



VISITING TRIBAL CULTURES IN INDIA

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Abstract:

India is endowed with an array of tourism resources - from bio-cultural diversity to a wealth of histories and antiquities. Tourism in India is a blooming industry as it accounts for an average of around 6.7 percent of the nation's GDP. In the past decade, India has seen a revolution in tourism and tribal tours have become extremely popular among tourists from all over India and abroad. 'Tribal tourism' as defined by Terry Ward, journalist and travel writer, is "a new form of travel in which tourists visit tribal villages in order to be exposed to a culture completely different from their own." Tribes living in region have a newfound source of income in tribal tourism. Tribal tourism has been instrumental in creating various financial opportunities for the tribes living in the hinterlands. It has helped foster awareness about the indigenous people in India. It is the branch of cultural tourism. It can also include tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities (i.e. festivals, rituals), and their values and lifestyle. Cultural tourists not only spend on food and lodging but also on buying cultural artifacts and other cultural mementos. India, a myriad land stores wonders in its magical womb. From the bewitching Himalayas to the tranquil seashores and from the pre-historic ornamental caves to the heritage temples and palaces, India scores well in every part of life, culture, heritage and the flora and fauna. India also has a rich cultural heritage inclusive of monuments, ethno-handicrafts from the various ethnic groups, colourful fairs and festivals, music and ethnic dances. Still India is not complete without its vibrancy that is stored in the unique and queer life style of the tribes. These tribal societies are also known for their unique and traditional culture that include their day-to-day lifestyles, beliefs, customs, traditions, festivals, food habits, costumes and even the way of earning livelihood. This diversity of culture provides an opportunity for the country to bring in tourists on a large scale. With the tourism sector showing tremendous growth, India can leverage its rich tribal culture to lure a sizeable proportion of domestic and international tourists and hasten its economic development. Factors like increasing propensity among tourists to see tribal and ethnic cultures from close quarters is also a big plus point. Hence, the present paper highlights the socio-cultural profile of the tribal communities in general and primitive tribal communities in particular and the potential for tourism expansion in these areas.

Key words: Tribal tourism, cultural tourism, inheritance of traditions, indigenous populations, India.

Introduction:

India being the second largest populace in the world is a land of multi-cultures, which boasts of a large number of tribes. These tribes and the rural community have been recently contributing to the development of Tourism industry in India. The 577 tribes of India are unique in their own way having variation in their customs and traditions, beliefs and rituals. The Tribals worship the forests and also revel in religious ceremonies and festivals connected with it. Considering nature as their creator, sustainer and provider, the tribals have imbibed a deep love for nature that is primeval and instinctive. Tribal societies operate with an indigenous knowledge very effectively with the help of which not only they eke out a living but also solve the problems of their day to day social living. These healers occupy a significant socio-cultural and health related importance in their societies. They have their own knowledge in health care practices that are ecologically and culturally deep-rooted. The tribal health care system even now largely depends upon the locally available natural resources. The tribal people are well known for their "exotic" customs

and practices. A substantial part of the tribal lore, myth, legends, folk tales, folk songs and folk dances reaffirms the concerns of a tribal community for its eco-system and culture. Tribal lore, myth, legends, folktales and folk songs always have a unique position in their habitat and culture. The music and dance of Indian culture convey everything with its expressions and melodies. There is sculptural evidence from all parts of India that underlines the rich tradition of dance that flourished over a thousand years ago. All dance forms were structured around the nine 'rasas' or emotions. They are hasya (happiness), shoka (sorrow), krodha (anger), karuna (compassion), bhibasta (disgust), adhbhuta (wonder), bhaya (fear), viram (courage) and shanta (serenity). Almost every tribe/village has its own folk dances performed on every possible occasion. The Kud, Bhangra, Lahoor and Hazagiri are some of the dances performed to celebrate the harvest season. There are elaborate dances to mark important events like weddings the birth of a child.

The lives of these tribes are closely tied to nature and stay at the most pristine and picturesque locations, untouched by the modern world. From the blissful Northeast India to splendid Orissa, fascinating Chhattisgarh and balanced Jharkhand, the tribal population of India has so far managed to preserve their prehistoric rituals, customs and culture even in today's modern world. The glimpses of this diversity in the art, rich culture and traditions of an ancient India in those tribal regions are an unforgettable experience. India is a land of countless types of festivals and fairs. The seasonal festivals associated with the harvesting and sowing of crops under different names all over the country reflect a sort of regional attraction of tourism. Desert festival of Jaisalmer concentrating on camel rides and folk dance of the area, cattle fair festival of Pushkar, Kulu and Mysore Dusshera of a different type and that of kite flying of Gujarat in Ahmedabad are their examples, most popular among foreign tourists. Light and sound shows are organised at many places to retell the life histories of famous persons and events. Apart from visiting and interacting with the tribal and rural people of India, one can take home some memories of their incredible artifacts. The tribes of Orissa possess wonderful talent at producing great fabric and doing textile work. One can collect these and some metal jewelry, mats and straw baskets handmade by the tribes. The tribal communities in India can be categorized as hunter-gatherer-nomads; hunter-gatherer and shifting cultivators; simple artisans; settled agriculturists; industrial and urban unskilled and semi-skilled workers (Behura, 1990-93).

Tribes In India:

The traditional abodes of the tribes and other small scale societies are fascinating tourist destinations that trigger human exploratory behaviour. Their cultural, geographical, ecological peculiarities and remoteness of their habitats satisfy the fundamental human curiosity to experience their life and cultures. In Central India, the communities of Bhil, Gond, Kol, Bhilala, Kanwar, Patelia etc are seen in the Chattisgarh area. One of the oldest tribes of India belongs to Jharkhand - the Santhals who are renowned for their distinct colorful dresses, music and dance. To get a refreshing feel of the mango groves and mud huts, one can go to the Madhya Pradesh's Chanderi, where the Amrae resort in Pranpur is a nice place to stay. The seven sister states of Northeastern India, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram have

places like Adi village in Pasighat, the village of Aptani tribe called Nishi village, Tagin village in Daporijo and Hillmiri village, which have their exclusive lifestyles and festivals. In the western part of India, Rajasthan and Gujrat, there are some interesting tribal villages like Devhat, Timla, Kol, Mandawa in Rajasthan and Tunda Vanda, Rabari and Zainabad in Bhuj, though the last one requires permission to visit. In Gujrat, there is a resort called Sham-e-sarhad that is owned and managed by villagers. There are traditional huts called Bhungas. Even pelicans, flamingos, leopards and foxes can be seen in some parts of Gujarat. In the fascinating Southern base of India especially in Orissa, the Bonda tribe is seen in Onkdeli. The largest tribal market in Kundli follows the barter system still now, and one can take a ride to the famous Chilka Lake. The elegant dancers of Gadhaba tribe will surely leave a mark in tourists' heart.

Challenges Before Tribal Tourism:

A great challenge before many tribal communities is choosing whether to develop tourism enterprises that are owned and operated by the tribal government, or fostering an economic development climate that encourages or assists tribal members to start their own tourism businesses, including tour companies, accommodations, food services, and arts and craft shops. Second, a strong and active leader for the tourism planning effort is essential. A lack of continuity of staffing in key tourism and historic preservation positions can cause serious delays, and ultimately stall tourism planning and development. Third, participation of community and a culture of entrepreneurship are necessary. The tribal and other community members work for establishing, expanding, or improving various tourism supportive enterprises — e.g., local artists and crafts persons, lodging, and food service providers, tribal cultural interpreters and educators, including guides, storytellers, dancers, singers, step-on tour guides, adventure guides, horse packers, rafting trip guides, and much more. The diversity and complexity of the enterprise opportunities suggests that the tribe should develop a variety of means to support not only tribal enterprise development, but also individual entrepreneurship initiatives. To market and advertise the full range of tribal tourism venues, facilities, and attractions, including traditional arts and crafts, are important elements of tribal. Hence to protect and preserve the unique tribal cultures and the economic development are the challenges before the tribal tourism.

Threats before tribal tourism:

Because of tribal tourism, the authentic indigenous life has grown in popularity across the globe. The tribal tourism has helped foster greater awareness of indigenous people, many of whom face oppression, forced land relocation and challenges to social and economic integration. However, the tribal tourism has also had a negative impact on indigenous populations that do not wish to be contacted by outside world. Many tourism agencies have sought to exploit these secluded indigenous populations. The indigenous people are longing for a self-reliant, communitarian and spontaneous development. The question remains of what can be done to make tribal tourism more ethical and to protect indigenous tribes from foreign exploitation.

Conclusions:

Every Indian tribal group holds an inheritance of traditions deeply rooted in their culture and lifestyle. The tribal tours in India are most refreshing and energizing. It will take you away from the chaos of the city and town to the calm and peaceful place where people still believe in living a simple life just like their ancestors do. The Indian civilization, one of the oldest in the world, seen in the primeval places of the country and explore more about the culture, traditions, rituals, customs and life style of the India tribal

people. Many tribal communities are looking to cultural and heritage tourism as an important component of economic development within their communities. Tribals support for these tourism initiatives not only from a desire to create jobs and to promote the local economies, but also from the desire to support and reinforce traditional culture — including language maintenance and rejuvenation, traditional arts and crafts, dances, songs, stories, and foods. If done well, and within proper limits set by the tribal governments themselves, tourism can be a potentially powerful tool. Carefully formulated tribal tourism can act as a powerful medium towards social and economic inclusion of tribals. Similarly, it would also provide for the tribals to have a sense of belonging to the nation and live a life of dignity and respect.

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