

# The Role of Tourism in the Preservation and Development of Cultural Diversity

Given the nature of tourism and tourist behaviour patterns, some of which have been described in the preceding paragraphs, they do not seem to be especially helpful in the preservation of cultural diversity. Tourism tends to grow and expand on its own terms. Tourism infrastructure is provided to international specifications and standards. It calls for modernisation and for acquiring a high degree of efficiency in tourism servicing and management by the various tourist agencies and government bureaucracy. Thus, it seems to reduce everything to one uniform mode of behaviour. Tourists come to experience local cultures, be they in authentic or "staged" form, but beyond small souvenirs, or curios, or other handicrafts, they take back little of this culture with them. On the other hand, they leave behind a lot of modernistic influences and superficial western mores which are basically uniform. The prosperity tourism brings induces people to take to a life of conspicuous consumption, rather than retaining traditional values. Tourism development also means expansion of capitalism and penetration of market forces. How cultural groups would like to cope with such new pressures on them, and to what extent they would like to retain their cultural forms and identity, are questions the groups should answer for themselves. A degree of prosperity in the community is certainly expected to be beneficial for the preservation of its cultural symbols in a more static, though more appreciated or valued, form aesthetically.

## *Role of Government*

1. There have been some general policy pronouncements, some rules and regulations, from time to time, by the government, providing the early bases of tourism development. But all this is short of being a comprehensive, integrated, long-term tourism policy. There is nothing like a tourism philosophy to underpin such a policy. HMG/N must act to repair this deficiency as soon as possible.
2. HMG/N must use its profits from tourism, making adequate provisions to safeguard Nepal's cultural and environmental heritage. There must be

a clear and unequivocal commitment that where fears exist about losing balance, measures can be immediately taken.

3. There has been no attempt to spell out and link tourism firmly with culture and cultural preservation. Much of the concern about tourism relates to environmental management, but environmental concern should not preclude concern for cultures and societies. The government should take the responsibility for defining such a link.
4. The country must be carefully mapped so that different areas can be assessed, not only for their tourism potential, but also for their cultural and environmental susceptibilities and for the ecological balance of the area.
5. The aims and objectives should be to run tourism on a sustainable principle, as with all other development programmes for the mountains. It must be acknowledged that each region is different in terms of its "carrying capacity".
6. The government should run tourism on a more competitive basis in terms of its fee-structuring. An exorbitant rise in various fees and climbing royalties cannot always be seen as fair and judicious. The government must not rationalise its actions by claiming that its intention is to discourage tourists from visiting certain areas that are overcrowded, or which may be already threatened with ecological damage. If this is truly so, it should immediately close down areas altogether. HMG/N must develop the habit of speaking out about its convictions openly and explicitly.
7. HMG/N should tone up its tourism administration and reactivate the various offices and cells charged with such an onerous responsibility to a new level of efficiency. The recently established high-level Tourism Board must work with greater purpose and coordination.
8. The government would do well to consider decentralising tourism administration by involving local communities in all decision-making processes concerning their localities. The enforcement of trekking rules on the ground might have a greater chance of success through such an approach.
9. A better method must be found of dividing the profits from tourism more equitably among the government, hotels, and tours and travel agencies based in urban centres and among the local hosts of tourists and porters. The present arrangement works to the disadvantage of the local community. Similarly, HMG/N should devise better methods of sharing and dividing responsibilities in the discharge of cultural and environmental preservation work.
10. Tourism development should go hand-in-hand with the work of general

development. Tourism should not be made the be-all and end-all of the development creed. Only a measure of economic prosperity enjoyed by the people can endow dignity and self-respect on tourism.

### *Role of NGOs*

Right now, Nepal is awash with non-government organisations (NGOs). Ninety-five per cent of these NGOs, however, are said to be concentrated in Kathmandu alone. These are private bodies or organisations set up to do community work and render service in different areas of sociocultural and socioeconomic development in Nepal's towns and villages. The NGOs are said to be especially helpful in taking ideas, resources, and programmes quickly, and without the bureaucratic hassle of the government line agencies, to the grassroots' level. There was a time when Nepal used to be called an over-advised country, because it was full of expatriate advisors and consultants. The spotlight now seems to have shifted to the NGOs which are giving the country the fame of being an overserved country.

Of the various types of NGOS at work, many are working in environmental preservation. Kathmandu alone is said to have 108 different NGOs working in the environmental field. Recently, a Kathmandu daily published a list of 93 NGOs engaged in the environment or in environment-related work (Kantipur: June 4, 1994). Barring one or two, which have perhaps made cultural heritage a part of their work agenda, the rest of them are specialising exclusively in environmental matters. Scanning through their names, it emerges that the environment has been interpreted in the broadest possible sense by them. Accordingly the definition includes gender problems, work in child welfare, the legal and journalistic implications of the environment, and matters of human rights. One obvious conclusion to draw from this would be that the country's environmental concerns far outweigh those relating to its cultural heritage.

There is no doubt that a lot of overlapping and undesirable competition now take place amongst the various NGOs. A general criticism voiced against them is that their motivations are selfseeking rather than evolving from a true spirit of social service and concern for village development work. One example of this was recently reported in a Kathmandu newspaper. An NGO called the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) has been established to address the problem of cleaning the Mt. Everest area of its garbage. However, two other smaller local NGOs, named the Himalayan Club of Lukla and the Sagarmatha Club, operating in the area were critical of the work carried out by the SPCC (Rising Nepal: June 6, 1994). The NGOs can also be criticised for

spreading the culture of "spoon feeding" and teaching villagers the habit of dependence on external resources and assistance, even for small things. One cannot possibly expect anything else from organisations that are themselves so heavily dependent on external foreign assistance.

In light of the above, it is difficult to say what true role the NGOs can really play in tourism-related activities. In an ideal set up, their work would seem to be most effective in teaching and spreading a new environmental awareness, educating the community about their natural and cultural heritage and about what should or could be done to preserve them, and, finally, in working as a strong environmental pressure group on behalf of the community for resisting any centrally-inspired rash decisions that might be detrimental to culture and to the environment. There are a few strong environmental pressure lobbies working in India, but Nepal has few like them. The NGOs could try to take this role on more effectively in future.

### *Role of the Private Sector*

The contribution made by the private tourism sector to cultural and environmental causes is too small and insignificant, in comparison to the concessions and tax rebates the government grants to hotels during the construction period and to travel and trekking agencies during the initial years of their establishment. For instance, hotels are granted soft loans with interest payable over long periods, facilities to import low-duty goods and equipment, and a tax holiday for the first years of establishment. Hotels and other tourism businesses in the private sector can draw on urban infrastructures, such as roads, drinking water, telecommunication links, etc, developed by the government without having to pay anything extra towards their cost. All that the private sector pays to the government is the hotel revenue, income tax, and tariff on public services. The private sector, in future, should carry a greater responsibility and devise better pollution control measures and measures for the preservation of natural and cultural heritage on a more institutionalised basis, by setting aside a larger share of its private profits.

The weakening of the traditional *guthi* institution has crippled and undermined the cultural activities of Kathmandu. It would be good if the private sector could come forward and assume the role of the former *guthi sansthan* in sustaining some of these cultural forms and practices. To do this now would be a timely move and would render an extremely valuable service to the cultural health of Kathmandu. Like the privately-endowed *guthi* land in former years, if the private sector could create a series of trusts in cash endowments and

deposit them in fixed accounts in the banks in substantial amounts, to be run and operated by the *guthiyar* of the specific cultural activity, it would be like a shot in the arm to the cultural life of Kathmandu.

### *Monitoring*

Monitoring the impacts of tourism in popular tourist spots, national parks, and alpine valleys should form part of an ongoing activity. Its success depends as much upon the refining of monitoring techniques, as upon the timely evaluation of monitoring results and a regular follow up on such evaluations. The indexes for monitoring have been listed, defining culture in the broadest possible sense.

### *Institutions for Monitoring*

Tourism monitoring, according to the key cultural indicators shown below, is suggested primarily for small, remote, relatively isolated mountain cultures, lying close to the high Himalayas. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) set up at the local community level and involving local members can serve as ideal agencies for such monitoring work and provide an institutional basis for the job. We have argued that to ensure better results in tourism promotion and to provide a just distribution of profits from tourism to benefit everyone engaged in this trade proportionately, local people must be involved in all tourism planning and decision-making processes for their areas. Within this framework, local monitoring groups can be easily established. Only where monitoring requires the use of a degree of specialised skill or knowledge should such a skill or expertise be brought from outside. In the long run, however, local people can develop such skills through training themselves.

For larger urban centres, such as Kathmandu city, monitoring might be a little hard to put into practice, if the whole city is treated as one single spatial unit. Of course, there will be many specialised institutions, at the government or the semi-government level, that are assigned the tasks of both monitoring and looking after cultural preservation, charged with the responsibility of monitoring. But such government institutions are never known to work properly, or cultural heritage would not be in such a pitiable plight today. Even in urban centres, therefore, monitoring must be entrusted to the NGOs. The city of Kathmandu can be divided into a number of specific localities and neighbourhoods, as it already is, where spontaneously formed local organisations can take on the work of cultural preservation and monitoring. It is up to the skill, ingenuity, and application of such local bodies to get the pre-existing government and semi-government institutions, such as the city

municipality, ward committees, or government departments, interested in their work and to cooperate with them. Only this will guarantee the most dependable institutional framework for such monitoring.

### *Monitoring Recommendations*

1. Monitor the state of the natural resource base (forests, shrublands, streams, lakes, high altitude passes, and pastoral and agricultural land) of the region, starting from a benchmark year, and note the changes in them.
2. Monitor changes in land use and landownership patterns. Check if local land is passing into the hands of outsiders through lease, rent, or purchase. Check if agricultural and pastureland is falling into non-agricultural, non-pastoral uses.
3. Monitor the use of temples, *chorten*, *gomba*, *mani*-walls, castles, and caves by the local community. Check their present state of preservation, and check whether these monuments or religious/sacred sites are cherished and valued by the local people, and whether they would like to see them preserved. Monitor any change in them, such as incidences of theft or destruction or, on the contrary, improvement in their condition.
4. Monitor local festivals and other public and community social and cultural events. Take note of any changes.
5. Monitor poaching activities involving rare and protected species in the region, or destruction to its unique biodiversity.
6. Monitor the state of traditional crafts. Check if the production of traditional crafts is dwindling or has increased. Check the types and varieties of local agricultural products and food preparation and see what changes are coming to them.
7. Monitor patterns of both emigration and immigration of people in each specific region. Check whether they are permanent, extended, or seasonal patterns of migratory activity.
8. Monitor seasonal work patterns and any changes in them.
9. Monitor time allocation patterns in the practice of traditional agriculture and household chores by gender and age and note any changes in agricultural-pastoral activities.
10. Monitor changes in the patterns and uses of leisure time and forms of recreational activity.
11. Monitor changes in the patterns of village organisation, social stratification, exercise of authority, and elite activities in the village.



12. Monitor changes in youth activities and their preoccupation in village life. Observe how far they are involved in drug culture.
13. Monitor changes in the use of materials and architectural styles in the construction of houses.
14. Monitor changes in traditional food and drink habits and changes in the manner of dress and wear in both genders.
15. Monitor the state and level of pollution, trail-littering, and garbage-piling and report on what is being done to tackle this problem locally.
16. Monitor the general level of crime, pilferage, and vandalism in the community.
17. Monitor the level of local awareness in the preservation of natural heritage in the village. Do they feel more concerned about the destruction of non-renewable natural resources?
18. Monitor tourism. Is it only a seasonal activity or is it a full-time activity for the members of the community? Does an increasing preoccupation with tourism result in the neglect of traditional pursuits?
19. Monitor ownership of the local tourist market.
20. Monitor the sale of local traditional and cultural products in the tourist market. Monitor what items are most in demand.
21. Monitor the wares manufactured outside which are slowly replacing local products.
22. Monitor the local fuelwood use pattern and the changes induced by the arrival of tourists.
23. Monitor the general development work being carried out in the area, such as road construction, improvement of trails, expansion of communication links, establishment of market facilities, schools, health-posts, agricultural services centres, and so on and what impacts they have on promoting tourism activities.

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