
UNIT 3 TOURISM THROUGH AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL LENS

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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, the learner should be able to:

- describe how tourism is studied in anthropology;
- outline the historical development of tourism study in anthropology;
- demonstrate the essentiality of the tourist spot, the tourist and the host;
- interpret the relationship between tourism and pilgrimage; and
- explain the importance of the issues of authenticity in tourism

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Anthropology as a study involving human beings has always spread its areas of learning to various aspects of society. In this unit we will take you through a discussion of how anthropology studies tourism and why it is important to do so. Understanding tourism in the context of anthropology had begun as early as in the 1970s, where major concepts of anthropology were interrogated for addressing tourism.

3.1 EXPLAINING TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology of tourism initially concentrated more on the way of life and behaviour of the natives of a tourist spot, more popularly called the “hosts”. The inclusion

Understanding Tourism

of tourism as a topic of anthropological inquiry did provide a new base for expansion of anthropological knowledge (Holden 2005). However, with the passage of time, the interests of anthropologists studying tourism broadened. The focus extended to other pivotal concerns of contemporary times, like (1) How individuals and society change due to tourism; (2) How tourists and hosts interact and what they share; (3) The mobility that takes place due to tourist and host contact; (4) Creation of new identity and self-characterisation; and (5) Finally new meaning emerging as a combination of all these aspects (Di Giovine 2017).

It is important to note that the main branches of anthropology are all involved in the study of tourism from one perspective or the other. Though the major work in tourism is done by socio-cultural anthropologists from its myriad concerns, like social organisations, history, cultural transformations, migration, environment, gender, stratification, rituals, and identities, the other branches are not far behind. Heritage sites and museums are places which tourists prefer to go to while visiting historical places. The archaeological anthropologists work in collaboration with archaeologists to keep heritage buildings, monuments and museums of importance in good condition for the public. Gathering museum artifacts and displaying them to the public is also their job. This has led to the development of a collaboration of sorts with tourism and archaeology, known as “archaeo-tourism” collaboration or partnership.

The communication that ensues between tourists and hosts, through language and symbols is an important area of study for contemporary linguistic anthropologists. These exchanges of language and gestures are a way by which, the outsider and the insider build trust for each other for the days that they are in each other’s contact. These give the linguistic anthropologist’s conceptual space to analyse such ongoing verbal and figurative transmissions.

Physical Anthropology is equally involved in studying different arenas which are linked to tourism. For example, Design Anthropometry is a popular branch of physical anthropology which uses anthropometric measurements to devise plans for better services to tourists. Body measurements of different human types can assist in the creation of seats of vehicles used on land, air or sea which can provide better comfort to tourists travelling long distances. Also, in places like Thailand where sex tourism is promoted, physical anthropologists can play a big role in the analysis of sexual borne diseases like AIDs affecting tourists.

This section thus clearly gives us an overview of how different branches of anthropology are seriously involved in the study of tourism.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What are the areas of study in tourism that anthropologists focus in contemporary times?

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2. What do social anthropologists study in tourism?

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3. Do archaeological anthropologists play any role in the study of tourism? Give an example.

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4. How can physical anthropologists assist in the study of tourism? Give an example.

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3.2 HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF TOURISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY:

In this section, let us try to learn about the growth and development of the study of tourism in anthropology.

Anthropology’s entry into tourism studies was by accident if one may call it so. Valene Smith, the creator of the seminal work, *Hosts and Guests* published first in 1977, was teaching geography and anthropology at the Los Angeles City College in 1946, when she was asked to develop a course on Tourism. This was to teach the students about a completely new world which had arisen after the Second World War. Her expertise about the world of tourism made her a popular and much sought-after academic who conducted and assisted visits to different parts of the world including Europe and Asia during the 1950s and 1960s (Smith 2015).

The events leading to Smith’s *Hosts and Guests*, happened during the early 1970s. She invited anthropologists interested in the study of tourism to respond in one of the newsletters of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and received a good number of respondents eager to participate in research and take this new field forward. This developed into a session on tourism in AAA’s 1974 meeting in Mexico City where as many as 35 delegates, presented their thoughts and findings. Theron Nunez was posthumously honoured in the session for his contribution to anthropology and tourism in his article “Tourism, Tradition and Acculturation: Weekendismo in a Mexican Village” published as early as in 1963. Finally, the main contribution in this session was the decision to bring together all the presentations into the form of a book, which finally developed into Smith’s edited classic, *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism (1977)*. This was the landmark created by anthropologists making their foray officially into studying tourism.

Smith also conducted a similar session in 1975 with the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) in Mérida, Mexico. The proceedings of this session too were published. Such sessions on tourism grew with new anthropological work added every year. By 1987, Smith realised that the book, *Hosts and Guests* needed a makeover with new and diverse changes being added to the earlier works. Many authors from the first version wanted their papers to be removed as new content related to their topics were no more available. The third edition, with its name tweaked a little, *Hosts and Guests Revisited* (2001) had a number of new chapters. With concerns and interests changing in the field of anthropology and tourism, it was pertinent to bring in these new investigations to the public domain.

Other notable anthropologists who dedicated their lives to studying tourism during the 1970s and 1980s are Nelson Graburn, Dennison Nash, Oriol Pi-Sunyer, Erik Cohen etc. They of course contributed to areas which were of significance then, more so in aspects of theory building, cultural encounters, cultural reconstruction, etc.

As compared to Valene Smith, whose *Hosts and Guests* and its later editions began as a work on tourism with a group of people involved, anthropologists like Dean Mac Cannell, propagated their theories and published them as single authors. Mac Cannell's work on tourism in 1976 is significant for concentrating on its semiotic aspects. He said that signs and symbols are the first pointers connecting a tourist to a site. Dennison Nash and Nelson Graburn contributed to tourism studies (1977) focussing on it as a symbol of modern day imperialism and as a transformative sacred journey, respectively. Both Nash and Graburn critically looked at Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process* (1969) and placed tourism as a journey allowing transition from one stage to another. More on this will be taken up on the section 3.4 on Pilgrimage.

As the popularity of studying tourism in anthropology grew, the *Annals of Tourism Research* devoted a complete issue to anthropological work on tourism in their 1983 issue. So, the mid 20th century was a point of development where the main areas of concentration as nicely put forward by Nash, were: Development, Tourist transformation and Superstructure. In the present century, tourism has placed itself safely within the gamut of anthropological studies and has moved beyond and further from the above mentioned areas of interest.

The turn of the century saw Amanda Stronza, an anthropologist, who brought into the discussion of tourism a new area- ecotourism with a review of literature that social scientists had published in past on the topic. She called this branch fundamentally interdisciplinary whose main focus was on "political economy, social change and development" (Stronza 2001: 261). Ecotourism as an interest is connected to the growth of environmental anthropology, which is now a key branch of anthropology. After Stronza, many anthropologists followed suit in studying ecotourism of which the names of Paige West, James Carrier, Jim Igoe, Stocker, Robert Fletcher etc., are worth mentioning (Wallace and Scott, 2018).

Check Your Progress 2

5. Who is Valene Smith? What circumstances led her to work on tourism and publish her first work, *Hosts and Guests* (1977)?

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6. What did Mac Cannell's work on tourism concentrate on?

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7. What aspect of tourism is Amanda Stronza known to study?

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3.3 ETHNOGRAPHY AND TOURISM

In this section and the sections thereafter, we grapple with concerns which are specific to tourism studies in anthropology. Ethnography, which is a much sought after and important method of research employed by social scientists including anthropologists to study tourism, is faced with difficulties while investigating tourism. This is because the tourist space, the tourist (guests) and the natives (hosts), all have interesting yet complicated positioning, making tourism investigation rather complex.

Ethnography is an intrinsic part of anthropological investigation. It is a methodology which has the credibility of establishing itself first as a method and then as a product. It involves direct engagement with people for a long period of time and preferably with the use of local language to gather "authentic" information about cultures. This methodology put to use in the case of tourism studies raises concerns that need attention.

3.3.1 The Field Site/The Tourist Spot

Let us first consider the place. Majority of the tourist spots have been historically significant and people visit them to recreate the romantic or ideal imagery they have in their mind's eye about the space. The image of such a spot gives the tourists the opportunity to see the space as it has been etched in their imagination from the accounts they have read and the pictures they have seen of the same from elsewhere. This creates an exotic imprint in them which when they actually encounter, they would like it to be exactly as they had visualised. It is the past of that particular place that they would like to see rather than its present. The people commercially responsible for the promotion of such spots equally are responsible in keeping such ideals alive as they too offer the tourist the assurance that the spot will possess the fantasy, glamour and sentimentality that it owned once upon a time. So, for example, in the case of India, the Westerners would

love to see an exotic land with snake charmers, naked hermits and elephants or the famous Taj Mahal as a symbol of true love.

The locals in such tourist spots, to keep this imagined reality intact, behave in a way which is pleasing to the tourists, allowing them to take with them a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. The very actions undertaken to achieve these ends provide interesting anthropological fields of study.

3.3.2 The Tourist/The Guest

Secondly a tourist spot is identified not only by the attractions it possesses but also equally by the people who visit the space and make it economically and culturally viable. They comprise of the visitor, the guest who go to experience what a place has to offer and most importantly for leisure and pleasure. The presence of the tourist allows for an interesting take for an ethnographer to study the perspective the tourists hold for the place, the gaze the tourists emanate, how the tourists view the locals etc. As mentioned above the tourists would like to be positioned in a way which caters to their imagined reality, it is therefore more interesting to understand and see how an ethnographer tackles such scenarios where the past, the present, the imagined and the real are all entangled.

Comparing an ethnographer and a tourist is a highly controversial area, debated by many scholars as to what role each has to play, how similar or different they are and how they can co-exist the validity of a travelogue penned by a tourist as compared to an ethnographic monograph created by an ethnographer. Their similarities in the ways of representing society and its culture, overlap so much that they have also been addressed as "distant relatives" (Crick 1995). As in the past anthropology was dependent on the accounts of missionaries, voyagers, migrants to develop the subject, similarly who is to say that work created by tourists cannot be helpful in a world where the discourse produced by the ethnographer on a society debates with the question of what the "other" sees that the "self" might want to do away with. Urry (1990) exclaims that it is now hard to identify any difference between processes of tourism and processes of society and culture. This is as in this postmodern world meaning of perception and representation may vary for different observers. As early as in 1955 Lévi Strauss brought out *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) which is a classic example of an anthropologist's travels and can be safely placed as a work of anthropological importance where ironically Strauss talks about his hatred for travel and people who travel.

3.3.3 The Native/The Host

One important aspect that anthropologists look into is to what extent and in what way the host communities are affected by the entry and presence of guests, the tourists. The impact of the culture of the tourist on that of the hosts can be interesting to note. The hosts copy the mannerisms of the guests which after a period of time can considerably affect the cultural and social structure of the host community. This can result in either a simple cultural drift or a more complex acculturation. This however can only happen if the tourist is seen as coming from a superior culture. Mathieson and Wall (1992) has pointed out that when hosts change their behaviour akin to the guests when they are present but become their normal selves again, once the tourists leave can be seen as cultural drift. It is more

phenotypic. However, if changes in behaviour become a more permanent happening where the cultural change which occurs due to coming in contact with tourists and is handed down from one generation to the next, then this can be a part of acculturation. This may be seen as genotypic behaviour. For example, the hill-stations of India that were the favourite tourist spots of the British, imbibed much of British culture which still persists.

Nash has discussed about the “adaptations host communities make when they become tourist destinations” (1996: 121). With the building of hotels, resorts and recreation centres. hosts have to cater to all the needs that the tourists look for to make the guests feel ‘at home’. For this it is obvious that the hosts have to make significant changes in their own lives to create another environment which is not part of their everyday life.

The tourist-host contact is often “mis-interpreted”. Each has unreal expectations of each other’s reality and allows anthropologists to notice the kind of adaptations they make to their behaviour to meet these expectations. Salazar and Graburn in their book, *Tourism Imaginaries: Anthropological Approaches* (2014) deal with these very concerns.

Reflection

Cultural Drift: It is a slow change which results from either a cultural loss or a gain in any cultural element or any practice in culture. For example: Fashion and style change.

Acculturation: This is a process which occurs when a culture assimilates itself into another culture, characteristically into the dominant one.

Phenotype: It is a physical trait that can be observed.

Genotype: It is the genetic composition of any living being.

Check Your Progress 3

8. What does an ethnographic investigation entail?

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9. What does the tourist generally expect from a tourist spot?

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10. What is the name of Lévi Strauss’ famous work based on his travels?

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11. When do hosts encounter a cultural drift?

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3.4 PILGRIMAGE

Anthropologists have shown interest in studies of pilgrimage, which started with Van Gennep’s (1908 (1960)) *Rites de Passage* and was taken forward by Victor Turner (1969) who dealt with rituals and pilgrimage as a path of transition. As postulated by Turner, an individual in society undergoes three stages of social transition. First is the stage of *Separation* where the individual is removed from their everyday activities with her/his community, second is *Liminality* where the individual is placed in a ritualistic and sacred environment and third, *Reintegration* where the individual is placed back to their routine life. The second stage of *Liminality* also holds a position of *Communitas* which is shared with others going through the same process at that point of time. Turner used this same outline to discuss pilgrimage. In pilgrimage too, he deduced that people move from a systematised, normal regime and enters into a liminal and sanctified environment of a pilgrimage centre. Anthropologists studying tourism, have been able to find likeness in the description of Turner’s pilgrimage with many tourism experiences. Anthropologists have linked it to Turner’s idea of *Communitas* where people in such situations experience, “spontaneity, personal wholeness, and social togetherness” (Nash and Smith 1991). An example of this is the involvement people feel during the popular festival, Fiesta de San Fermín, which is held in Pampola, Spain or while visiting the Walt Disney World.

Graburn (1983) explains that such stages in people’s lives, through the use of tourism, give them the much needed change and refreshment from their daily structured lives. He opines that tourism is “one of those necessary breaks from ordinary life that characterises all human societies, which are, moreover, necessary for the maintenance of physical and bodily health.” (1983: 11). He states that modern day tourism bears similarity with pilgrimage of earlier times and hence Turner’s views on pilgrimage can be used to draw a parallel with tourism. It is the travel of both to a ‘much looked forward’ destination. However other anthropologists, who see much difference between the two and point out that pilgrimage is a journey with a religious purpose leading one to a holy point whereas tourism is seen as ‘absurd’ in the sense that it has not structured purpose and leads one to the fringes (Leite and Graburn 2009). Newer ethnographic work has led anthropologists to advice that pilgrimage and tourism should not be theoretically distinguished from the context of anthropology but can only be evaluated from the perspective of their background or their heuristic conditions (Badone and Rosemon 2004).

Sometimes (as noted by Basu 2004, Ebron 2000 and Graburn 2004), tourism in the context of pilgrimage is also seen from the standpoint of the structure of pilgrimage which is evoked as corresponding to tourism and how it effects it. Anthropologists point out that pilgrimage is also used in context of identity tourism, for example, “roots pilgrimage” referring to a journey to the home

of one's ancestors (Basu 2007) or "queer pilgrimage", referring to a journey to San Francisco which is known as a homeland of gays (Howe 2001). Such sites have immense emotional value equivalent to a pilgrimage site. For the tourist the sacredness lies in the gravity of the intent of the journey and the lasting impression that the visit would bring in its end.

Check Your Progress 4

12. Which anthropologist's seminal work on rites of passage has influenced scholars to study the concept of pilgrimage in tourism?

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13. What is Graburn's take on pilgrimage and tourism?

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3.5 ISSUES OF AUTHENTICITY AND THEORETICAL CONCERNS

The notion of authenticity in tourism has been a matter of interest and concern for anthropologists. It has been studied from three theoretical approaches: Objectivism, Constructivism and Post-modernism. Authenticity, is usually used in the sense of genuine, real, true etc. But, in tourism, authenticity implies not the real truth but a truth that the tourist wants to see. To the tourist, authentic may be something that the tourist has dreamt of. As Gisolf (2010: n.d), describes a scenario in his article, "Authenticity", about how the people in the west bear images of certain places to have honest people, working the earth honestly to produce honest products where there is no room for nuclear reactors, trade unions or traffic jams. The tourist imagines the past to be seen in the present. It is full of images of "primitivism, exotic tribes and historical stagnation" (ibid). Reality of such sites may have starkly transformed but authenticity, here remains something that is visualised and then seen by tourists and for the tourism business to thrive, such "authentic realities" are built. Let us now try to see how anthropologists have tried to understand authenticity in tourism

The Objectivist Theory: This theory suggests that authenticity is free from the mind's eye. It is present as intrinsically in the object which is visited and is not connected to the notions of the visitor or tourist, hence authenticity exists as a factual trait. Boorstin and MacCanell, two American scholars, assessed this objectivist theory in the 1970s. Boorstin (1964) opined that the tourist always looks for the inauthentic object and is conscious of the fact that the host spot offers a 'pseudo-event'. The 'authentic' is manufactured and hence is actually inauthentic. Boorstin concludes that the tourists in reality look for inauthenticity. However, MacCanell (1976) disagreed and made his point that, "the alienated modern tourist in quest of authenticity hence looks for the pristine, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity"

(1976: 384). He calls such tourists the “religious pilgrim”. They do agree on one point, that what tourists actually finally get to view is inauthentic.

The Constructivism Theory: In the Objectivist theory, one issue which was observed was that it viewed tourists’ spots and their cultures as constant and unchanging. This issue was tackled by another approach called the Constructivism theory. The main advocate of this theory in the context of tourism was sociologist, Erik Cohen. This theory argues that authenticity is not physically observed and “is a socially constructed, negotiated concept and is not a permanent property of the toured object.” (Terziyska 2012: 90). Thus, different people can view an object with a different authenticity, based on her or his philosophy or way of thinking. Cohen presented a new term, emergent authenticity to describe how with change in culture an artificial or fake experience, eventually is recognised as authentic. Urry (2002) explains this as the tourist belief of authenticity is created by ‘modern mass media’ by means of ‘time-space compression’.

The Post-modern theory: This was postulated by Wang and he called it existential authenticity, also known as activity based authenticity (1999). This theory differs from the above two, as it is not concerned with the object of visit but by the experience the tourist entails at the tourist spot. Wand writes, “Existential authenticity refers to a potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism are to achieve this activated existential state of Being within the liminal process of tourism. Existential authenticity can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects” (ibid: 352). Postmodernism has been debated by others, like Engler who asserts that, objectivism may have been mostly discarded as a theory but it is still seen in praxis (n.d). For example, hotels and resorts, or group tours which promise to give an authentic feel of the culture of the tourist site.

Authenticity became a topic of discussion in the 1950s and became an important concept to discuss upon, as acting as an inspiration to travel and for its ability to exhibit itself in tourism happenings. It is however found that while academics talks more of the constructivist approach of authenticity in real life, objective authenticity prevails more.

Check Your Progress 5

14. Name the three theories on the basis of which authenticity is studied in tourism by social scientists.

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15. What does the objectivist theory talk about?

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16. How is the objectivist theory different from the constructivism theory?

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17. What does Wang’s existential authenticity deals with?

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3.6 SUMMARY

This unit gave you a basic idea of why anthropologists study tourism, how it is studied in the major branches of anthropology and what are the areas in which anthropologists are interested in. A detailed historical discussion was provided along with the important pioneers associated with it. Ethnography was shown as an important method of studying tourism. Finally, two very significant concepts, pilgrimage and authenticity were comprehensibly discussed in this unit.

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Refer to the first paragraph in Section 3.1
2. Refer to the second paragraph in Section 3.1
3. Refer to the second paragraph in Section 3.1
4. Refer to the fourth paragraph in Section 3.1
5. Refer to the first two paragraphs in Section 3.2
6. Refer to the sixth paragraph in Section 3.2
7. Amanda Stronza known to study eco-tourism
8. Refer to the second paragraph in Section 3.3
9. Refer to section 3.3.1
10. *Tristes Tropiques* (1955)
11. Refer to section 3.3.3
12. Victor Turner
13. Refer to the second paragraph in section 3.4
14. They are: Objectivism, Constructivism and Post-modernism
15. Refer to the second paragraph in section 3.5
16. Refer to the third paragraph in section 3.5
17. Refer to the fourth paragraph in section 3.5