
UNIT 30 TRADE

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30.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Unit are to know:

- How does Tourism industry use Indian cultural attractions to its own end? and
- What kind of impact is made on the culture of the region/country as a consequence of this use?

30.1 INTRODUCTION

The attraction features of a country or region provide a basis for developing tourism there. But these are not the only factors which promote tourism; along with them the marketing arm of the government and private enterprises also play an important role in order to induce the tourists to visit a particular place. These agencies take the help of age old historical, cultural, and religious traditions as well as the natural assets of the country/region to create an image of mysticism, kingly grandeur or lively folk culture in the world tourism markets. Thus India is shown as one of the last untamed frontiers, with her diabolic traditions and culture, dangerous tigers, alluring mountain, seductive beaches, inviting deserts, lively but mystical oriental culture and friendly people. It must be noted that for the tourism industry culture is a product which is packaged, marketed and sold to earn profits.

Hence when tourism is understood as an industry to earn foreign exchange it uses definitions of places and people and promotes areas that fit those definitions. Thus advertisements create images of places, and evoke expectations on the part of the visitor, which in turn leads destinations to adapt to such expectations.

This Unit is addressed to understand the process of image creations on the part of tourism industry (trade) in order to study the perception of Indian culture, invoked by the industry.

30.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL SITES

Archaeological, historical, and cultural sites include cultural and national monuments, historic buildings, important religious houses such as churches, temples, mosques, etc. Prime examples of these in India are the famous cave paintings, cave and other temples, Indo-Islamic architecture, numerous regional styles, colonial architectures, etc.

The tourists are attracted, through wide publicity given by tourist agencies, to the 'oriental' religious mysticism manifest in many layered carvings on temple walls, depicting scenes from Hindu mythology or religious stories or various aspects of different deities. Similarly, erotic sculptures and paintings, boldly emblazoned in all their grandeur in Khajuraho and other temples, are projected as another major attraction which lure tourists to visit these places. The tourists are invited to treat themselves with these diverse subjects of carving and paintings and understand that full human life must concern itself with religious, sexual and artistic experience. But in order to earn more and more revenue, such specific features, which are

but one part of the many faceted Indian religious cultural milieu, are often sold by tourism industry through glossy brochures in the process converting 'oriental' into objects given to the pleasure of flesh.

Another aspect that deserves a consideration relates to religion. India is reflected as a land where Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Islamic and Sikh religions co-exist along with their manifest symbols i.e. Temples, Mosques, Chaityas and Gurdwaras. The glossy promotional pamphlets describe India as a land of religious mystics having more than just a normal share of wise men and religious philosophers. The temples are truly described as architectural delight. For instance, Konark with its 13th century Sun temple never fails to inspire an awe, though the temple proper has been long lost to the elements and what stands today is only a chariot whose exquisite stone wheels have become a symbol of Orissa. Similarly, Jama Masjid at Delhi leaves the tourist dumbstruck, not to mention Sanchi Stupa near Vidisha, Dilwara Temple at Mount Abu, Golden temple at Amritsar and the churches in Goa. The Buddhist religious sites are being marketed as major tourist attractions in the South East Asian tourism generating markets.

It may, however, be noted that since tourism is considered an industry, any attraction of the country/region, be it cultural, ethnic or religious, becomes a commodity to the promoters which can be sold in the market. Thus religious dances and temple fairs are organized and in several cases these places become accessible only through varying rates of entry fee. We must understand that the significance of such places lay in the faith of the believers, something which cannot be understood by tourists, by buying tickets to the show. This kind of commodification of religious and cultural activities violates the very meaning of the ritual, its authenticity and its power for the people.

Similarly, tourists are lured to see the magnificent architectural wonders like Red Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Taj Mahal, etc. These are often described as living examples of princely Indian culture. Tourists in some cases are even invited to experience the extravagant life of kings, and colonial rulers by offering them a stay in the oriental palace settings. To the tourists, mostly European, an opulent colonial ambience is recreated through projects like Palace-on Wheel type trains. The focus of archaeological and historic tourism thus gets located mostly on objects like forts, palaces and havelis of rulers and wealthy persons. A major difficulty that is encountered as a consequence of such lopsided projections is that they invariably portray an elite perception of the past for the visitors and in the process, often omit the less glittering yet more significant realities of our cultural heritage. This elite perception makes heritage sensual rather than conceptual – something that is to be experienced, rather than consumed.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) What do you understand by cultural, historic and archaeological sites?

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- 2) Discuss the negative and positive impacts of tourism promotion on the archaeological sites?

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30.3 ARTS AND HANDICRAFTS

Referring to visual arts such as paintings and other artefacts, and handicrafts are important attractions for tourists. They form an important sub-set of cultural tourism which has been discovered as an effective marketing tool to attract those travellers with special interest in arts and crafts. We notice that commercial art galleries, antique shops and museums (which also include site museums associated with specific archaeological, cultural, historical or natural features) are developed to tap tourists, with special interest in heritage and art. This has also made various State governments in India to open up arts and handicrafts emporium. These centres aim at maintaining minimum quality standards, pay the producer an equitable price and set a fair pricing structure. The tourists are informed about these centers through hyper publicity making these centres an attraction in themselves inviting visits. It is generally observed that demonstrations by the artists and craft persons in making art and craft objects can be an interesting and educational experience for tourists and may induce them to make purchases. In order to induce tourists to buy the local artefacts, various cultural festivals related to local traditions and arts are also organized.

An important question with regard to the promotion of art and handicrafts is whether the authenticity in traditional styles should be maintained or not? There are two schools of thought in this respect. The first school points out that authenticity, at least in terms of utilizing traditional skills, techniques, motifs and materials, should be maintained. The other school thinks that designs can be modified to suit tourist market demand.

In the tourism industry creation of jobs and earning foreign exchange is often considered the prime objective of all promotional activity. Obviously then authenticity gets sacrificed and the market forces asking for quantity production of artefacts begin to rule the roost.

Another serious side of this issue relates to the role of middlemen. No doubt tourism helps in preserving various cultural manifestations - artefacts and makers of these artefacts are encouraged through the medium of state emporiums, festivals and private entrepreneurs. But tourism industry is controlled by middlemen, who dictate to the artists what sells and in the process also make the real profit. In the process the 'real thing' is 'prettified' and 'deodorized' so much so that, according to a researcher, the craftsmen in Goa, and Rajasthan have forgotten traditional patterns, shapes and designs.

Thus while tourism lives off culture it also destroys it. In Khajuraho, for instance, the villagers have taken to selling their ancestral vessels to the tourists. Cheap aluminium vessels replace these time honoured things.

Tourism has furthered the process of impoverishing culture by claiming to make it into an "authentic show". The art objects are often injured in this cultural oversell. For example, it is common to find Ganeshas, Natrajas, Devis in the Indian drawing rooms 'on show'. The attitude is normally found among the members of urban middle and upper middle class. They curse their rootlessness and their technology ridden existence and pine for "simple life". In their menu, simple equals real/natural and authentic equals rural.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) How are arts and handicrafts converted into tourist attractions?

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2) Tourism has a negative impact on the preservation of arts and handicrafts. Discuss.

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30.4 PERFORMING ARTS

The Performing Art forms (dance, music, drama, etc.) are important attractions for tourists. Performing art centres and theaters are often developed at considerable cost for such presentation, primarily for the benefits of residents but often substantially supported by tourists. Moreover, special cultural events such as religious carnivals, and fairs, or cultural festivals at particular places (for instance, **Pushkar Mela**, **Taj Mahotsav** or **Suraj Kund Mela**) are significant attractions which lure tourists. This kind of tourism often depends on the visitors' desire to experience diverse cultural landscape and forms. It can also be an important technique for reviewing and focusing interest on the preservation of local cultural expressions that otherwise might be forgotten. Every tour operator packages cultural events as a source of entertainment in the itineraries. They are used for evening and night entertainment and in many cases the cultural features of a region are the subjects of theme dinners.

In this endeavour overseas as well as domestic tourists are supplied with colourful pamphlets which allure them to experience the life style, ritual dances or traditional music of ethnic/tribal communities. The important feature of such promotional ventures is that any thing that is 'ethnic' becomes fashionable. The tourist brochures promise to take the visitor back in the past by assuring the visitor of the same setting and same charm in which the cultural items were originally organized, as if history can be re-created. Along with "authentic" cultural recipe the tourists are also promised all modern amenities including trendy restaurants and costly places to stay. This curious juxtaposition of the past and present is typical of the marketing strategy of the tourist trade.

It is a significant feature of such tourism promotion that with the advent of tourist gaze and its attendant market impact, the material form and content of much indigenous art have become adapted to meet external tourist demands. However, the demands of the tourism industry are such that universal return to traditional art and cultural forms would be almost impossible and, perhaps, from an economic perspective undesirable. This commercialisation of culture for marketing it to the tourist destroys it for the host. What happened to Goa's carnival is a good example. The origin of carnival is obscure but it is believed that it was introduced by the Portuguese. It was somewhat similar to Holi where masked youngsters pelted coloured water and wheat flour at one another. There were plays and roadside performances which were occasions for the underdogs to take a snipe at their landlords. This festival acted like a safety valve in the Goan society, providing a release of tension. Gradually it became a show with many live bands, scantily clad women and cardboard cut outs of sponsor's products. Thus the carnival was appropriated by the government and private companies to their own ends.

The role which tourism plays in transforming collective and individual values is inherent in the ideas of commoditisation, which implies that what were once personal 'Cultural display' of living traditions or a 'cultural text' of lived authenticity now become a 'cultural product' which meets the demand of commercial tourism. Art form is no longer thought of as an expression of imagination or creativity but the talk about it is as a 'Product'. People no more get moved by the experiences that art has to offer, but they consume them. Culture thus has become a 'commodity'.

A serious question to be posed here is that will such commoditisation help the tourism in the long run? The answer should be a straight no. This is because in the pursuit of short term profits the authenticity of the "cultural product" is eroded and after a while it ceases to be an

attraction, the "consumers" look elsewhere for more genuine and authentic products. Researcher have proved that every destination has a life cycle. In TS-2 Block-1 you have been already familiarised with the outcome of guest-host interaction at destinations along with the sociological and anthropological impacts of tourism. Unfortunately, the travel trade rarely takes any note of these aspects. Hence, it is time that the tourism industry should come forward for the conservation and preservation of various cultural aspects rather than only asking for incentives, benefits or concessions.

Check Your Progress-3

1) What do you understand by Performing Arts?

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2) What is the result of tourist's interaction with the Performing Arts?

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30.5 LET US SUM UP

The above discussion brings out the point that when cultural activity becomes an asset to be sold and promoted in the tourist market place it distorts the cultural manifestations of the community. Its authenticity is destroyed and its power for the people is lost. This kind of cultural version goes hand in hand with the dominant ideology about tourism prevailing in the world. Tourism is taken as a leisure activity and can be bought at a price. Thus culture is being packaged, priced and sold like fast food. All the cultural as well as natural resources have their price and if you have the necessary resources, it is your right to see and experience, whatever you wish. In such a situation the perception of culture to the tourist trade is primarily governed by the ethics of consumerism. Without passing any value judgement, we may like to suggest that the tourism policy must make amends for any distortions emerging from such commoditisation of culture, and consequent consumerism.

30.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sec. 30.2
- 2) See Sec. 30.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sec. 30.3
- 2) See Sec. 30.3

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Sec. 30.4
- 2) See Sec. 30.4