

HERITAGE TOURISM IN INDIA: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS

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Introduction

In today's world, disputes regarding 'national identity' are widespread. Ethnic conflicts, nationalist violence and the subsequent loss of human lives globally have focused renewed attention of the international community to an unprecedented level. Williams (1994: 50) mentioned that since World War II, half of the world's states have experienced major ethnic conflict. Although approximating the number of deaths from ethnic violence is tentative, according to Williams' (1994: 50) estimation, deaths from ethnic violence since 1945 are as high as 20 million. A growing number of scholars have claimed that one of the important reasons of ethnic conflicts is due to the desire of people to belong and loyal to a particular identity, for instance, Kashmiris and Nagas in India, ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia, and the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq. "A national identity is thus a very personal concept as individual's draw upon the differing identities available to them in order to construct their own sense of who they are and how they fit in" (Palmer 1999: 314). Levitt (1983) argued that there is now a "global village" of millions of consumers who share common needs and lifestyle. Questions like 'what is our identity?' has become one of life's essentials (Basu 2004; Giddens 1991; Palmer 1999; Sarup 1996). Thus, it is no surprise then that scholars have paid rapidly increasing attention to these remarkable phenomenon, and that the issues of identity and ethnic conflict are so common in both academic and popular discourse.

As Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 424) suggested, "ethnic violence warrants our attention because it is appalling, not because it is ubiquitous." In an age when ethnic conflicts and nationalist violence continue in different parts of the world, it is in India where some of the tumultuous ethnic turmoils have been taking place (Baruah 1999; Varshney 2001). In one of these turmoils, Pakistan was formed. Also, India suffers from militant nationalist movements in Kashmir, Punjab, and the seven Northeast states apart from the frequent Hindu-Muslim clashes.

Introduction to Travel and Tourism

Tourism is travel for leisure, recreational and business purpose. Tourists can be defined as people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual surroundings for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other pur-

poses by the World Tourism Organization. Tourism is a known affair in human life. It has been an industry of vast dimensions and eventually supports economic and social growth. Tourism worldwide has experienced phenomenal growth. With more than 600 million people travelling annually, tourism is the world's largest industry, with revenues of about half a trillion dollars a year, and averaging five percent annual growth.

India, being a vast and diverse country has always something to offer, and its glorious traditions and rich cultural heritage are linked with the development of tourism. Its magnificent monuments attract large numbers of visitors from all over the world. Tourism is the largest service industry in India, with a contribution of 5.68% of the national GDP and 8.78% of the total employment in India. India witnesses more than 13.72 million annual foreign tourist arrivals and 650 million domestic tourist visits. The tourism industry in India generated about US\$ 100 billion in 2008 and is expected to increase to US\$ 275.5 billion 2018 at a 9.4% annual growth rate.

Growth of Hospitality Industry in India

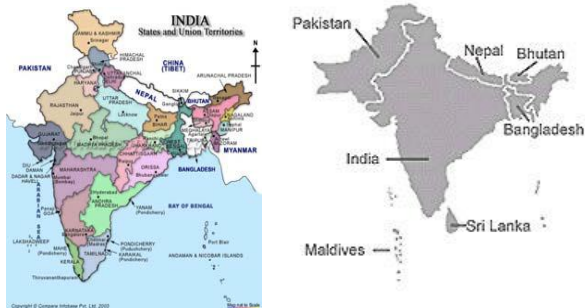
The hotel industry in India is going through an interesting phase. One of the major reasons for the increase in demand for hotel rooms in the country is the boom in the overall economy and high growth in sectors like information technology, telecom, retail and real estate. Rising stock market and new business opportunities are also attracting hordes of foreign investors and international corporate travellers to look for business opportunities in the country. The hotel industry in India is going through an interesting phase. The industry has a capacity of 110,000 rooms. According to the tourism ministry, 4.4 million tourists visited India last year and at the current rate, the demand will soar to 10 million by 2010 to accommodate 350 million domestic travellers. The hotels of India have a shortage of 150,000 rooms fuelling hotel room rates across India. With tremendous pull of opportunity, India has become a destination for hotel chains looking for growth.

Heritage in Indian Tourism

India, with an area of 3.3 million sq. km, is the seventh largest country in the world, and with a population of 1 billion, is the second most populous. India has 16 ma-

for languages and around 1000 different dialects. Hindi, which is spoken by about 45 per cent of the population, is the national language. English is the language for official communication. According to the World Bank gross domestic product rankings for the year 2004, India is the 10th largest economy in the world with a GDP of \$691.876 billion after USA, Japan, Germany, UK, France, Italy, China, Spain and Canada respectively (World Bank 2005).

Figure 1. Map of India



Tourism in India is not new. Travelers from different nationalities visited India -the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, the Portuguese, the French, the Dutch and the British. Also, there were intellectual travelers like Marco Polo, Huen Tsang and Mark Twain, who came to India in search of knowledge and peace (Indian Tourism Ministry 2005). However, after India's independence in 1947 from Britain, while critical issues like agriculture, infrastructure and power supply received high importance, tourism received little attention, as during that time, tourism was considered a 'luxury' (Kakkar 2003). In 1955, the First Planning Commission ranked tourism 269th on their priority list of industries, and at that time, the average number of tourists who visited India was around 15,000 (Kakkar 2003). Not much has changed over the last four decades. Even in 2000, as Singh (2000) mentioned, India attracted less than 0.5 percent of world tourist arrivals and earned only 0.7 percent of world receipts. Several authors have argued that one of the main reasons of India's failure to attract tourists is the country's negative image abroad (Chaudhary 2000; Singh 2000).

Conclusion

This study brought several insights into how tourism is interconnected with sociopolitical dynamics governing India's contemporary state and society. The study showed that in India, how heritage of different religions are represented are important political issues. As heritage is culturally related and comparative, it can be represented in various ways by different agents of tour-

ism promotion. There was a clear hierarchy of ethnic and cultural identities in all the three representations. Namely, the fact that all the three representations celebrated India's glorious past and modern present appeals to a "'Golden Age' or a myth of origin [that] conjures up fantasies of cultural purity and the flowering of 'national genius'"(Edensor 1998: 84). According to Bhabha (1994) and Smith (1997), even though nations are modern they claim to "antiquity."

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