

HOW FAR IS INCREDIBLE INDIA?

Indian Tourism - A soft power charm that needs more introspection

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Abstract

The cultural and aesthetic assets of India have long been glorified and organised as initiators of tourist fascination. Roping in Steffi Graf as the ambassador for Ayurveda further enhanced the prospectus of medical tourism in India. The government and the bureaucracy now project tourism as 'an engine of growth' - an excellent source of foreign exchange and employment. Opposition to large-scale tourism projects by environmental and labour activists is often dealt with through undemocratic means. This article points to a less than sanguine role for tourism in the power balancing of a country and economy along with the dynamics that works to exaggerate tourism's share in the economy in an emerging context of governmental failure, political crisis and interest group consolidation. Involving the local self-governing bodies to promote the indigenous lifestyle and culture can give a head start with improving tourism. The glory and uniqueness of the Indian culture could be preached better through the tourists who are willing to engage as efficient cultural ambassadors. The image of India as a haven for leisure and traditional knowledge systems have been integrated through various tourism initiatives like Incredible India 2.0, UDAAN Regional Connectivity Scheme (helped in increasing tourism to remote regions) Hop in Hop Out buses popular in Delhi, Nagar darshan schemes in various Indian cities and involving NGOs and private investments in promoting regional tourism. The potential of tourism as a soft power is yet to be explored by India. The unrealized and unrecognized aura of tourism in determining the public diplomacy sphere with

regard to India and the foreign policy initiations towards it would be analysed and scrutinised. The variants of tourism in popularity in India — heritage tourism, medical tourism, eco tourism, pilgrimage tourism, marine tourism, river tourism, educational tourism etc have proved to be efficient in a large scale to place India in the global tourist map. The paper aims to look at how can tourism be shaped, understood and executed as a soft power tool of India. The tourism industry though has flourished over the years in India, but unlike the south eastern nations in the neighbourhood, has failed to beckon the ones who had visited the Indian sub continent. The paper aims to look at how the prospectus of framing a clear tourism policy or agenda for India, that could develop and reshape the tourist outlook. The study will incorporate the means of secondary data collection — relying on official websites and interviews with private stakeholders in tourism sector augmented by suggestions and opinions of tourists.

Keyword: *Tourism diplomacy, India's soft power. re-branding India*

1. INTRODUCTION

India critically viewed for its social inequalities and poverty, has successfully portrayed itself as a nation of rich culture, history, heritage and unique philosophy accompanied by celebratory divinity.

Tourism has a less than sanguine role in the balancing of power for a country along with the dynamics that works to exaggerate tourism's share in the economy in an emerging context of governmental failure, political

crisis and interest group consolidation. Involving the local self-governing bodies to promote the indigenous lifestyle and culture can give a head start with improving tourism. This is an unrealized and unrecognized aura of tourism in determining the public diplomacy.

Tourism should be shaped, understood and executed as a soft power tool of India. The tourism industry though has flourished over the years in India, but unlike the South Eastern Asian nations in the neighbourhood, has failed to beckon the ones who had visited the Indian sub continent. The paper aims to look at how the prospectus of framing a clear tourism policy or agenda for India, that could develop and reshape the tourist outlook.

2.SOFT POWER

Joseph Nye, the Harvard professor who proposed and propagated the concept of soft power in the 1980s defined it as "the ability to attract people to our side without coercion"¹. He coined the term 'Soft Power' in his book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* published in 1990 and developed and propagated the concept further in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, published in 2004. Hailed as the "second face of power"² - soft power meanders the way for the nations to get the desired outcomes tactfully. In the art of persuading foreign nationals to believe and follow a nation's policy interests - despite increased participation of non-state actors like universities, Trans National Corporations, Non-Governmental Organisations, celebrities in cultural and creative professions - Nye argues that the state is the most important participant in the soft power politics. The increased appearance of soft power in public diplomacy has paved way to greater realization of a nation's foreign policy aims. Though blessed with

¹ As quoted by Joseph S Nye in 'Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics'

² Ibid

³ These were foreign travellers who had visited India during ancient period and made account of the same. Hiuen Tsang said to have travelled India between 627- 643 CE has authored '*The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*' about his visit to India (Geetha). Ibn Battutta who visited India from

necessary and essential tools to become the pioneer in the soft power arena, India yet has not fully explored its soft power potential. Joseph Nye and the U.S. lead the world in this arena. As the world is entering the Asian era, India needs to rewrite its presence on the globe in an elaborate and powerful manner, stressing on its soft power diplomacy, with utmost priority.

3.TOURISM AS A SOFT POWER?

The cultural and aesthetic assets of India have long been glorified and organised as initiators of tourist fascination. The government and the bureaucracy now project tourism as 'an engine of growth' — an excellent source of foreign exchange and employment. The variants of tourism in popularity in India — heritage tourism, medical tourism, eco tourism, wildlife tourism, pilgrimage tourism, marine tourism, river tourism, educational tourism etc have proved to be efficient in a large scale to place India in the global tourist map.

The glory and uniqueness of the Indian culture could be preached better through the tourists who are willing to engage as efficient cultural ambassadors. The travelogues of Hiuen Tsang from China, Ibn Batuta from Morocco, Venetian voyager Marco Polo, Fa-Hien from China and Megasthenes³ stand as touch stones to the abundance and glory of Indian culture. The image of India as a haven for leisure and traditional knowledge systems have been integrated through various tourism initiatives like Incredible India 2.0, UDAAN Regional Connectivity Scheme (helped in increasing tourism to remote regions) Hop in Hop Out buses popular in Delhi, Nagar Darshan schemes in various Indian cities and involving NGOs and private investments in promoting regional tourism. The potential of tourism as a soft power tool is yet to be explored by India.

1333 to 1334 has provided an account of his stay in '*A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling*' (Chavan, 2017). Marco Polo has narrated his experiences in India in '*The Travels*' (Arora, 2009). Fa Hien is said to have visited India from 400-411 AD, providing an account of the Gupta Age in India (Geetha, Fa Hien's Views on india).

A difference can be achieved, creating a positive impetus in the tourism industry if the work force and the hospitality might of the sector is employed by people who have a direct benefit of exposure and association with the cultural and regional acquaintance of the area in question. By doing so, the locals get employment opportunities and the tourists would receive bona fide, reliable insight to the culture, history and heritage of the area. The tourists would be able to experience and explore the locality as a second home. Having a greater exposure to the locality in this manner would definitely instil in them an appeal for the area and the appreciations, descriptions and narrations that they engage in, will have better outcomes. For such a scenario to arise, it is essential to employ more locals in the tourism sector, if possible the local self governing bodies should be roped in to create schemes regarding the same.

4. MAKING INCREDIBLE INDIA INCREDIBLE

India understands that effective development of tourism would only be attained once feasible and renewable modes of tourism, which promote the local culture and beliefs aiming for constructive host guest relationship are established.

The brochures and social media are used as tools to propagate regions as per the requirements. Each state in India showcasing its own uniqueness has proved to be an effectual mechanism in comprehending the interests of the tourists and developing the region accordingly. Beaches, treks in forests, meditations and heritage explorations are major attractions that get the attention of tourists to set on an advent to India. This brochure culture is crucial to the idea of what needs to be projected and how it needs to be projected.

Wildlife tourism which gained popularity in the late 1990s saw an increase in tourism profits, employment opportunities for the locals and revenue gains in businesses run in the area. Most importantly it opened doors for the urban and foreign community to explore the tigers in its original habitats. This in itself was thrilling and adventurous for the visitors. The conservation measures in the various wildlife hotspots and biological parks have been a success, as mingling

tourism and wildlife management techniques has not been detrimental to the spirit of the measures of conservation. The focus of wildlife tourism in India, has been "conservation education" (DeFries, 2010). People are encouraged to conserve the environment through their own informal and collective measures by making themselves accountable to the management and use of environmental resources in one's locality.

Lately the focus has been on maximising returns from tourism. The 2010 report of the Elephant Task Report of the Government of India, stressed on the importance of granting access to school, college and local youth who are considered the pivots of conservation movements to the sanctuaries and national park. 'Free access on weekends, dedicated education teams and close contact with those who work in local languages on nature were seen as essential (Rangarajan, 2010)'. Through such initiatives the contribution of local communities in preservation and conservation projects is ensured. It should be noted that curbing the access of local community into the wild and enhancing luxury tourism can be unfavourable to the economic and social progress of the region.

Charles C Geisler talks about unseen and hidden refugees, rising in the third world as a result of conservation efforts in his work 'Endangered Humans' published in Foreign Affairs. Though the urban and western world looks at conservation and preservation of environment as evolution, and appeasing new modes of development, the poor and rural world sees it as a threat to their indigenous lifestyle and livelihood. Opposition to large-scale tourism projects by environmental and labour activists is often dealt with not taking them into confidence and this has hampered the tourism industry of India adversely. The locals feel alienated from their environment and habitat when limitations are placed upon their customary and long-established rights in the region — collecting firewood and other resources from the wild, aiming at conservation and promoting tourism. Thus involving them with the conservation and tourism planning can only boost the development of Indianisation among tourists.

In 2002 as the International Year of tourism celebrations were underway the World Eco Tourism Summit held at Quebec city issued the Quebec Declaration on Eco

Tourism. The declaration 'recognizes' that 'eco-tourism embraces the principles of sustainable tourism, concerning the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism' (Uddhammar, 2006). For the first differentiating between eco tourism and sustainable tourism it enumerates the advantages of eco tourism as follows

1. *Contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.*
2. *Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributing to their well-being.*
3. *Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors.*
4. *Lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organised tours for small size groups.*

(Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism Defines Basis For Its International Development, 2002)

According to Emil Uddhammar the declaration tries acknowledge and 'understand that small and micro business seeking to meet social and environmental objectives are key partners in eco-tourism and are often operating in a development climate that does not provide suitable financial and marketing support for eco-tourism' (Ghosh, 2009). The conscientiousness of the tourists is also discussed.

Business tourism has a boost in India. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a phenomenon was lucratively used as a means to conservation of the natural, historic and cultural assets, augmentation of tourism and the immediate focus was on promotion of sustainable tourism methods. This has laid the foundation for further incorporating sustainable tourism initiatives into play. The corollary of tourism — in spawning a constructive or destructive image on the region and locality subjected to visit, should be understood as the torch bearer in realizing peace through tourism. For profitable trade and better commercial engagements to take place stable and nonviolent atmosphere is a requirement. Tourism is a popular means to achieve such a conducive atmosphere for trade and commerce. Thus corporate sector do not get discouraged to invest and endorse tourism. It is universally acknowledged that in an active economy flourishing with trade peace and stability is ensured.

Tourism ensures this liveliness in the economy. Moreover, the corporate segment can achieve successful employment of non-governmental or track 2 diplomacy as unauthorized envoys of their mother country, and as reliable citizens of the countries where they engage in commercial relations, thus increasing an affinity for their native region in their foreign counterparts. It should be acknowledge that soldiers are reluctant to disturb relations between nations where people through constant travel and interactions have reduced tensions that had prevailed or are likely to ponder on.

Despite the emergence of this positive definition of peace, there remains scepticism about tourism's ability to promote peace' (Kim, 2007). National Geographic had coined the term 'geo tourism' to provide a wider arena to the notion of eco tourism and sustainable tourism. The Geo tourism Challenge was established in 2008 and co sponsored by National Geographic and Ashoka's Changemakers, to preserve and promote the heritage, flora and fauna, the local culture and the natives in their atmosphere simultaneously allowing the tourists to get acquainted and enjoy the place in its quintessence, providing them an opportunity to engage in 'this local' experience. The character and true spirit of the region is better understood and transported through such initiatives. This helps in bringing nations and regions together. It is the geo tourism spirit that has promoted the idea of sister cities among nations. Preserving the ancient libraries like Khudha Bakhsh Oriental Library in Patna, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune and Saraswathi Mahal Oriental Library at Thanjavur, has received a stimulus from the visit of foreign linguists especially.

Odisha has become the host to the latest World Cup in Hockey. India has not yet probed the chances of utilising sports tourism to effectively communicate between nations. The 2018 Hockey World Cup was different. The brochures showcase the beautiful beaches, sand arts, the Konark Sun temple, Odissi dancers well supplemented with the hidden beauty of Odisha, with major Indian architectural, cultural and historic marvels featuring along. Odisha is clearly focussing on promoting the tourism industry in its state through hosting the event. What was lost during the Common Wealth Games at Delhi in 2009, could be won back

through promoting regions and states which has a potential for tourism development and management. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has an agenda on conducting summits and meetings away from New Delhi and the metropolitan cities. The focus is shifted to cities and regions where tourism could be a tool to promote the Indianization.

According to a survey by European Union— Flash Eurobarometer Report (March 2016), reiterated by WTO points that culture and heritage are major promoter of tourism. The figures of the survey show 60% of visitors considering culture as a major focusing on regions to visit. Therefore it is important at there is a proper awareness about the same. Local communities can be hence, utilized for the same. The archeological survey of India discerning the relevance of heritage and culture in fostering tourism, has taken special focus in preserving and promoting the heritage sites. Tourism has received an impetus India as and India has featured in the UN World Heritage List with 29 cultural sites, 7 natural sites and one mixed site – the latest addition being the Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles at Mumbai, in 2018. With cities like Varanasi, Hampi and Khajuraho the tourism prospects in India are immense as these cities are considered to be the oldest living city in the world, a discovered heritage town and an ancient architectural marvel respectively.

Initiatives like the Medical and Wellness Tourism Board (MWTB) and Tourism Vision Document 2030 introduced by the Government of India in 2015 are initiatives that clearly recognize the requisite of promoting tourism as a soft power tool. The MWTB has clear objective of assessing and propagating the superior and advanced treatment techniques in Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) and the mesmerising effect of Yoga and meditation in improving the mental wellness and overall immunity. Tourism sector and government organs work together to make this initiative popular and commendable. MWTB should be not seen as a variant of medical tourism inspite of it being a promoter of the same. The culture and heritage of India is also imbibed when one gets involved with any of the Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy treatment. Roping in Steffi Graf as the ambassador for

Ayurveda by the Kerala government has further enhanced the prospectus of medical tourism.

The Tourism Vision Document 2030 released in 2015 details how the Human Rights Department under the Ministry of Tourism (working under the Indian Tourism Development Corporation Ltd) would function with major private and other public sector units to employ skilled and trained force in the hospitality and tourism industry by 2030. New course and syllabus have been incorporate to create a workforce which simultaneously has a better understanding of Indian culture and heritage, and the effective management of the hospitality and tourism industry. Thus the students would have a enhanced knowledge in dealing with tourists and their queries. As the government is involved in the process, it could further help in enabling the foreign holiday-makers have an elated and peaceful stay in the country.

5.CONCLUSION

Tourism has made the territorial border wither away as a hindrance to understand and comprehend the nations better. In essence, tourism has refurbished the idea of global village.

The Indian Philosophy – “athithidevo bhava”, which emphasis on treating the guest as God has further proved to evoke the foreign interest in exploring India. This is a major reason why India is still an attractive destination for couples, solo women travellers and group women travellers. In spite of comments about an unhealthy atmosphere in India for women and tourists in the media, which has proven beneficial to India’s extended neighbourhood in the South east, the expeditions carried out by foreign tourists earlier and its vivid descriptions through social media and official brochures of public and private agencies in the tourism and hospitality department has proved the Indian philosophy towards tourists to be accurate.

As travellers, one gets involved in cross cultural interactions, which in turn provide them with an insight and deeper understanding of the country they have explored. Realizing the potential of tourism in sustaining peace and better integration of nations, the National Tourism Policy of India acknowledges tourism as a

unifying force nationally and internationally fostering better understanding through travel. Tourism is a boon when it is focussed on a path of sustainable development thus slowly eradicating poverty and motivating preservation and conservation of natural, historic and cultural elements. The prospect of tourism as soft power is tremendous in such a scenario. Tourism can be a bane if the management of the same is done inadequately with the benefits only reaching very few with least benefit to the people directly affected and involved in the region that was transformed to help in tourism. The potential of tourism as a soft power would die in a similar scenario.

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