

Cultural Heritage of Rajasthan *vis-a-vis* Politics of Travel Information

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ABSTRACT

An attempt is to analyse cultural heritage of tourist interest, as suggested or claimed in tourist brochures, websites, newsletters, travel guides, advertisements and score of the sources. Apart from giving information these, sites have a stereotypical agenda to be fulfilled which involves politics of language and other issues.

KEYWORDS: *Brochures, Cultural heritage, Entertainment of Commerce, A Product manual etc.*

At the threshold of the 21st Century, Tourism emerges as a major industry in global scenario. India is an important tourist destination and Rajasthan is the heart beat of tourists coming to India from various parts of the world. The present paper is an attempt to analyse cultural heritage of tourist interest *vis-à-vis* tourist brochures, promotional newsletters, websites and travel guides. An attempt is made to interpret the constituents of these products which enable a tourist to make up his mind and in a way visit a place before the actual visit happens. Brochures, newsletters, websites and travel guides have multi dimensional functions to play. They establish a kind of a discourse through their language and content. They also reveal cultural politics, governmental policies and other related issues. Two important product-manuals under consideration are *Rajasthan – A la Carte* and *Fodor's India*.

We all thrive in the world of advertisements, and more persuasive the advertisement, more convinced is the consumer – the tourist. Pramod K. Nayar suggests that brochures have three fold purpose, “information, entertainment and commerce.”¹ Most of the time brochures are free of cost and it depends on the free will of tourist to read at his discretion. Perhaps this ‘discretion’ has tempted a kind of inquiry into the rhetoric of the brochures on Rajasthan. The kind of inquisition is also an outcome of two basic assumptions regarding information given in the brochures and other similar sources:

- (a) It is a social necessity to provide information.
- (b) We rarely travel is unknown places.

It is not possible for the present day tourism industry to thrive without providing information to its prospective consumer that is ‘tourist’, thus for the Departments of Tourism (both to the Centre and the State) it is inevitable to create, innovate and advertise its tourism industry. Moreover, even if one looks at the private sector, the hotel industry depends on the print and electronic media for its promotion. The campaign like *Incredible India* has a tremendous success not only for domestic tourists but also for foreign tourists. Secondly, ever since man has started travelling he has never explored without having urge to know a little about the destination he has to reach. Explorers and adventurers have of and on attempted to venture for unknown destination aeons ago but in the 21st century people rarely leave homes before knowing where they are heading to. Now-a-days brochures have always been handy for the information one intends to seek. Tourism offers alternatives to routine life, it emerges

from human desire to break the monotony of life. Otherwise monotonous life compels man to undertake travel. He searches for alternative destinations, to do something different.

The Department of Tourism, Art and Culture, Government of Rajasthan, Jaipur in 1999 published a product manual, *Rajasthan- A La Carte*, a comprehensive information brochure on various subjects of Tourists' interest such as Architectural Heritage, Natural Heritage, Paintings and Sculpture, Fairs and Festivals, Shoppers Paradise, Rajasthani Cuisine, Village Tourism and Agriculture, Adventure Sports and various others. In other words it's a complete Rajasthan manual. It can also be viewed as a cultural text. For the domestic tourists it may be of some relevance but for the foreign tourists it has great importance. Apart from socio-cultural and historical information, it also includes information regarding Tourist offices in the other parts of the world such as Australia, Switzerland, Thailand, Canada, Germany, Italy, USA, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Netherlands. It enlists government of Rajasthan Tourist Offices and also government owned tourist hotels, motels and guest houses. To further support the foreign tourists the last page indicates a kind of a reminder regarding dos and don'ts for the foreign tourists that is what travel documents one must carry, national holidays, what to wear, in which month, and similar other things. It shows cases, Rajasthan attractively the front cover and back cover has nine exotic pictures of cenotaphs of Moosi-Maharani, Alwar, intricate brass work of Rajasthan, Jain temples of Ranakpur, Lalgarh Palace of Bikaner, Sculptures of Barmar, Black buck at Jodhpur, Tiger at Ranthambor, traditional Rajasthani Thali and a woman in traditionally attired Rajasthani dress. *Rajasthan-A La Carte* is a wonderful travelling companion because consistently it is full of fascinating facts and one can view what one has travelled to see in Rajasthan forts and palaces, lakes and gardens even the wildlife sanctuaries that were once the exclusive hunting grounds of the royalty are steeped in romance and chivalry. Rajasthan still enjoys the romance and chivalry, as one senses in the palaces, still having sprawling gardens, magnificent lakes and, royal hunting grounds. Now the people of Rajasthan who still retain chivalry and grace of their past. The romance not only of the recent past but also of the yore.

Referring to the origin of the Thar Desert *Rajasthan – A La Carte* narrates a myth from *Ramayana* thus:

Aeons ago, it is believed, Shri Ram drew an arrow in his bow. The target was Lanka, the island capital where his wife was held captive by the demon king Ravana. However, such was the power of its annihilation that the gods pleaded with Ram to desist from his intended purpose. Unfortunately, the arrow once drawn, could not be withdrawn Ram pointed the arrow at a distant sea, and let it escape. The heat generated by the arrow dried the sea and its place arose a dry, arid and hot."²

The myth narrated, may give rise to several queries and interpretations, but the fact is that fossils excavated in the Thar Desert reveal the remains of marine life the movement of the sand is in ripples creating new layers of waves as the wind dances in Jaisalmer. It seems as though in the unconscious heart of the place sea that once shimmered is still alive and breathes through the layers of sand. "Introduction", to *Rajasthan - A La Carte* glorifies the past and even the present of the state thus:

Deeply religious, the people built, beside their fortification and their palaces, splendid temples, elaborate wells handsome mansions and memorials to their dead. Celebrated for their valour on the field, the rulers were known for... the sensitivity with which they offered patronage to artists.³

In a way the glorification is an attempt to market the past of Rajasthan as a product for tourists' interest. Thus, it is done both artistically as well as aesthetically.

But same does not happen when one flips over *Fodor's India*, whose cover page claims that *Fodor's* has been 'guiding smart travellers for 60 years.' It has been billed as "The King of Guidebooks", or even as "An admirable blend of the cultural and the practical" by *Newsweek* and *The Washington Post*. The blurb of the handy guidebook informs us that it is "the best guide to India" for it tells us where to stay and eat, no matter what is the budget

“also 31 pages of maps and great features.” *Fodor’s India* uses rhetoric for the benefit of foreign tourist. In a way it is good for the promotion of tourism in India but somehow the details regarding Rajasthan smack of the politics of language. It is something like looking down upon with a high brow attitude towards the middle-brow ones. An attempt is not just to glorify the past but to look into the chinks of fractured glory and pitfalls of high ego which Rajput ancestors were well known for:

Following India’s independence the Rajput princes and kings were forced to merge their state into a new country, but they still kept title to their palaces and forts, private lands, jewels and other possessions. More recently, the government and forts (many of the royal museums existing today were established to avoid this). Without their stipend, many maharajas became hoteliers; other turned their properties over to leading hotel chains. A few are paupers or recluses.⁴

The foregoing passage indicates a foreigner’s (in general) and American’s in particular snobbish attitude which is also the attitude of a well developed country towards the developing one. The writer further exposes social dissensions of Indian society:

From the kings who still live in splendour to the peasants who still bow to, and even worship, the descendants of their former rulers, Rajasthan retains the spirit of Rajputana...⁵

Such travel guides give lopsided view of things. To a great extent they harm and formulate a prejudiced opinion for the tourist destination which a foreign tourist intends to visit. The impression created by *Fodor’s India* is that Rajasthan’s royal families have financially become paupers therefore have mortgaged their properties or have turned them into hotels. Secondly, still age old class distinctions of the society are such that grass root Indians are enslaved. Interestingly there is a chapter on “Cosmic Chaos” in *Fodor’s India*. Kathleen Cox states:

I have always wondered why, for example, India’s urban cows prefer to chew on newspaper rather than on rotting garbage (a plentiful supply) or ransom patches of grass in a field...⁶

Explanations like this hardly will ever market Indian tourism industry, it is entirely misleading and will often keep the tourists at bay. Cox further goes on to criticize government of India’s policies ever since 1947. She is of view that in India policies regarding tourism in specific have led to “economic isolationism”⁷. The market in India is captivated by indigenous products which are often substandard old fashioned, she feels. It is perversion of mind and nothing else!

On the other hand *Rajasthan - A La Carte*, ferrets out a more positive and bright progressive image of the erstwhile princely state of Rajasthan. It states :

These bastions of history, bristling with memories, some pleasant, other less so, seats of intrigues, of coronations, royal residences were once staged, were abandoned with the passage of time as modern, independent India surged ahead on to road to progress. Since the government had withdrawn the privileges granted under privy purse, maintaining these magnificent properties... were in danger of falling in ruin... have recently been converted into hotels though they have managed to keep their flavour as medieval homes intact... the remind us of our heritage.⁸

This observation is in utter contrast with the point of view given in *Fodor’s India*. It is for more tourist friendly and affirmative. Rajasthan is the land of celebrating life because of its love for colours and sophisticated simplicity. No matter to which town Rajasthan we go we find a range of arts and craft. The colours on the fabrics spill over people’s lives and permeate through their life style.

Despite negative attitude of Cox and others ‘The World Tourism Organisation predicts that tourist arrivals in India will reach 1 billion by 2010 and 1.6 billion by 2020.’⁹ The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has launched a world wide advertising campaign to promote Indian tourism through **Incredible India**. The attempt is made to turn India into a tourist destination not just as a nation, as a whole but in micro segments like ‘Jaisalmer: City of Valour’, ‘Peaceful Pondicherry’, ‘Exotic Rajasthan’, ‘God’s own Country Kerala’ and various others. Sloganising is an Art and it has been well developed through various state-level

Tourism Development Corporations 'Brochures'. These brochures show case package tours general information, facilities and special deals. It is a form of literature, a document of culture for the place for which the prospective tourist has to pay nothing.

In current scenario like other states of India, Rajasthan too aspires to expand its cultural and heritage tourism. Thus, a state level *Commission for the Conservation of Art and Cultural Heritage* has been constituted recently, it is Chaired by Honb'le Omkar Singh Lakhawat, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha. Secondly, INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage) in Rajasthan is being looked after by Sh. Ajay Vikram Singh, Former Defence Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, Government of India. He is the convenor for Ajmer chapter of the organisation.

These organisations are doing a commendable work to facelift the neglected cultural heritage sites of Rajasthan and develop them into new tourist destinations. The Commission and INTACH have plans to conserve and promote Rajasthani folk and tribal culture, as more and more tourists, coming to Rajasthan take keen interest in visiting authentic sites of folk and tribal culture to experience the 'real' effect, which is different from visiting regular historical sites. For example, **Jaisalmer is City of Valour** while Udaipur not only boasts of chivalrous past but also takes pride in its heritage. It is the Centre for Performing Arts Paintings, Crafts, Culture and Heritage which is engaged in the acts of conservation and preservation.

Times are ever been changing and so are the perceptions of things and also of rhetoric of tourist brochures.

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