

Handicraft-based Cultural Tourism in India

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There has been a significant growth in the tourism both globally and in India. Tourism has been recognised to be one of the major contributors to the economic growth of most country. It has been said to have a great potential in improving the living standards of people by reviving the local economy and creating better opportunities for employment. It has become a big foreign currency generator. Governments world-wide have acknowledged these advantages and are facilitating the tourism sector through policies, infrastructure building, schemes promoting tourisms and digitising the dispensation of the information for wider publicity globally. In order to further the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, the UNWTO report Tourism for Development (2018) stressed on to bring about changes in “policies, business practices and consumer behaviour for tourism” so as to make them more operative and proactive tools.

The other UNWTO report on “Tourism and Culture Synergies” (2018) underscores that there exists a synergetic and mutual relationship between tourism and culture. The collaboration between the two or cultural tourism impacts the community in both positive and adverse ways. If the two are in tandem, then it can become a means to achieve sustainable development goals. The “International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017” report has highlighted the role of sustainable tourism in development for achieving “Sustainable economic growth; Social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction; Resource efficiency, environmental protection and climate change; Cultural values, diversity and heritage; and Mutual understanding, peace and security.”

Introduction: Tourism in India

India has always been a very popular destination of tourist interest as it provides a glimpse of India, the enigma it is. Its kaleidoscope of culture and people and intriguing geographies provide an unmatched experience to the tourists. This unique experience initiates the unversed into inimitable wonder called complex India. India offers a variety of tourism that include Cultural tourism, Adventure tourism, Ecotourism, Heritage tourism, Pilgrimage tourism, Medical tourism, Wildlife tourism, Educational tourism, Sports tourism. No matter whatever kind of tourism people opt for, they experience all sub-categories of tourism and in the context of wider Indian cultural mosaic.

Tourism in India has become one of the fastest growing industry and economic sector. The Indian state and Indian citizens are working in cooperation to sustain and explore the new ways and new areas to promote tourism both domestic and international. If more data of tourism in India is analysed, it has been found that international tourism is picking fast and the domestic tourism statistics shows that it is increasing too. The increase in volumes of visit have been seen.

Such a surge in both the international and domestic tourists has been catalyst in improving travel infrastructure, bettering attendant facilities and promoting cultural heritage. Indian government is not only facilitating tourism per se, but is focussing on theme-based tourism to

attract people for niche tourism. At the same time, Indian government is encouraging sustainable tourism without compromising with the authentic experience. India is a country where all the tangible and intangible elements of tourism are circumscribed and embedded in culture. Irrespective of which type of tourism a tourist chooses, he/she will surely experience its rich traditional customs and mysticism.

Cultural Tourism

When the tourists take interest in the knowing the way of life of the people of the particular place like in case of visits to learn about Toda ethnic group of Nilgiris Hills of Tamil Nadu or Desia tribe of Koraput Valley of Orissa, this tourism is called ethno-tourism or ethnic tourism or commonly called cultural tourism. The main objective of this kind of tourism is varied. For the community, tourism is used as a tool to empower people like any other type of tourism, while providing tourists with the authentic experience they expect. But being a community-based experience, it relies on ethics that promote ecological conservation and sustainable development. But above all its by-product is that it encourages the youth to take pride in their culture and preserve it in its pristine form by promoting its food, dress, music, dance, festivals, etc. Therefore, culture and tourism are inseparable.

Cultural tourism emerged as a new sector of tourism after the devastating Second World War. There was an exposure to diverse culture as different regions of the world were pulled into the War. The World War made the West realize that ignorance about the 'other world' was a major reason for their loss. At the same time, common people were exposed to different cultures. Ignorance about the so-called 'other cultures' and communities ignited the curiosity to travel and experience new people and new cultures personally. Tourism was further facilitated by the technological advancement and improved means of transport.

The uniqueness of different regions was expressed through different terms assigned to different regions, like, the exotic Orient, the scientifically advanced Occident, the little explored Polynesia or the mystic Africa. Then the need for professionals, skilled and unskilled labours by the West, enthused those in the developing world to migrate for greener pastures and that began to open the world on a large scale. But the thirst to know the unknown and explore the unexplored led the curious towards leisure travel and seeing the fascinating heritage hitherto read only in the books. Movement of people for travel and tourism to familiarise with other cultures kept on gaining momentum. Even the definition of 'culture' expanded incorporating intangible along with the tangible aspects of any community within its domain. Cultural tourism arose as a distinct field of tourism and as Richards (2018) says that "an expanding notion of culture had helped to stimulate the growth of cultural tourism in the 1990s."

Cultural tourism encompasses tangible aspect including visits to heritage sites, religious places, places of historic importance, art and architecture of buildings. It may include travel to place for some learning and training activity such as mountaineering, sports activity, yoga and meditation. Intangible element of cultural tourism embraces community's values, practices, skills, dance and music, crafts, in sum totality of 'way of life' of a community. When anthropologists or historians or sociologists visit places to explore and gather information of certain places then cultural tourism embraces academic research. Cultural tourism is a multifaceted concept as it encompasses different elements, therefore, its definition remains

elusive and often subjective. Thus, to define cultural tourism is difficult. Siamak, Hallb, & Rasoolimanesh (2019) found that, “the linkages between “culture” and “tourism” and the complex nature of culture has led to substantial ambiguities in the extant literature with respect to a clear and generally accepted definition of cultural tourism.”

Allen et al., (2015). quote the World Tourism Organization (2005) definition of cultural tourism as “a movement of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as, heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, arts and drama to cities outside their normal country of residence.” This definition focusses on foreign tourism overlooking the domestic tourists. But this definition was revised in the 22nd Session of UNWTO. According to the definition adopted by the UN Tourism General Assembly, at its 22nd session (2017), Cultural Tourism implies “A type of tourism activity in which the visitor’s essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions (UNWTO, 2017: 18).”

The new definition not only considers the tangible elements of any culture and heritage to be of tourist attraction but also includes the intangible aspects of cultural practices like lifestyles, values and belief system. Tourism is not restricted to be a leisure or a holiday but now is seen as an experience or learning that entails both the production and consumption of cultural products of the tourist place.

Saarinen (2016a, p. 410) say that cultural tourism is connected “with a search for originality and authenticity.” He further says that “due to this anticipated connection with a search for authenticity, cultural tourism is sometimes seen as a more “serious” and even more sustainable form of tourism (p.411).” Cultural tourism has been predominantly community-based tourism that underscores the importance of community and social networks. These networks provide land, labour capital and skills for the sustenance of community life. This enables to strengthens social cohesion. Different communities have certain special traits that give them a unique identity. But most traditional communities have typical handicrafts that become synonymous with the place and over the period become craft of tourist attraction like blue pottery of Jaipur, *Banarasi silk*, Lucknow *Chikankari*, *Madhubani* paintings, Dhokra metal craft, etc. These handicrafts are pieces of art with distinctive feature that GI tag has been given to few. The products made with hand using simple traditional technology creates a product that becomes trademark of whole community.

Handicraft sector:

Since times immemorial handicraft has been a most preferred activity of humans that not only concretizes human creativity but also generates a useful product by means of the most eco-friendly materials employing the highest of human acumen leading to peace and satisfaction of the craftsman. Archaeological evidences have shown that human evolution has gone hand-in-hand with the progression of art and handicraft. Handicraft is a prime example that demonstrates the evolution of mankind towards civilization. Edwards (1891, P24) says “Were I asked to define it, I should reply that archaeology is that science which enables us to register

and classify our knowledge of the sum of man's achievement in those arts and handicrafts whereby he has, in time past, signalized his passage from barbarism to civilization.” In the contemporary times, the disillusionment with the mass production meant only for the sake of utility and profit making has prompted people to revisit the revival of handicrafts. Gandhi ji believed that handicraft can be a medium of education for children. In weekly magazine *Harijan* (1940) he wrote that, “The object of basic education is the physical, intellectual and moral development of children through the medium of handicraft.” The revival of handicrafts for the economic empowerment gives it a shade of commodification.

India being one of the world ancient civilizations. Different phases of its civilizational history are characterized by the development of a particular art and craft that became synonymous with that phase. In prehistoric period of Indian history, the crafts popular were pottery, terracotta, jewellery, metalwork, etc. But textile, painting and woodwork are seen not before the Vedic period. Stone carving, weaving and sculpture find mention in the Gupta period. The Moghuls popularised the stone inlaid work. Industrial revolution pushed for factory system and ushered in the era of mass production that became a major cause of decline of handicraft. India with its wide rural base always acknowledged the economic, social and political importance of local craft in the life of its producers. These skilled craftsmen are not only the bearers of the specialised skill of their forefathers but are also transmitters to the next generation. The products of these skills play economic, social and political role in their communities. A strong need was felt to revive these crafts. Handicrafts acquired a new symbolic role. Its gifting has become a ceremonial act while establishing new alliances or reaffirming the existing friendship. In Indian, both official and unofficial, the presentation of some form of handicraft has become a ritual. In case of the cultural tourism, local handicrafts have become one of the important tourism products as consumption product both for aesthetic reasons and for the memory-sake. This has made tourism a big foreign currency earner.

Saarinen (2016a) has tried to define handicraft bearing in mind its method of production and the nature of products created. He says “by definition, crafts (or handicrafts) are a type of work where useful and/or decorative devices are made by hand or with simple tools. This indicates that crafts are usually not mass produced, involving large economies of scale.” He further says that “interestingly, Cave, Jolliffe, and Baum see souvenirs as "glocal" products, i.e., products that are simultaneously global and local. Craft-based tourism can involve local communities in tourism activities at different levels of the production chain.”

UNESCO (1997) report defines handicraft as “those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product...the special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.”

Handicraft is a manifestation of the culture and creativity of the people who make them. It is the repository of the culture as it manifests and gives expression to skills and the way of the life of the people. It provides context to both tangible and intangible products of the society. Own: Dissatisfaction and disillusionment of the industrial and mill products has ushered in a

huge demand for the consumption of customised and traditional crafts that are motivating people to go places to satisfy their curiosity with regards to highly creative craft items.

Handicrafts is the earliest form of labour that requires skill and local natural eco-friendly inputs. It is the interplay of skill and natural material that shapes the creativity of the labour. For Marx creativity is an ideal and hence, Sayers (2003, p. 114) says “it (handicraft) is the ultimate expression of human freedom, in the form of artistic production.” In handicraft production, worker is engaged in all the stages of the production process and every process leading to the creation of the product is done by hand. Thus, the acumen and skill of the worker is the basis of the soulful production of the handicraft.

Handicrafts are bought as souvenirs and gifts by the tourists. These tourism products enable local people to participate in the national and global economy and their interaction with the outsiders becomes a mutual learning experience. Handicraft based tourism flourishes because of the value-addition of the local products embodying local culture and heritage. For sustenance of handicraft tourism, handicraft has to align with the principles of sustainable development for sustainable tourism. The economy of the tourist places becomes self-sustaining and attracts job-seekers due to availability of employment opportunities.

Handicraft has two facets. One, is the using skill, training and knowledge required for the craft on the materials locally available to create a product and second is the product to be an expression of the sum-total of the culture producing it. The interaction of human skills, needs, desire and creativity with the raw materials of the crafter results in the production of a unique work of art that envisages utility, innovativeness, originality and more often is geographically identified. The handicrafts have the inherent quality of being specific to a place due to usage of locally available raw materials, the cultural specificities of the place and the skills passed on for generations in their community only. The complex interaction of ecology, environment, economy and culture combine uniquely to give shape to the product that becomes the piece of art of the place identified with the place. The craft becomes a metaphor of the location it is produced at and vice versa. Mass production and globalization is posing a substantial challenge to the traditional handicraft sector. Survival of craftsmen is also at stake. Environmental degradation has added to their struggle as the availability of the freely available natural resources has become a limiting factor.

The handicraft sector has been providing sustainable livelihood, economic independence and has been mechanism for empowering marginalized and deprived communities especially of rural areas. Handicraft sector is one such sector that exhibits gender equity as equal contribution of men and women is required in pursuing the craft and often is a familial activity. It helps, therefore, to balance gender power equations in the family and community. Handicraft sector, thus, is product of interaction of economy activity, employment generation, skill and training, social empowerment, youth training, gender power equations and tourism.

Government Initiatives

Central Cottage Industries Emporium was set up in 1952 to popularize Indian craft in India and abroad. In 1957 the *Khadi and Village Industries* were promoted in rural areas for rural development by the formation of the *Khadi and Village Industries Commission*. To further the

export of Indian handicrafts and create a brand image of Indian handicrafts abroad according to the international standards that “Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)” was established in 1986. To support handicraft and artisans there is a collaboration between *Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana* and *Dastkar Shashktikaran Yojana*.

As far as handicraft-based tourism is concerned Government of India through its initiatives is spreading awareness of local tourism products. Few such initiatives are dedicating permanent spaces for fairs like in Delhi at *Dilli Haats*, every year India International Trade Fair also displays competitive Indian handicraft for international markets, or once a year *Surajkund International Crafts Mela* in Haryana showcases handicraft from all over India which has become a very big tourist attraction for both international and Tourist destinations. *Kumbh melas* organised in different places also intends to provide an opportunity for pilgrimage tourism but it also is place for marketing of craft products from the whole country. Continuing with the objective of strengthening domestic tourism, the Ministry of Tourism organized *Paryatan Parv* in 2019 under the initiatives such as “*Dekho Apna Desh*,” “Tourism for All,” and “Tourism and Governance.” Similarly, “*Bharat Parv*” was also planned.

Some cultural villages have been identified and specially designated by the Government of India for tourists preferring village cultural tourism. Some of the best tourism Indian villages are Pochampally, Telangana for unique *Ikat* handloom; Madla, in Madhya Pradesh is popular for wildlife tourism and rural sustainability; Dhudmaras in Chhattisgarh for thrilling adventures; Kumarakom in Kerala for famous backwaters or Alpana Gram in Tripura known for mud wall murals. These kinds of villages that try to retain their traditional culture and traditional way of life attracts tourists who want to familiarise themselves with the indigenous life styles, indigenous art and craft. These places of cultural tourism have been supported by the government to sustain the life style that becomes a tourism attraction. This may sometimes restrict the normal evolution of the community as it is purposely made to present a static tradition. This may ignore the necessities of the locals.

Ndlovo (2013) criticises these created representations of indigenous culture in cultural tourism saying that they represent myths instead of culture frozen in time in South Africa. he also quotes (Craik 1997) who opines that “they reproduce stereotypes, generated by the West’s desire for exoticism and imaginations of the primitive ‘Other’.”

There are many challenges facing this promising tourism but handicraft sector has not been systematized as other sectors of economy have been. The other issue which Saad (2020) highlights is with regard to retailing of the handicrafts. He stresses that Rural retailers face disadvantages because of their geographical location, unsettled prices for their products, and low customer base (p.19). The observation of Zargham (2007) is that handicraft sector works might emigrate to other better paying jobs giving them better standards of living and a sense of dignity. In the long run they might “lose their cultural identity.” This according to him is a very dangerous challenge to the sector.

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