

## Government's tourism policy in India

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### ABSTRACT

The Government policy was found to be, by and large, demands led and unfamiliar with the larger social, cultural and even economic issues at stake in the development of tourism in a traditional society. These policies suffered typically from biases of macro-economists, and their ambitions to be 'scientific', which made them naively innocent of the related social forces involved in the process of economic change. These policies further reflected the planners' view of reality, in a way that suited their convenience and the entrenched vested interests in society with whom they were aligned. Thus, the strong ideology of planning that exists in the Government is of the 'top down' variety.

**Key words :** Tourism policy, Revenue generating sector

Tourism in Asia is in a thriving condition. Every country is involved in promoting tourism in a big way. Tourism has become a top priority of the economic agenda of all the countries. For example, if in Malaysia tourism is the top revenue generating sector, in India tourism is slowly getting due focus taking into account the country's rich heritage and cultural tradition. However, a review of the tourism trends in Asia clearly indicates that while economic considerations have reigned supreme, the social aspects are not being given due importance as far as the strategic tourism considerations are considered. Tourism it appears is developing an elitist bias as broadening of its social base with participation from all sections of the society is clearly not visible. The important role of participatory and community based organisations like cooperatives in promoting tourism has yet to be recognised. As a result, the concepts like "sustainable tourism", "peace through tourism", "poverty reduction through tourism", 'community tourism', etc. which can best be implemented through participatory institutions have yet to be popularized in a big way. India is environmentally and culturally so diverse that it is not feasible to focus on a single destination or tourist experience to understand the effects of tourism on culture. It was therefore, decided that this study should look at least three different tourist sites, which together could put across the nature and dimensions of the issues being examined.

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The conscious and organized efforts to promote tourism India were made in 1945 when a committee was set up by the Government of India under the Chairmanship of Sir John Sargent, the then Educational, and Adviser to the Government of India. The major terms of reference of the committee were, among others:

- Examine the scope for increasing the existing tourist traffic, both from within the country and from overseas;
- To suggest ways and means of creating, both in India and overseas, the desire for touring, including visits to holiday resorts, good climate stations, scenic places, places of pilgrimage, of historical, and of archaeological interest in India;
- To suggest what facilities should be provided at places to be developed and advertised for Indian visitors, and foreign visitors . . . etc.

The Committee's interim report submitted in October 1946, recognized the potential to substantially augment both direct and indirect revenues through tourism and therefore identified the need for a separate organization to take initiative in such matters. Amongst the other major recommendations were the need for a 'chain of first class hotels of international standard for the convenience and comfort of foreign tourists', and starting publicity bureau in 'important' foreign countries. The seeds of the present two-tier tourism policy were laid by the Sargent Committee in 1946, apparent in its emphasis on increasing foreign exchange earnings and the setting up of separate 'first class hotels of international standards'. The policy also identified the importance of 'cultural tourism', and this has been the main plank of the post-independence tourism policy until the recent NAPT, 1992, when we see a purposeful shifting emphasis towards 'recreation and

adventure' tourism. It must be pointed out, however, that one of the characteristics of the Indian bureaucracy is its penchant for precedence and continuity: while NAPT, 1992 attempts to shift priorities, each succeeding policy statement has in fact, developed from earlier ones, all the way back to the Sargent Committee Report. After independence, the Government set up the Tourist Traffic Branch in the Ministry of Transport in 1949 as a follow-up on the Sargent Committee recommendation. In 1958 a separate Department of Tourism in the Ministry of Transport and Communication was set up and in 1967 a separate Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation was created with the Department of Tourism as one of the two constituent departments. Besides the influence of policy changes, the advancement of tourism in the country closely parallels the fiscal incentives provided by the Planning Commission in the successive Five-year Plans which have guided the overall economic development of the country.

### **Tourism development in India:**

The Indian federal system of government, the Central Ministry mainly guides, assists and co-ordinates tourism policy. The responsibility for implementation of these strategies i.e shared by the centre - through autonomous agencies like the India Tourism Development Corporation, the State Governments and the private sector. However, since the control on the use of land vests with the State Government, all projects involving the Master Planning and development of land and the provision of infrastructure for tourism, needs the active cooperation of State Governments: co-operation is by no means always certain.. It has therefore, often been mooted that tourism should be brought into the Concurrent list of the Constitution, so that the Central Government can play a stronger role in implementing tourism policy. But this is a delicate matter of Centre-State relationship which may not proceed much further in the near future. Briefly, one finds that in effect the development of tourism has been uneven over the country and has often reflected the initiatives of individuals who happened to be in power at a particular time in the State Governments, rather than the result of any long-term rational tourism policy, as may have been expected with the existence of a strong bureaucratic set-up. The Government proposes to increase in tourism by the year 2010. This is an ambitious goal and will have enormous ramifications in the tourism industry. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that for a country like the size of India, the number of tourists is very small. The Government policymakers towards the one obvious option: growth in this sector of the economy.

This complex interrelationship between the number of tourists and their relative level of influence on the host community needs to be borne in mind in each of the case studies.

### **Government's tourism policy :**

The NAPT, 1992, is only the latest statement of the Government's tourism policy. It attempts a purposeful shift in priorities towards a 'leisure:' oriented tourism strategy, but it does not abandon the earlier emphasis on cultural tourism whose antecedents can be traced back to the Sargent Committee report of 1946. Cultural tourism remains the central plank of India's tourism strategy for obvious reasons. However, less understandable is the neglect so far of other equally strong reasons or attractions to visit India\.. India has a diverse range of tourist destinations and as a foreign guide book puts it. Basically India is what you make of it and what you want it to be. If you want to see temples, there are temples in profusion with enough styles and types to confuse anybody. If it is history you want India has plenty of it, forts, abandoned cities, ruins, battlefields and monuments all have tales to tell. If you simply want to lie on the beach there are enough of these to satisfy the most avid sun worshipper. If walking and the open air is your thing then head for the trekking routes of the Himalayas, some of which are as wild and deserted as you could ask for. If you simply want to meet the real India you'll come face to face with it all the time - a trip on Indian trains and buses may not always be fun, but it certainly is an experience. India is not a place you simply and clinically 'see'; it's a total experience, an assault on the senses, a place you'll never forget.

Earlier strategies to exploit this varied potential had relied on the recommendations of surveys that only focused on the historic and archaeological monumental aspects of India's tourist potential. These surveys showed that heritage was the biggest draw in attracting foreign tourists to India. One of these surveys was conducted by a UNESCO expert Dr. F.R. Allchin in 1968 who established a much broader definition to the cultural heritage. Dr. Allchin's report broke down the various aspects of India's cultural attraction and reviewed them in the light of the then prevailing conditions. He divided the monumental heritage into four principal subject groups: (a) Buddhist monuments; (b) Hindu monuments; (c) Indo-Islamic monuments; and (d) Monuments of European and British association with India. He advised that each deserved to be exploited for purposes of cultural tourism. The same classifications continue to be identified in today's strategies. He went on to identify as a separate category, the 'religious heritage', and subdivided this into the types

of visitors each category attracted: (a) visits of Indians domiciled abroad; (b) the Buddhists from Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka and other countries with a Buddhist heritage; and (c) the smaller, but growing number of Americans and Europeans who were interested in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam. Pilgrimage tourism is now recognized as an important segment of the tourism market, especially the Buddhist circuit.

Besides these obvious categories, Dr. Allchin's report also identified the 'natural heritage' as part of the cultural heritage because of 'the educational character of the interests involved. Then the report went into define the importance of the traditional arts and crafts and the potential for 'cultural shopping' of the different types of Indian handicrafts and handloom works; the performance of music and dance to make it accessible to the tourist; and finally, quite interestingly, 'gastronomy' as a 'cultural heritage' for the tourist who is 'strong minded and persistent enough to overcome the values of what we may call the hygiene barrier and to break through the prevailing Indian 'stew barrier. Some of these suggestions were translated in time, into policy, like for example, the development of Khajuraho into an important tourist destination, and the concept of tourist circuits to promote more varied tourism. It also justified, and firmly established, the role of cultural tourism in future tourism strategies. Surveys and reports such as the one prepared by Dr. Allchin reinforced the commonly held perception of India as a cultural destination. An attempt at a more inclusive tourism policy was made in the Tourism Policy document of 1982 which tried to relate tourism to larger social objectives like 'natural integration'. This was a theme that concerned even Jawaharlal Nehru, who said, 'We must welcome the friendly visitor from abroad not only for economic reason, but even more because this leads to greater understanding and mutual appreciation. There is nothing the world needs today more than mutual understanding.

In practical terms the 1982 Policy document correlated tourism policy to the trends in world tourism, a principle that finds explicit expression in the 1992 Policy document. Thus, tourism policy is seen to be the resultant of determined by the demand side of the tourism equation, and not the supply side. This is not different from the understanding of tour operators regarding the determinants of tourism development. The implications of this bias in understanding the tourism phenomenon must be appreciated to understand some of the problems that have been noted at the local level in the respective case studies. The Government's policy is dependent on external patterns and forces of tourism development which it tries to

influence (through publicity) but cannot entirely control to align such patterns and forces with the country's own needs or priorities of development. In any case the attempt at influencing trends through publicity is pathetic, considering the budget allocated for this purpose. This dependency on international trends in tourism to establish the Government's policy, is now an article of faith, and when specifically questioned on this aspect of the tourism policy, no official could even imagine an alternate model for formulating tourism policy: 'How do we know that the tourist will go where we want them to go?' was the stock reply. But the need for such a reversal of policy objectives is precisely the concern of several recent studies of tourism in the third world.

The demand led tourism policy and the macro-economic rationale noted earlier, are having pillars of the country's tourism policy. This is clearly spelt out in the Report of the National Committee on Tourism prepared by the Planning Commission of the Government of India in 1988. Its terms of reference were:

- Evaluate the economic and social relevance of international and domestic tourism in India;
- Define the tourism product, its present and future variation keeping in view the market needs and demands;
- Determine the requirements of a balanced, integrated infrastructure and facilitation measures to achieve the maximum consumer satisfaction;
- Develop a planned market strategy based on scientific research and consistent with on-going responses of the market needs through a realistic communication strategy;
- Determine and define the role of the Central Ministries, State governments, Public and Private Institutions in the promotion of tourism and suggest a mechanism for monitoring the performance of these agencies against the well defined economic yardstick;
- Assess the manpower needs for development of tourism sector and to recommend appropriate training programmes for manpower development; and,
- Recommend organizational and institutional measures to systemize long-term planning for tourism sector on a sound, technical and economic basis.

The members of the Committee were senior bureaucrats and heads of the large hotel chains and travel agencies. Basically their objectives and ideals were in consonance with each other. Both in its terms of reference and the composition of its members, the conclusions of the Committee were pre-determined and predictable: there was need for more tourism and the problem was to find the means to fulfill the ends. The recommendations included a wide range of fiscal incentives and

administrative proposals which have subsequently found place in the NAPT, 1992. The timing of these proposals also coincided with the country's tilt towards a 'market' economy. Thus, the Report states: Hence, the time has come for a reappraisal of the future role of the State in tourism development and the extent of its participation. We consider that it is neither necessary nor feasible for the State to continue with large investments in the sector as before. The time is both ripe and opportune for private entrepreneurs and market men to take over. The State can best contribute to tourism by concentrating on planning broad strategies of development, provision of fiscal and monetary incentives to catalyze private sector investment and devising an effective regulatory and supervisory mechanism to protect the interests of the industry and the consumer. In line with this recommendation, the 8th Five-year Plan proposed that no direct investment from the Government funds should be made for tourism development and the Government would confine its role to defying policy and developing strategy. The 'thrust areas' it identified for future development were:

- Development of selected tourist circuits/centres which are popular with the tourists instead of spreading limited resources thinly over a large number of circuits/centres.
- Diversification of tourism to India from the traditional sight-seeing tours centred primarily in places of cultural tourism interest towards the more rapidly growing holiday tourism market.
- Development of non-traditional areas such as Trekking, winter sports, wildlife tourism, and beach resort tourism to exploit the tourism resources of the Himalayas, the vast coastline with sandy beaches and abundant sunshine, and wildlife, to attract more tourists and to lengthen their period of stay in the country.
- Restoration and balanced development of national heritage projects of cultural, historical and touristic importance to exploit India's unique position as a cultural tourism destination and to utilize tourism as a major force in support of conservation of national heritage.
- Exploration of new tourist generating markets particularly to attract quite a large number of foreign tourists of Indian origin.
- Focusing on high spenders and to provide abundant opportunities for excellent shopping in the country.
- Spreading the net wide to attract female tourists and tourists of the older age group. India provides the necessary security and attractions for this category of tourists. Increase in longevity and availability of disposable income could be the motivating force for attracting this

class of tourists.

Seen in a critical light, there is a wide disparity between the statements of intent and their implementation in the field. These proposals are quite obvious to the cultural implications of the proposed growth strategy, notwithstanding the brief chapter on the potential environmental and social problems, where it makes general statements of intent to mitigate the problems of tourism development which contrasts starkly with the very specific proposals it recommends for tourism development. By and large, it remains sanguine that 'there is complementarity, not conflict, between the genuine requirements of tourism and the imperatives of cultural preservation and ecological balance'. There is no evidence that the people who formulate policy in the Government are even aware of this distinction. Under the circumstance, one can only expect greater conflict of interest between the visitors and the host community in future, because the new Government policy will now allow the market to develop tourism without social audit.

### Conclusion:

The Government policy was found to be, by and large, demands led, and unfamiliar with the larger social, cultural and even economic issues at stake in the development of tourism in a traditional society. These policies suffered typically from biases of macro-economists, and their ambitions to be 'scientific', which made them naively innocent of the related social forces involved in the process of economic change. These policies further reflected the planners' view of reality, in a way that suited their convenience and the entrenched vested interests in society with whom they were aligned. Thus, the strong ideology of planning that exists in the Government is of the 'top down' variety. In India, the importance of tourism is seen primarily from the economic angle: earning much needed foreign exchange and providing employment. This is evident in the objectives stated in the National Action Plan for Tourism prepared by the Government of India in May 1992, and in the recommendations of the Planning Commission's Report of the National Committee on Tourism of May 1988 which are two important documents on the Government's tourism policy. The Government is aware of problems related to the development of tourism sites and imposes certain restrictions amongst which, to safeguard the environment, the Government requires that tourism projects obtain clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Such clearances are however, not necessary for safeguarding the cultural and social well-being of society. Considering India's fantastic tourism potential, and the opportunities opened up by the newly

liberalized economy, many feel that the sky is the limit for the development of tourism in India.

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