

Impacts Relating to Kathmandu

Negative Impacts

1. Change in the ethnic demography and culture of Kathmandu. Direct impact - the local Newar culture is being eclipsed by intrusions from other cultures, e.g., the Tibetan, the Newars have been pushed into second place. Tibetan cultural landmarks have become more prominent. The cultural characteristics of places such as Thamel and Swayambhu, which only a few years back used to be predominantly Newar, have been turned into a tourist market, run mainly by the Tibetan cultural population.
2. Commercialisation. Direct impact - people engaged in the tourism trade are excessively commercialised in all their attitudes and dealings, in which incidences of overcharging and duping tourists (selling them fake antiques) in the host country are commonplace. Taxi-cabs are clearly overcharging tourists. This is one small instance in the dehumanisation of tourism.
3. Staged cultural shows. Direct impact - living cultures woven within and around the lives of the community are reduced to cheap, sponsored shows for the pleasure of the tourist. Although hoteliers in Kathmandu take no small pride in claiming that they have been contributing individually to the costs of such "staged" shows, involving the traditional masked Mahakali and Bhairav dances of Bhaktapur, or the Lakhe dance of Kathmandu, such dances, lifted out of context, have become cheap acts of mimicry. It is like turning "*sacred ceremonies into ten cent peep shows*", in the language of Cecil Rajendra, the Malaysian poet.
4. Carpet industry. Direct impact - this industry is regarded widely as a spinoff and ancillary industry of tourism. Its unplanned and uncontrolled expansion has given rise to all sorts of problems relating to civic amenities and the general pollution in Kathmandu. It has created a shortage of drinking water in Kathmandu, polluted its river systems with chemicals, and slums have sprung up everywhere. It has ruined Nepal's image abroad where it is depicted as a country that inhumanly exploits child labour.
5. Voyeurism. Direct impact - the excessively inquisitive eyes of the tourist are prying in to every imaginable nook and corner, looking at every home and hearth, at every act that the people do, catching them unawares. Most people do not even know what all this means and smile

back instead of frowning at them. Cameras are busy clicking, zooming, and whirring about, invading people's privacy as never before. There is hardly a place where the inquisitive tourist is not to be found, including the burning ghats where dead bodies are cremated. Too many tourists go crowding popular temple sites to watch local people worshipping.

One such popular site is the temple at Daksinakali where the chief attraction for tourists is animal sacrifice. They watch the whole act, either with suppressed horror or condescending amusement, imparting a sense of embarrassment to the cultural participant. It spoils the cultural integrity of a ritual act. More than that, it makes everything in the country look as if it is on sale.

6. Value change. Indirect impact - traditional mores and morals that had helped to define and regulate a person's relationships with his family, kin groups, *guthi* organisations, neighbourhood, and community at large are all beginning to fall apart. It has led to a reduction in people's participation in cultural activities — both private and public. A more materialistic outlook now pervades them. As a result of this over-materialistic mindset of the people, many public festivals in Kathmandu are under pressure and fears have been expressed about their continued survival.

7. Youth problems. Direct impact - the hardest impact of tourism on the local youth was felt during the 60s and 70s in the heydays of the hippies. It was at this time that our youths were exposed to unhealthy influences from hard and soft drug abuse. The current Minister for Home Affairs believes that our youth mainly acquired the dangerous hard drug habit from tourists. It has become, today, the singlemost serious social problem and there are over 26,000 drug abusers among the youth of Nepal, of which 13,000 are to be found in Kathmandu alone. This "drug culture" is showing signs of spreading further and further. The youth are also acquiring other tastes, e.g., pop music. The pin-ups and wall-posters of pop icons like Michael Jackson decorate the rooms of these youths in the remotest corners of the country, and every passing tourist seems to reinforce their faith in their newly-acquired culture.

8. Increase in crime rate. Direct impact - tourism has a direct correlation to the increased incidences of prostitution in Kathmandu. No hotel will admit that prostitution actually takes place or is allowed to take place in it, however. There is an increase in other fraudulent activities to deceive tourists. Cases of tourists being robbed, or sometimes even murdered, are reported in the newspapers. Smuggling of hard drugs, gold, and art objects has been on the increase.

9. Art theft. Indirect impact - increasing incidences of art theft are reported. Bangdel has shown in his book that art theft in the 60s, 70s, and 80s shows a steady growth (Bangdel 1989).
10. Street begging. Direct impact - the sight of street urchins and beggars hanging outside five-star hotels, eating places, and other popular tourist haunts has become commonplace. Tourists have encouraged this by giving them money or buying them food or cigarettes. Trekkers in the countryside are offering children cash and gifts corrupting their young minds (Thapa 1992: 128).
11. Products for tourist consumption. Direct impact - manufacturing of drinks such as beer, coca-cola, and other hard and soft drinks in many varieties and great amounts is carried out locally, with the result that, in some quarters, Kathmandu is called the world's beer capital. Huge bill-boards, neon signs, and displays are mounted at soaring heights or suspended from tall rooftops to advertise them, scarring the city's skyline and the traditional look of the architecture of Kathmandu, even in its core cultural areas. These signs also block off the views of the surrounding hills.

Positive Impacts

1. Better appreciation of Nepalese art. Indirect impact - at home and abroad, the number of admirers of art work such as sculptures, paintings, and woodwork increases. The worth of art is valued in monetary terms. Museums receive more attention, art exhibitions are held, and private art galleries for Nepalese art are springing up abroad, making it part of a high and tasteful lifestyle.
2. International recognition of Kathmandu's cultural heritage. Direct/indirect impact - the value of Kathmandu's artistic heritage was recognised by UNESCO in 1979, when it included seven cultural/artistic sites in the Kathmandu Valley in its World Heritage List. Monument preservation schemes and projects are launched more frequently. The Durbar squares of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur remain in relatively better shape and are better maintained. In continuation of such work, more recently, local NGOs, in collaboration with local municipalities in Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, carried out restoration work of their respective monument sites in 1993-94. Gokarna, Panauti, and, outside the Valley, Gorkha Durbar have been receiving better attention in terms of preservation work. These are all tourist sites.

3. Handicrafts' production. Direct impact - There has been a remarkable growth in handicrafts' production in the private sector where the export performance and foreign exchange earnings look extremely encouraging. Tourism has provided a direct stimulus to the revival of some of Kathmandu's traditional art forms such as *thanka* paintings, bronze production, and wood and stone carvings. It has helped a new crop of artists, excelling in the production of the above art forms, to emerge and make names for themselves. The Handicraft Association of Nepal has published an inventory of 65 such eminent craftsmen (Shakya 1989).

Chainpur brass, which is the term given to metal crafts in the Sankhuwasabha district of the eastern hills, has also witnessed a revival, thanks to tourism. Although this craft hails from outside the Kathmandu Valley, it is a Newar craft from and its origins are in Kathmandu (Sharma et al. 1991).

4. An increased awareness of pollution problems. Direct impact - people in Kathmandu are more aware and feel more concerned about the increase in pollution in the city, perhaps more so on account of the tourists.