourism Finance Corporation, Hotel Management and Catering Technology Institutes, Food Craft Institutes, Indian Institute Tourism and Travel Management, India Tourism Development Corporation, Indian Association of Tour Operators, Travel Agents Association of India and a large number of hotel management colleges, sports and adventure clubs, beach resorts etc have also contributed to the growth and development of this industry, and there has been a particular emphasis on human resource development (Anandanatarajan and Antonyraj, 2017). The first major effort to promote the industry was launched with the announcement of 1991 as the 'Visit India Year'. Enormous tourist resources were commercialized. The first ever Indian Tourism Day was celebrated on January 25, 1998.

The year 1999 was celebrated as „Explore India Millennium Year“ with a host of shows, exhibitions etc (Anandanatarajan and Antonyraj, 2017).

Tourism geography is the study of travel and tourism, as an industry and as a social and cultural activity. Tourism geography covers a wide range of interests including the environmental impact of tourism, the geographies of tourism and leisure economies, answering tourism industry and management concerns and the sociology of tourism and locations of tourism. Tourism geography is that branch of human geography that deals with the study of travel and its impact on places (Williams, 2003).

It is important from a policy perspective to examine the impact of globalization on tourism from a social and cultural perspective, as India is a country wherein there are several different identities. The entry of multi national corporations, and increased tourism has also led to an increased formation of urban middle class households, which is changing the sociology of the country (Maguire, 2019). As living standards rise and spending power increases in these hubs of tourism, it is also negatively affecting smaller businesses and rural households as resources begin to get diverted from those areas (Maguire, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial for the government to support local businesses to prevent unemployment, and a disproportionate growth of wealth inequality in the country.

Further, such globalization has also led to ‘McDonaldization’ or homogeneity in the cultures of the country where India is often perceived as one country. It has been a critique that tourist sites in India, and even spiritual sites are simply points of commodification and do not at all reflect the local cultures of the communities in question. Further, the culture that is highlighted in such places is most often, only that of the Hindu majority (Chatterjee, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Both the central and state governments of India have taken several steps to promote and support the production of local handicrafts and the growth of local businesses. There are several tourist destinations across the country wherein the government promotes the sale of local handicrafts at fair prices, and local arts are displayed for tourists to become aware of (Anandanatarajan and Antonyraj, 2017; Chand, Your Article Library). Due to government subsidies, these artisans are able to sell their goods at competitive prices so that they are prevented from being subsumed by larger shops and chains. The government also allows for lower excise and customs duties, financial assistance, skill development programs and market development assistance (DPIIT).

In 2015, the tourism ministry sanctioned funds for the development of four rural tourism sites in Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland,

Uttarakhand, Punjab and Tripura. Apart from that, it has launched a new scheme called Swadesh Darshan for integrated development of tourist circuits around specific themes (Economic Times Online, 2015). Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, the Ministry of Tourism is developing critical tourism infrastructure in the country in a sustainable and inclusive manner to make India into a world-class tourist destination (Economic Times Online, 2015). The focus under the scheme is to develop public facilities like last mile connectivity, tourist reception centres, wayside Amenities, solid waste management, illumination and landscaping. Rs 6121 crore have been sanctioned in this scheme with 77 ongoing projects (Economic Times Online, 2015).

Further, the government has provided financial assistance to states for tourism projects, and focused on sites of pilgrimage. There are also several policies focused on building of infrastructure like airports and highways, as well as the safety and security of tourists (Economic Times Online, 2015). In the 2019 budget, the government stated that one hundred new clusters will be set up in 2019-20 to enable 50,000 artisans to come into the economic value chain (PTI New Delhi, 2019). The Government will launch a mission to integrate traditional artisans and creative persons with the global market to obtain patents for them. The finance minister also stated that focus would be given to protecting the rich tribal culture of the country, with the development of a digital repository where documents, folk songs, photos and videos about their evolution, place of origin, lifestyle, architecture, education level, traditional art, folk dances and other anthropological details of the tribes in India are stored (PTI New Delhi, 2019).

However, there needs to be more of a focus on local business and traditions, with a focus on bringing benefits to local communities. Such policies do not particularly exist on a large scale, other than a few states having implemented it. Therefore, taking into account the approach of tourism geography, it is important to move the focus away from simply building infrastructure and urbanization and investment, but to ensure that local communities are also integrated into globalization (Sakshi, 2019).

Without such policies, there is a risk of the erasure of local identities and cultures dying with local businesses. The country loses traditional knowledge of art, handicrafts, literature, lesser known sites, handlooms, etc. In the following section, this paper will pose policy recommendations to better the situation of local communities and businesses so that they are not erased in the process of globalization and urbanized tourism.

CONCLUSION

Community owned tourism and establishing a strong network of co-operatives has the potential to better integrate them within the process of globalized tourism. The government must implement schemes for capacity building for local communities, which is currently something

being carried out by non governmental organizations (Mukherjee, 2017). For example, the efforts of the organization Help Tourism has allowed local communities to effectively participate in the tourism business and keep their cultures and knowledge, as well as spread awareness about the same. The government must also promote folk art based tourism enterprises, on a larger scale than is being currently implemented. Rural creative hubs are gradually emerging as new cultural tourism destinations to bring additional income opportunities to the so-far economically marginalized areas. Further government assistance would go a long way in preventing all resources from being dedicated to urban tourism hubs (Mukherjee, 2017).

Tourism policy must also focus on education tourism wherein tourists can visit community centers and learn more about local identities and culture, rather than the focus on homogenized and commercialized experiences which have become a consequence of globalization. According to this perception one of the most important international researches on this area the ATLAS research “has indicated that the experiences enjoyed most by cultural tourists tend to be those small scale, less visited places that offer a taste of 'local' or 'authentic' culture. Tourists increasingly say that they want to experience local culture, to live like locals and to find out about the real identity of the places they visit” (Csapo, 2011). Therefore, there is large potential for cultural tourism to grow in India, and the government must take steps to promote the same.

These methods of changing attitudes and actions indicate a new way of bringing about administrative reforms that are crucial to any attempts at better governance. An obvious and easy combination makes itself available in the Ministry of Textiles, which oversees the development of crafts and textiles, with the mandates of tourism and culture. Essentially, a well developed and coordinated synergy will incrementally improve national and international awareness of tangible and intangible heritage spaces, concepts, skills and livelihoods existing in India. This kind of integration will also enable the inclusion and upliftment of the simplest of occupations (Jaitly, 2014).

Livelihoods that are handled by the Ministry of Rural Development under *khadi* and *gramodyog* banner still need to be included with policies on crafts and handlooms to make the integration complete. Cultural activists and tourism experts could look for potential to showcase local assets. Its special or traditional skills would have to be mapped. Its cultural and historical heritage and places of special interest can be developed as social and cultural meeting places that stimulate conversation and creativity (Jaitly, 2014). If these are at marketplaces called local *haats*, it can retain and improve upon India’s traditional economic and social hubs. Each village would be able to showcase its specialty by making every section of the community stakeholders (Jaitly, 2014). Such models have been implemented extensively in Gujarat, Varanasi, and Rajasthan.

The government must not compromise on basic utilities such as water and electricity for these regions (Jaitly, 2014)

Government institutions to provide services to artisans of different kinds need to be revamped and upgraded to encourage tourists to visit. If these tried structures are activated with a dynamic, contemporary approach wherein all such services are considered a part of the Research & Development, which enhances the economic value of a product, it becomes a viable part of a business plan rather than a welfare and subsidy arrangement. Such establishments could then be incorporated into a tourism plan and charge a moderate fee to those who would like to visit the establishment (Jaitly, 2014).

Further, a public and private partnership model could be implemented to fill the gaps in tourism resources that currently exist. Assisting local businesses and tourism development could be included as a part of Corporate Social Responsibility. A collaborative and consultative process between the government and communities is crucial to effectively integrate local culture, and avoid westernization and globalization in the tourism industry, from resulting in erasure of Indian identities.

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