

Hunting in Other People's Forest [Some Environmental Issues of Tourism]

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ABSTRACT The cultural and non-material aspects of tourism are central theme to many recent books on tourism. It is true that tourism is not an unmixed blessing to many places. While, some people hold the opinion that tourists destroy the heritage and environment, others advocate that it is tourism that makes people conscious about cultural heritage, geographical environs or need to preserve historic monuments. Most of the damage caused by tourism was because local authorities ignored the principles of planned development. The sociologists and anthropologists demonstrate the damaging effects on societies with a weak fabric of cultural traditions. The phenomenon of environmental impact of tourism is not confined to a single country or region. This is a global issue grouped broadly under three categories: ecological, psychological and demographic. The most threatened spots are small islands and hill stations of the developing world. India has limitless potential but environmental limits are there. Darjeeling is an excellent example of ruthless destruction of natural tourist attractions. Where tourist products are like colour, climate, solitude or religious sanctity indiscriminate hunting of resources are bound to damage the environment. So, integrated perspective planning is must. The paper considers some principles to this direction.

INTRODUCTION

The growing body of literature on the effects of tourism on host societies very often emerge two polarised positions. Some find its glorious contribution upon income and employment. The others generally focus on its deleterious effects ranging from the introduction of drugs, prostitution, gambling to deforestation, subtle racism, psychological colonialism and so on. On one count it can be either or both. Bryden put it: "The implication of this style of criticism is that whatever the economic benefits, these largely unquantifiable (social) costs are of sufficient weight to argue against further growth of tourism" (Bryden, 1973). This paper will examine the latter position bringing all the consequences into one single concept, 'environment' without going into the theoretical details.

Tourism is an industry of multi-faced activities. Starting from snow clad mountains, silky beaches, verdant forest, to historical relics and cultural or sports-meet all combine to make

the product-mix for this industry. In other words, it is a two way interaction between economic value and cultural resources.

THIRD WORLD SCENARIO

Changing values and attitude of host societies are the most important psychological outcome of tourism. Forster remarked that "A tourist region.. must possess natural advantages and a slightly lower standard of living than the region from which it draws its tourists" (Forster, 1964). But in many resorts the difference is overwhelming. Boudhiba observed, "Tourism injects the behaviour of a wasteful society in the midst of a society of want" (Boudhiba, 1976). In such atmosphere demonstration effect can result from mere observation. Not only a beach towel, a lipstick or a pair of sun glasses create temptation, a torn bra, empty bottle, or even condom caps generate a disturbing sense of frustration among the deprived youths of those poverty ridden

areas. A number of Caribbean islands and places of ASEAN archipelago suffer today from this environmental degradation. Socio-cultural environment of places like Seychelles, Malta or Sousse (Tunisia) are now on the verge of great disorder. In studying the case of tourism at Fuenterrabia, a Spanish Basque, Greenwood showed how the local folks mimic the consumption pattern of rude, rich and idle outsiders dropping all signs of Basque culture (Greenwood, 1977).

Changes in sexual morality towards a 'free loving-free living' ideal is perhaps the worst psychological impact upon surrounding environment caused by tourism. In Bermuda, a government enquiry commission observed in 1951, that the high rate of illegitimacy were attributed to the holiday atmosphere generated by large scale tourism (Dekadt, 1979). In a recent meeting at Vienna the International Abolitionist Federation draws the world's attention to the sex tourism which is operated now in various countries. According to the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, in Philippines, prostitution is a thriving industry particularly in the vicinities of tourist centres. The trend started since second world war.

No doubt mass tourism is the main cause of the break-down of tourism facilities and damage to the environment. It literally drives the citizens out of town during summer rush. During busy hours of July, Louvre takes the look of a busy railway station. Most beaches of the west get jam-packed during holidays resulting high pollution. The sun has become an asset in the age which glorifies suntan. The developing world is richly endowed with this gift of nature. Moreover as Luis Turner argued, "Relics of past civilisation are tourist attractions with which even capital intensive fantasy world Dizny land can not compete" (Turner, 1976). But no beauty can last long if exploited carelessly and here many developing countries are committing the same mistake what the developed world made earlier. A classic example

is Acapulco of Mexico where unplanned traffic concentration and housing estimates have destroyed the once heavily forested hill side. In Pattaya, Thailand 3,500 beds have come up without a master plan. Proper sewage disposal is nowhere both in Acapulco and Pattaya.

Islands are the most threatened in the developing countries. In most of the cases demographic load factors are primary determinants for this. Bahama is a small island with residential population of 180,000. It draws very little benefit from 1.5 million tourists who have made the island their playground. Tiny Bermuda (24 sq. miles with 50,000 people) has set a ceiling of 450,000 arrivals. "Tahiti, painter Gauguin's Paradise isles with their free loving - free living people have become caricatures of his paintings" (Roy, 1979). In the Pacific, the Galapagos islands have an absolute ceiling of 12,000 visitors per annum. The groups are also limited to ten. They travel being accompanied by an official naturalist.

Not only the islands, some high altitude small countries are facing serious problems. Closer home, in Nepal 130,000 visitors shared the habitable third of 140,000 sq. km., creating enormous hygienic-cum-environmental sufferings to this geographically handicapped nation. Same is the case of conservative Islamic Afganistan. The country is worried about the staggering impact of 94,000 tourists.

CASE OF A QUEEN

India has limitless potential but financial and environmental limits are there. There are innumerable pockets where environmental hazards with all their ramifications are looming large in course of the development of the industry. Darjeeling, one of the finest hill resorts of world ranking beauty offers an excellent testing ground of various hypotheses current in the literature on the environmental impact of tourism. But it is a pity that the town Darjeeling today is not only financially a bankrupt

institution with a debt of more than Rs. 100 crore (1000 million), but with dumped garbage, illegal construction, scanty water supply and acute power shortage this once colourful queen is taking today a shabby look. Recently some members of the newly elected Darjeeling Municipality alleged that, it was a place for "holiday posting of Government officials" who were not interested to give the town a better shape.

With an area of 10.57 sq. km., Darjeeling is nestled at an altitude of more than 2300 metres (7,000 feet) of eastern Himalayas. It lies between 27°3' north latitude and 88°16' east longitude. In one sense it is the brain child of G.W. Llyod, a British surveyor investigator who came across this sleepy hamlet and visualised the tremendous potential of the location in early British days. He put across the idea to the then Governor General, Lord William Bentinck that this is exactly what the British needed to acquire as a holiday resort. Virtually Darjeeling was gifted to British on February 1, 1835. The gift deed read: "The Governor General having expressed his desire for the possession of Darjeeling, on account of its cool climate for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkimputte Rajah, out of friendship to the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is all the land, south of the Great Rungeet River, east of the Balasur, Kahail and Little Rungeet Rivers, and west of Runguo and Mahanadi Rivers".

In about a decade from 1835, Darjeeling became flourishing settlement of over 10,000 inhabitants. During eighties and nineties of last century, demographic structure and trend took a new look following installation of railway lines and other communication development. Migration from neighbouring Kingdoms maintained an increasing trend since then. The table 1 gives the trend of present century.

Table 1: Population of Darjeeling over time

Year	Population	Decade variation	Percentage variation
1901	16,924		
1911	19,005	+2,081	+ 12.30
1921	22,258	+ 3,253	+ 17.12
1931	21,185	- 1,073	- 4.82
1941	27,224	+ 6,039	+ 28.51
1951	33,605	+ 6,381	+ 23.44
1961	40,651	+ 7,046	+ 20.97
1971	42,873	+ 2,222	+ 5.46
1981	57,603	+ 14,730	+34.35

In 1951, the following towns were merged: (i) Jalapahar with a population of 905 in 1941 and P 718 in 1931, (ii) Lebong with a population of 446 in 1941 and P 564 in 1931.

Source: P 435 Census of India 1961 Vol. I India Part - II - A (i).

If we try to analyse the causes of environmental decay that takes place at Darjeeling, demographic load factor comes first. All other consequences are the results of this increasing pressure. In general, hill stations suffer most from this type of pressure unlike many other beach resorts or even the tiny islands. Darjeeling is such a place where flat land is unseen. Like many tourist destinations of India, Darjeeling was developed earlier, 'tourism' (in strict modern sense of the term) was an after thought. Thus, the place lacked any master plan that can feed the increasing demand from both domestic as well as overseas visitors. Capacity consideration is thus an important task at Darjeeling where population density is already alarmingly high (8,000 per sq. km.) Increased habitation means continuous exploitation of natural resources. As a result Darjeeling finds gradual deforestation, soil erosion, declining rainfall and above all unusual climate variation.

The town that was originally planned for 20,000 to 25,000 has at present a population of more than 80,000 with an addition of 100,000 visitors during tourist season. The figure rises to 5,000 a day in the peak season or 1.5 lakh over the year.

The water scarcity is the most pressing problem Darjeeling is facing presently, particularly during peak summer season. The two Sanchal lakes and the Sendhap lake are the only sources of local water supply. A quantity of 45 m.g. can feed one fourth of the present population. The technology of the distribution too is primitive. The amount of electricity supplied to the town is less than half of the requirement. All these insufficient municipal facilities are getting sandwiched by the illegal construction taking place in the town. No other hill station of the country is so severely threatened with this type of unauthorised mushrooming of aesthetically displeasing hotels, lodges, inns and so on. This got a boost after the Urban Land Use Act was repealed by state government in 1982. Municipal record shows that there are only 81 listed hotels with 3,500 registered tourist beds and about 500 beds in private lodges and holiday homes. But those concerned with hotel business say Darjeeling has more than 500 hotels most of which are unhealthy and got their trade licences by way of some speed money.

Though theoretical survey of such phenomenal growth of tourism is all along absent in India, concerned government authorities or other local bodies take some stray measures to build up some tourist infrastructure which are not integral parts of any rigid scientific plan for overall tourism development. Hence, a minute demographic research on tourist profile, at least during the heavy 'season' months is urgently needed at Darjeeling to reach the desired capacity figure.

CONCLUSION

If some people are prepared to pay and others can provide them, a market is bound to develop. But, nature of consumption on a tourist product is altogether different from that of other finished goods. Supply of tourist products in most of the cases is inelastic. Moreover, where the products are like colour, climate,

solitude, religious sanctity or undisturbed environs of game sanctuaries, indiscriminate hunting of limited natural resources is bound to damage the environment. That is why planning the travel industry should take these factors into account. So many of popular centres have sprung up with little or no such perspective thinking.

Research on the environmental impact of tourism is topically uneven. Most studies centre round the effects of tourism on one particular environmental component. Any policy or planning should bring together all components to assess the impact of tourism on the environment as a whole. Any plan-strategy regarding tourism should include thus both the physical and psychological aspects of environment. In this respect some general principles can be put down as follows:

- 1) The country must have a concrete national tourism policy as a part of national development policy.
- 2) As a general principle, the country should attempt to develop tourism projects not at the cost of serious adverse environmental impact.
- 3) Planning should be interdisciplinary consisting of experts of various disciplines like geographers, social scientists, environmentalists, ecologists, engineers and so on. One centrally placed institute may function with various local bodies. For example, at Darjeeling, the local officials felt that a Darjeeling Development Authority with powers of all round development should be set up which can play an important role in collaboration with institute like Institute of Himalayan Studies. The recently formed Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council may serve the purpose. The National Institute of Oceanography could be one of the leading spirits in the regional tourism development of Goa, Kerala and Bombay.

- 4) Planning of new tourism projects in new areas should be integrated with maximum carrying capacity and planning of additional local services like housing, health and education.
- 5) Authorities in Charge of maintaining the law and order must function on the highest level of their efficiency. This is more important in those areas where tourists are responsible at least in part for many of the environmental impact.

In recent years, both the World Bank and UNESCO have got involved in tourism development. While Bank's participation is project based, UNESCO's involvement is indirect, mainly in supporting research projects. Besides other technical matters as condition of loans, the authorities examine the environmental questions. The bank is involved presently in 19 countries. In one joint World Bank UNESCO Seminar, it was laid down that as a general principle, countries should attempt to develop tourism and tourism projects on a scale, at a rate of growth and in location, which do not place undue strain on environmental impacts.

In the last Manila declaration of World Tourism Conference, (1980) environmental aspect has been highlighted considerably. Hence, the general conclusion is that if future development is not governed by environmental impact both will be irretrievably damaged.

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