

“HANDICRAFTS AND TOURISM: EXAMINING THE NEXUS IN INDIA”

Tahir Ahmad Khan*

Abstract

The importance of handicrafts is both cultural and economic. The cultural importance of handicrafts leads to the preservation of the heritage, traditional skills and the art. Its economic importance lies in high employment potential, low capital investment, high value addition, and potential for export/foreign exchange earnings. With India emerging as a major tourist destination, the demand for handicrafts has greatly increased.

Introduction

Handicrafts form an integral part of tourist experience, they represent local traditions and indigenous populations, also a valuable souvenir. Many countries benefit from handicrafts as a part of the cultural tourism dominated by archaeological and heritage sites, since they provide communities with a source of income and jobs opportunities, such benefit varies though from a country to another. When culture is defined from a touristic perspective, a special focus is given to communities and their social characteristics, traditions and behaviors; which all make them different. This focus is given to their representation of creativity and artistic aspects in their cultural complex. The desire by tourists to encounter and experience different cultures as well as their materials and immaterial expressions are strong motivations behind the enormous growth of heritage tourism taking place worldwide (Robinson and Picard 2006). Cultural/ Heritage tourism is based on the existence of some components; these are classified as tangible and intangible. The tangible part includes both immobile resources (as built heritage, sites and cultural landscapes) and movable elements (as artifacts, handicrafts, media and consumer goods), the

* **PhD Candidate at MUIT, Lucknow**

intangible group of cultural aspects as art expressions, languages, living cultures, folklore...etc) (Ratanakomut 2006). Tangible and intangible components of heritage are the main attractions of both domestic and international tourists since they satisfy the curiosity and relaxation to a learning experience and appreciation of local cultures (both tangible and intangible) (Bak 2008). Tangible and intangible cultural heritage together express the richness and diversity of the world's cultural traditions. In tourism, visiting different cultural sites is considered as the main heritage attraction, while intangible cultural heritage often is viewed as secondary to the experience in such sites. Many tourists would stop at a store or workshop selling traditional handicraft items (UNESCO and EIIHCAP 2008). An integral part of tourist experience is "Handicrafts", they represent local traditions and indigenous populations, they also symbolize the places visited by tourists, the experiences they had, and a souvenir to be taken for friends and relatives (Akhal et al 2008). Besides evoking wonderful memories by tourists when taking a good quality handicraft home, it arouses the interest of others who see it to visit the destination (WTO 2008). Handcrafted objects as tangible components and craftsmanship as being intangible in culture are among the resources mobilized in tourism. Exploiting these resources for tourism purposes is of a great significance to sustainable development. Such significance comes from the fact that manufacturing traditional artistic objects generates both income and employment opportunities.

Nexus between handicraft and tourism in India

The importance of handicrafts is both cultural and economic. The cultural importance of handicrafts leads to the preservation of the heritage, traditional skills and the art. Its economic importance lies in high employment potential, low capital investment, high value addition, and potential for export/foreign exchange earnings. The craft or handicraft sector is the largest decentralized and unorganized sector of the Indian economy, and is among India's largest foreign exchange earners (Vijayagopalan, 1993). Indian craftsmanship has been a way of life since centuries. This trade was in a way globalized long back through the Spice Route and the Silk Route. Region-specific crafts as well as the craftsmen travelled all parts of the world through enterprising traders and country interventions.

In the 1990's the handicrafts emerged as one of the major exportable goods from India. 'Within a short span of time, from 1993-2000, the sale of handicrafts and handloom export increased from Rs 30 billion to Rs 100 billion (excluding export of 'gems and jewellery') (Liebl, 2003). This industry has great potential of further growth.

With India emerging as a major tourist destination, the demand for handicrafts has greatly increased. In ancient era, explorers and travelers were the only source of marketing and publicity for these artefacts. The patronage of the emperors has helped these craftsmen and the crafts to survive the pre-independence era in our country. The artisans used to be an asset for the empire and sometimes they were even appointed as the ambassadors of the kings. The artefacts produced, were gifted to the guest from different parts of the world. Thus, in the era of the Kings and Emperors also, the visitors had a connection with the artisans in a way or the other. However, during the 200 years of British rule, craftspeople went through a grim period of ambiguity and severe poverty. The craftsmen were forced to manufacture raw cotton, instead of the products of their desire the 'handicrafts'. The British rule crippled the rural economy of the country. 'There was unemployment and famine; it was the black period for the Indian craftspeople (Ramaswamy V, 2003).

However after independence, the artisans again became the masters of their own art. Although the Government failed to provide them the earnings and the patronage they enjoyed in the ancient times, still their condition improved. However, there was no particular change in the status of the craftsmen in the country. The visitors/tourists have once again come to the rescue of the art and artisans in the rural India. Centuries later, today the changing scenario can be observed in our country. Increasing demands for the handicrafts in the international market, if tapped appropriately, may bring the long-awaited prosperity for the artisans. It is the time we can provide the due respect and affluence to the artisans of the country. The handicrafts articles particularly, gems, jewellery, leather goods, mirror work, ivory, stone and the brass work constitute the main shopping items of the foreign tourists. 'The International Passenger Survey (1996-1997) reported that nearly 40% of the tourist's expenditure on shopping is spent on these handicrafts, which in turn contributes heavily for the sustenance of several small/medium firms which account to 90% of the tourism business (Dhariwal, Richa). A study conducted by the Ministry of Tourism, India (2001) revealed that

in the two states of Kerala and Rajasthan, more than ninetypercent of artisan's incomescome from the tourist related activities and this haslead to higher education and better standards of living (Tourist Statistics, 2001).

In the last decade much efforts have been made toward the role of handicraft and art as an important factor in special interest tourism. The sale of cultural souvenirs is now recognized by many countries as an important factor in the promotion of tourist attractions and national tourism identity, stimulating increased visitor numbers and encouraging repeat visits. The range sold has included various forms of apparel and textiles, as well as copies of artefacts and art. Tourism policy makers and planners in many countries have not however considered souvenir production and associated retailing development as an integral part of their policy mix for developing total and regional economies or providing tourism information (Asplet. M, 1997).

Conclusion

Handicraft represents the large and dynamic segment of the manufacturingsector. Within the past few years the handicrafts have become one of the majorexportable items of the country. This success in terms of exports completelydiscards the fear of crafts being replaced by the modern market drivenmanufacturing. Due to thedevelopment of the tourism industry and awarenessof the importance of hand made products the demand of the handicrafts hasgreatly increased.Handicrafts form an integral part of tourist experience, they represent local traditions and indigenous populations, also a valuable souvenir. Many countries benefit from handicrafts as a part of the cultural tourism dominated by archaeological and heritage sites, since they provide communities with a source of income and jobs opportunities, such benefit varies though from a country to another.Indian craftsmanship hasbeen a way of life since centuries. This trade was in a way globalized long backthrough the Spice Route and the Silk Route. Region-specific crafts as well asthe craftsmen travelled all parts of the world through enterprising traders andcountry interventions.

References

- Asplet, M. Cooper, Image Creation through Textiles: Influence of Souvenir Shopping on the Marketing of Tourism Destinations, to appear: Proc. ICCT 1997.

- Barber T, Krivoshlykova M. Global Market Assessment for Handicrafts. United States Agency for International Development, July 2006.
- Desai KG. Human Problems in Indian Industries. Sindhu publications, Bombay, 1969.
- Ghose SM, Aslam J. Global Recession-Impact on the Indian Handicraft Industry. International Journal of Business Swot 2011; IV(1).
- Giri VV. Labor Problems in Indian Industry, Asia Publication House, New Delhi. 1947.
- Redzuan M, Arif F. Constraints and potentials of Handicrafts industry in underdeveloped region of Malaysia 2010; XX: 121.
- Moore D. Promoting Handicrafts - Path to Problems. International Trade Forum January-March 1972.
- Nisar A. Problems and Prospectus of Small Scale and Cottage Industries, Deep and Deep Publication, New Delhi. 1987.
- Balliu Q. Territorial Diagnosis of the Handicraft Sector in Shkodra Region of Albania. International Labour Organisation - National Expert 2006.
- Mahapatra S, Dash M. Problems Associated with Artisans in Making of Handicrafts in Orissa, India, 2011; 6(1).
- Cable V, Weston A. The role of handicraft exports-problems and prospects. Overseas Development Institute 1982; XX(10).