

Tourism vis-à-vis Native Culture-A Study of Kangra

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the synergistic linkages between alternative tourism and native culture and customs and how one complements the each other. Alternative tourism has the power to bring about the positive changes in the local community without unnecessarily burdening the natural resources. Alternative tourism fosters cultural exchanges and understanding between the host and the guest communities. Tourism can be a strong enlightening and educational force by bridging two different cultures and can contribute to a harmonious mix of cultures through understanding of host community traditions, customs, lifestyles and environment sand enhanced respect for these elements of the host community culture. In the present study a sample of 150 respondents was randomly selected to gauge the perception of the local population on the influx of tourism leading to cultural exchange and also preserving culture of their native place through alternative/responsible tourism. Response to each statement was evaluated on three point scale of Agree, Disagree or Cannot Say and opinions were assessed through statistical analysis.

KEYWORDS : Synergistic Linkages, Culture and Customs, Local Community.

Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the fastest-growing industries; however the impacts that result are wide-ranging and controversial (Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse, 2003). The tourism industry needs to be aware of the negative impacts, and that it is necessary to encourage the adoption of more responsible-tourism behavior in the future in order for tourism to be a sustainable industry.

Alternative tourism has the minimum detrimental effects on the culture and environment of a tourist destination as opposed to mass tourism. Mass tourism can erode the unique cultural identity of a destination with the influx of all the negative impacts. Mass tourism greatly affects the native culture. The tourism industry has used local cultures as part of the tourism product by taking traditional rituals, dances, music and crafts that formed part of local people's cultural heritage and 'packaging' it up for tourists. This often involves manipulating culture for tourists 'benefit' until they bear little or no resemblance to the original cultural experiences derived over centuries. In some cases the original meaning of the ritual or performance to local people is lost as the 'tourist' version takes hold (Francis, 2001). When this change continues it threatens culturally important places and artifacts.

This leads to erosion of traditions where it may be seen as staged authenticity and assimilation. Commoditization of a destination's culture or its conversion into a commodity in response to the perceived or actual demand of the tourist market is one of the major negative cultural impacts associated with international tourism (Greenwood 1989). Recently tourism studies turned its attention to 'alternative' forms of tourism, suggesting that these were more likely to overcome the exploitative dimensions of mass tourism in developing countries (Lea 1993; Brohman 1996; Khan 1997). Alternative tourism is that form of tourism which does not unnecessarily pressurize the available local resources. Rural tourism, agri tourism, farm tourism, green tourism, adventure tourism etc. are all various forms of alternative tourism. As opposed to mass tourism, alternative tourism is considered to be responsible tourism. The definition of responsible tourism was agreed as "...all forms of tourism which respect the host's natural, built, and cultural environments and the interests of all parties concerned" (Smith 1990: 480). Responsible tourism strives towards minimizing the negative impacts on the environment, society and economy, and facilitating respect and benefits to the tourists, hosts and the destination. Tourists visit foreign countries to obtain a sense of paradise, and dabble in a society that has not yet been corrupted (Buchner, 2003). Responsible tourism or sustainable tourism aims to provide such paradise by meeting the needs of tourists, without effecting the economy, environment and society in a detrimental way. Thus far, Responsible Tourism has had a vast variety of implications, such as ethical considerations and the suggestion that it may just be a marketing ploy (Lansing and Vries, 2007). It also has been confused with Ecotourism, a form of tourism that places emphasis on a sustainable connection with the natural environment (Weaver and Lawton, 2010). However, Ecotourism is actually a form of Alternative Tourism (Weaver and Lawton, 2010).

In recent years, tourism has become important in the development process of developing countries. This is mainly because it is seen as the panacea of many problems: it promotes employment; it earns much-needed foreign exchange and can also contribute to the conservation of natural and cultural resources (Whelan 1991). Tourism and culture are seen as two powerful drivers for growth. The tangible cultural heritage has a great advantage over its intangible counterpart (Sekler, 2001), such that with proper care it would remain authentic over centuries as long as historic monuments remain without falsification and misleading imitations, they would, even in a neglected state, create a sense of continuity that is an essential part of cultural identity. Cultural tourism is growing faster than most other tourism segments and at a higher rate than tourism worldwide." (Parker, 2007). Tourism is a powerful agent of change. International tourism acts as a catalyst for the transition from traditional ways of life to so-called modern, western forms of society. Accordingly, tourism often brings with it the introduction of new behaviour

trends and norms. Very often, these are contrary to traditional norms existing in the host community, and can come into conflict with its cultural identity and threaten the traditional value systems there. Tourists coming from wealthier nations tend to influence their less affluent hosts, thereby causing and creating cravings amongst the hosts to be more like their guests from affluent nations. Locals try to be more like tourists, they start aping their lifestyle, giving rise to demonstration effect. In this process they start losing their own identity which made them so unique in the first place and drawing the tourists to their respective places. Thus mass tourism can prove to be detrimental for the destination visited by the tourists. As the Asian saying has it: "Tourism is like fire. You can cook your supper with it, but it can also burn your house down."

Himachal Pradesh state is visited more than by 1, 46,04,888 annually domestic tourists and 4,84,518 international tourists. Himachal, economy depends a lot on tourism industry and its benefits. Upsurge of mass tourism has brought along with it the unwanted changes in the local life style and values

Scope of the Study

Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh was chosen for the study as the district is amongst the top three districts of the state in terms of tourist arrivals. The places of Pragpur, Dharamshala and Kangra town have their own unique cultural identity. Pragpur town of the District has been declared a heritage village by the State Government. The town of Dharamshala is the headquarter of Tibetan Government in exile. Kangra town in Kangra District is famous for pilgrimage purposes having many ancient and sacred temples. This research is focused on finding the opinion of the native population on tourism affecting their culture and whether there is a possibility of promoting tourism in such a manner that it does not harm the native culture in an adverse manner.

Theoretical Background

Culture and Tourism

Tourism may be considered a tool that can bring about reconciliation by helping people to travel and experience local cultures at destinations, and by fostering cultural exchanges and understanding between host and guest communities (Rabu, 2003; Leong, 2008). Tourism can be a major influence in bringing socio-cultural change (Curtin, 1996). Cultural tourism involves cross-cultural interaction among people of different nations, leading to better understanding and harmonious relations (Rabu, 2003; Desbiolles, 2008). Cultural heritage tourism is a form of tourism motivated by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or heritage offering of a community, region, group or institution (Lord, 1999). It can be considered an

independent segment of the tourism industry, as well as a complement to mainstream tourism, in conjunction with other forms of attraction. It can contribute to a harmonious mix of cultures through understanding of host community traditions, customs, lifestyles and environments, resulting in enhanced respect for these elements of the host community culture (D'Amore, 1988). According to Salazar (2006), it is often the denial of cultural identity that fuels conflict. Bali, in Indonesia, is known for its unique ethnic Hindu culture but has been a victim of commodification/commercialization due to excessive tourist inflow and unsustainable tourism development (Picard & Wood, 1997). The tourism industry has used local cultures as part of the tourism product by taking traditional rituals, dances, music and crafts that formed part of local people's cultural heritage and 'packaging' it up for tourists. This often involves manipulating culture for tourists 'benefit' until they bear little or no resemblance to the original cultural experiences derived over centuries. In some cases the original meaning of the ritual or performance to local people is lost as the 'tourist' version takes hold (Francis, 2001). When this change continues it threatens culturally important places and artifacts. This leads to erosion of traditions where it may be seen as staged authenticity and assimilation.

Responsible Tourism

As stated by Tearfund (2002), investing in socially responsible tourism ethics has benefits for the business and the community; it improves business performance, reduces poverty, unemployment, and returns on investments are usually positive. Alternative tourism has emerged and assumed to be effective in developing countries (Britton 1979). New Age tourism usually embraces some form of environmentalism (Frommer, 1988), community values (Murphy 1992) and constructive 'host and guest' (Smith, 1989) interactions (Eadington and Smith, 1992), takes the notion of social responsibility seriously (Krippendorf, 1987), although it does not compete directly in the corporate, global market place, but rather occupies a niche market. Thus New Age tourism is, in part, a re-inflection of the ideologies encapsulated in antecedent counter-cultural movements, but also an interesting and important manifestation of a growing preoccupation with the self (identity tourism) and the environment (sustainable tourism) which are important currents within the postmodern cultural 'sea change' (Harvey 1989). Generally allocentrics enjoy such activities. They are willing to explore new destinations and leave their comfort zones. These tourists are willing to mingle with the local residents and to learn about their native culture and customs. They are respectful of the natives' way of life and quite willing and inquisitive to explore their culture and customs. Alternative tourism is a substitute to the mass standard tourism, which is tourism that has the implication of culture being modified and staged for culture consumption (McIntosh and Zahara, 2007). Urry (2002) argues that the process of

creating a commercial tourism product from local cultures involves the careful selection, as well as screening, of cultural elements; these products are never simple mirror images of reality. A constant struggle, he argues, has emerged between market viability and authentic representation of local cultures, frequently resulting in a commercial (and practical) screening and packaging of reality. According to Hjalager (2004), cultural traditions can be sacrificed and replaced by stereotyped mass consumption products, and the rapid expansion of tourism may threaten traditional building styles, landscapes and other representations of cultural heritage. According to Leong (2008), many countries have made unwise investments in tourism that is often imposed on local communities, especially rural and minority communities, at a level and speed that causes great social disruption. Tourism, if managed in the right way, can be a bridge between cultures, an enlightening and educational force. Sekler (2001), has rightly observed “tangible cultural heritage has the great advantage over its intangible counterpart, such that with proper care it will remain authentic over centuries. As long as historic monuments remain without falsification and misleading imitations, they will, even in a neglected state, create a sense of continuity that is an essential part of cultural identity”. Participation by the community in developing and attracting tourism to their area is generally driven by the desire by some members of the community to improve the economic and social conditions of the area (Rojek and Urry, 1997; Selin, 2000). Tourism from the point of view of destination areas, a means of improving and modernizing the economic and social condition of the host community and, therefore, may be described as an agent of socio-cultural change (Johnson et al, 1994; Sharpley, 2000).

Tourism and community

Tourism is a phenomenon that involves social and cultural interactions among communities across the world (Cohen, 1979). It involves the voluntary movement of people from their usual place of residence for leisure, recreation and holidaying, and not engaging in any kind of remunerative activity (UNWTO, 2008). A community, with its surrounding environment, becomes a crucial part of a tourism experience (Blackstock, 2005). Local community members at a destination, irrespective of whether it is a semi-urban or rural area, become major stakeholders in the entire tourism activity. Yet, the macroeconomic benefits of tourism have been deemed more significant while the interests of individuals or communities in terms of socio-cultural/socio-economic and environmental implications have been given less consideration (George, 2007). As a result tourism has largely been perceived or has turned out to be an economic rather than a political or social force that counters conflict and misunderstanding among cultures in the world (Lee, 2006). Contemporary discourse focuses on economic and business domains to the exclusion of tourism’s social values (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008).

Research Questions

Review of literature suggests that alternative tourism supports and alleviates cultural tourism. This type of tourism puts minimum demands on the resources of a destination. Tourists who undertake such tourism are environment conscious and they respect the cultural diversity of the place visited and are fascinated by the unique cultural identity of the place. Tourism has a decisive role to play in contributing to cultural exchange and sustainable development. Investigating the role of alternative tourism vis-a-vis native culture, the following questions have been framed-

- 1) Does culture of Kangra have a lot of touristic appeal for the tourists?
- 2) Is mass tourism harmful for the native culture of Kangra?
- 3) Has tourism contributed towards uplifting and sustaining the native culture in Kangra?
- 4) Has local handicrafts industry of Kangra benefitted from tourism?
- 5) What is the perception of the respondents on developing alternative accommodation for tourists in Kangra?

Material and Methods

Total sample of 150 respondents (50 each; n=150) from the native population from Pragpur, Dharamshala and Kangra were selected on convenience cum judgment sampling technique. Using stratified random sampling, an opinion survey was administered on the sample. The survey consisted of 'five opinion statements' identified by the researcher to gauge the overall perception of the local population preserving culture of their native place through tourism. Response to each statement was evaluated on three point scale of Agree, Disagree or Cannot Say and opinions were assessed through statistics using frequency and percentage of respondents on each statement.

Findings and Discussion

It has emerged from the responses that out of 150 respondents for each statement, 78% agree with the view that mass tourism is detrimental for the culture of their area. The native population believes that mass tourism can erode their cultural values. They are not in favour of promoting mass tourism in their native places. 65% of people responded in affirmative that culture of district Kangra undoubtedly acts as a pull factor for the tourists. Tourism has given a fillip to the souvenir industry in Kangra. 90% of the respondents have agreed to this statement. Kangra is famous for its Kangra tea, Kangra paintings and Tibetan handicrafts and handloom products. Tourists place a heavy and continuous demand for the local souvenirs. Most of the respondents have felt that tourism has given a new lease of life to their ethnic handicraft industry like miniature paintings and exquisite shawls

woven by the people of the area. People of Kangra are very proud of their culture and customs. The influx of tourists to the district has not affected their native culture in a negative manner. 75% of the native population of the region was of the opinion that their culture remains intact even while showcasing the same to the tourists. They still have retained their own customs and culture. Majority of the local population are of the opinion that if managed and promoted in a sustainable manner the unique cultural identity of their native place would not be lost rather responsible tourism would help to preserve it as this is the main pull factor for the tourists. Residents of Kangra district opined that unconventional tourism like rural tourism, eco tourism and agri tourism could become more appealing if tourists could be accommodated in the alternate accommodations like home stay and tented accommodations. Home Stay Scheme was launched in the year 2008 in Himachal Pradesh. There are 31 registered home stay units in Kangra district. These home stay units are already a grand success among the tourists. The scheme focuses on rural tourism to generate employment, income and promote new destinations by exhibiting ancient heritage and culture of the State. 72% of the respondents agreed to the statement that alternative accommodations have added more charm and appeal to the unconventional tourism. These alternative accommodations have become more popular not only amongst the tourists but local residents as well because the local community is directly involved in tourism this way.

Table No. 1

Sr. No.	Opinion Statements	Responses		
		(150)		
		Agree	Disagree	Can't Say
1.	Mass tourism is detrimental for the culture of your native area. (RQ1)	117 78%	33 22%	0 0%
2	Culture of Kangra has a lot of touristic appeal for the tourists(RQ2)	98 65%	52 35%	0 0%
3	Tourism has given a boost to the souvenir industry of Kangra.(RQ3)	135 90%	15 10%	0 0%
4	The unique cultural identity of your native area has remained intact while showcasing the same to tourists(RQ4)	113 75%	37 25%	0 0%
5	Alternative accommodation like home stays etc. have added more charm and appeal to unconventional tourism in Kangra District(RQ5)	108 72%	42 28%	0 0%

Source: Primary Data

Conclusion

To stop the cultural values of the state from being degraded it is necessary to promote alternative tourism as it does not unnecessarily exploit the available resources and also ensures the preservation of native culture. As per the perception of the native community, alternative tourism as well as responsible tourism can prove helpful in preserving the unique cultural identity of a tourist destination. This form of tourism thrives on the culture of destination and souvenir industry and is a reflection of the native culture; therefore, the handicraft industry is also supported by this form of tourism. Alternate tourism should be given an edge over mass tourism as mass tourism destroys the tourism attractions. This type of tourism supports the culture of the native destination because the community is aware of this fact that the cultural attractions of their place are the main pull factors for the tourists visiting their area. Compared to mass tourism, alternative tourism uplifts and highlights the cultural uniqueness.

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