

A Study on Heritage of Indian Hospitality

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ABSTRACT

Since the dawn of culture, India has maintained a magnificent heritage of hospitality, based on human kindness and fellow-feeling. Indian culture and religions, for centuries now, have imbibed mutual respect, concern, pardon and forgiveness for humans, animals and even Nature. There exists etiquette in every culture of receiving guests and hosting; but, it reached an artistic divinity in India in the Vedic culture that flourished some fifty centuries ago. In ancient Indian culture, guest was equated to God and has been called Atithi in Sanskrit. The relationship of guest and host was elevated to Godly binding, where guest too is bound by certain gratefulness, as a part of the hospitality Code of Conduct. It is wrong to say that it was part of Hindu culture alone, because this code of conduct was formed before the word Hindu came into existence, when a simple Sanatana Dharma prevailed in India for all Indians. In modern India, Indian government has invoked the Atithi Devo Bhava campaign under tourism enhancement.

KEYWORD: Heritage, Culture, Hospitality, Divinity, Industries, decade, MICE tourism

INTRODUCTION:

Ancient Indian culture was unique in its approach to life. The religion of Hinduism did not exist in the early days. People lived by a code of conduct that did not harm another human, animals or even plants and that means, did not harm any kind of life however inferior and obscure it might have been. This code of conduct later gave way to an ecology worshipping Sanatana Dharma that dictated terms to Indians. Initially, it was a loosely connected, easy to follow benign rituals, which, unfortunately transformed themselves into rigid laws in medieval times and came to be called Hindu religion, although there is no starting date or a proclaimed Prophet here. Sanatana Dharma was a nature-worshipping concept. In those days, perhaps all civilizations like Mayan, Egyptian and other religions of the Ancient World, worshipped the elements of Nature. They lived an ecological life and there was no other force to be perceived and naturally, they thought that by pleasing the Nature around them, they could pacify its destructive forces that brought them sickness, floods, thunder, lightning, persistent rain that ruined their crops and drove them to higher places. Eventually, not immediately, when the various religions like Buddhism, Jainism were born, the Gods of Nature were replaced by other Gods, who were heroes by their own rights. But, the concept of hospitality did not alter by the advent of these religions, or by later arrivals like Islam and Christianity. Sikkism, born in India, remained an integral part of the land.

—Hospitality is the cornerstone of Indian culture. In India, people have the highest regard for guests and value hospitality. There is clear protocol laid down in this context in ancient Indian scriptures and followed to date everywhere, across even the biggest business houses in India. Westerners are astonished at the kind of ‘red carpet treatment’ they receive in India.

Divinity in hospitality

In Indian heritage, offering hospitality is not the only divine act. Even honouring the offered hospitality was equally divine. The person, who was honoured by hospitality, is bound by it, beyond any other relationships, blood or friendship. In Mahabharata, we come across the sad state of King Shalya, Madri's brother. King Pandu had taken Madri of Madra Desh as his second wife after Kunti, and she became the mother of Princes Nakul and Sahadev. At the start of Mahabharata war, Duryodhan needed Shalya on his side, the formidable warrior of many weapons on his side and tricked Shalya to accept his hospitality. Shalya, who had not anticipated any hospitality from his nephews' enemy, the Kauravas, naturally thought that he was being honoured by the Pandavas, was aghast when he came to know that throughout his journey, he was accepting hospitality of Kauravas and now, he was bound by gratefulness for the received hospitality and had to fight on behalf of Kauravas, whom he detested, against his own family, became a charioteer to Karna and lost his life in the war to his own nephew.

Nature and Life Within

As said earlier, in the days of Sanatan Dharma, perhaps the oldest of all philosophies, beyond 10,000 years and more^{lxxx} kind values like humility, respect, nature worship, caring for other lives, natural element adoration, fellow-feeling and justice prevailed and out of them all, valuing another life was of paramount importance. There always existed a way of seeing life as indivisible part of Nature. Considering another human as part of oneself and another similar creation of Nature renders sublime fellow-feeling. Out of this concept, the principle of being hospitable to guests or any one in need arose. It acquired social, legal and even political importance and a noble binding of mutually accepted rules were followed. Daily life in ancient India was a very interesting part of history of human kind. As a sign of that flourishing civilisation, we have Harappa and Mohenjo- Daro, discovered in 1922.^{lxxxi} This Indus civilisation had existed during 3000-2,500 BC and continued till 1500 BC perhaps at the same time as Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations.^{lxxxii} This was a highly advanced, well-modulated culture, with evidences of trade across the seas and effective civic administration.

Later times

Sanatana dharma shrank and took the form of rather compartmentalized Hinduism with a certain fundamental mindset. Eventually, India saw the emergence of two other religions called Jainism and Buddhism. Although they were new religions, they remained close to Hinduism and continued the same culture of hospitality. They took spiritual begging to an entirely higher plane where Hindu rishis, Jain munis and Bouddha bhikshus were treated with great hospitality and humility. This extended itself to the societies and hospitality took over with great fervour. They were religions born in India, Sikhism included, and could not differ from the land's culture. These religions gave more importance to humility and kindness to an almost impossible extent.

—They became part of the original Ganges culture. All other minority religions, Islam and Christianity came to India and took root with the same hospitality as one of the unwritten rules. Religions could be many; but, they did not defy the rule of land. India uplifted hospitality to divinity and made it a way of life, where even the humblest are treated with regard and respect.

Earlier Modes of Travel

India, from the beginning, was a travelling society and the hospitality sector was well-developed with many modes of travelling.

The modes of travelling in those days were varied within available limitations. Kings and emperors used horses, elephants, chariots. Soldiers mainly used horses and camels depending upon the region. Palkin or Palki that were carried by servants were used by the noble and royal ladies. The rest mostly walked or used bullock carts. Horsewagons too were used for family travels. Rivers and seas were crossed in boats. Sailing across the sea was a rare occurrence. There were various transports like chariots, elephants, camels, elephants, donkeys, Palkin, chairs carried by people, etc. Ancient texts and Harappa excavations are evidence to these modes of travel in ancient India.

Hospitality units over the ages

Even though they were far and few, well-maintained Dharmashalas (Charity houses for travellers) and roadside Sarais to provide food and shelter from rain, animals and dacoits were available in Ancient India, a few, run for profit and others, by charitable people of means throughout the sub-continent and beyond. Journey in those days was nothing less than going to battlefield. People mainly travelled on horse-back and in a bullock-cart. Another tourism that flourished in Ancient India was Commercial Tourism. Traders travelled with their goods and with the risk of never to be seen again. They usually maintained a known route and patronised trustworthy inns. In ancient India, travel was not for pleasure and carried high risk.^{xc} Traveller of the day was anyone like a merchant, scholar in search of ancient texts, or a curious wayfarer looking for new adventures, or even a medical man in search of further knowledge. Eventually, the trade routes opened and tourism got enhanced in India. Travel across the sea became better known and Indians ventured into the sea for the first time.

Venturing into sea

Roman Empire was the most powerful European kingdom in the beginning of Christian era and this kingdom had traders and merchant caravans that frequented most central and south East

Asian countries and thus, began Indian trade with the West. These trade transactions gave way to regular travelling and it might be wrong to say that only commercial traders attracted by ivory, silk, spices, precious stones etc travelled to the East. Along with them, came historians, adventurers, entrepreneurs, craftsmen, historians, students, religious missionaries intending to spread the word of religion, writers, scholars, etc. These trade groups had entertainers, cooks, soldiers, and doctors etc. going together in an unknown voyage to reach an unseen land. Initially, they preferred the land routes. Most important were the people, who came with the single-minded focus of visiting new places and recognize new cultures. They were neither interested in the Asian wealth or lucre or conversion. They came on a scholarly pursuit, for their intellectual satisfaction and education. They wanted to satisfy their intellectual quest and see the wonders of a supremely wonderful land, India. They were welcomed in every corner of India, Indians returned these visits and new cultures were born in distant lands, while their cultures took root in India. That was the real advancement of mankind. China and India were exchanging tourists even before the dawn of Christian era. But, voyage by sea from the West to India and back was long, dangerous and tedious and took more than six months, solely depending on weather, unpredictable wind and even high voltage monsoon. Seasonal winds could change their direction and velocity, sending the ships to the bottom of the sea. When Buddhism became popular in India and the peace-loving Indians succumbed to the new faith, Buddhism also spread to nearby countries like Burma and China. Many tourists from these countries came to India to find out more about it. Buddha missionaries went to almost all the Asian countries to spread awareness of this religion. Buddha Bhikshus of all nationalities were a rare breed of sincerity and devotion, as we can deduce from historical evidence today. All Bhikshus had great desire to see the land of Buddha, where he strode like a colossus and where the most important of his relics could be found. In 65 AD, The Chinese Emperor Ming Ti of Han Dynasty dispatched a goodwill mission to India. Buddhism had brought the two countries closer and the Emperor was eager to know the original Buddhism that flourished in India, where emperors and kings were the patrons of this new religion. Strangely, the fascination of Buddhism was such, especially to nature-worshipping Indians that they were increasingly abandoning their Sanatana Dharma to gain access to Buddhism with its adorable, most recent Prophet, Buddha, who abandoned his princely rights to become a Bhikshu.

Travel inside India

Those were the days of free travelling, though sadly, not many records exist of Indians travelling inside India. Fa-hien visited India during the reign of Emperor Chandragupta II, between 401 and 410 AD, and historians have been unable to find any records to this effect. Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' tells us a slightly different story by mentioning that in the 3rd century AD itself, there existed a rule according to which a certain 'Mudra' was necessary for all foreign travellers, who were touring India and the absence of it would attract a fine of 12 Panas.

Maritime history of India

Indian hospitality was extended to foreigners when maritime activities started and Indians went abroad and foreign travellers came to India. Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were discovered in 1922. These ancient civilizations existed approximately during 3,000-2,500 BC and continued till 1,500 BC perhaps at the same time as Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations^{ci}. Scholars believe that the maritime travelling of India started during the Indus valley when trading contact with Mesopotamia was established^{cii}. When Romans annexed Egypt, trade with India increased. According to Strabo, at least 100 ships and 20 vessels sailed to India every year. He says, —At any rate, when Gallus was prefect of Egypt, I accompanied him and ascended the Nile as far as Syene and the frontiers of Kingdom of Aksum (Ethiopia), and I learned that as many as one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from Myos Hormos to India, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise.^{civ} India exported spices as the main commodity to the Greco-Roman World and the West, says Ball (2000). Silk and other commodities were not really favoured.

HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

To analyse the steady transition, spread and improvements in hospitality industry and how it has remained complementary to tourism. It will also highlight hospitality's initiatives in promoting

tourism. In the last two decades, tourism and hospitality sectors have seen remarkable, many-sided improvements in India, through the contribution by private sector and the government help. The Ministry has set up a Hospitality Development and Promotion Board, which monitors and facilitates hotel project approvals. India has the potential to become one of the major tourist destinations in the world and the tourist demand grows at 10.1% annually, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). Department of tourism is trying hard to create an unparalleled tourist destination in India and most of this responsibility and achievement rests on hospitality sector. Many kinds of hospitality-linked tourisms are available in India, including medical, healthcare, and adventure, heritage tourism, and ecotourism, rural and religious tourisms. Hospitable industry can provide the goodness of naturopathy, yoga, siddha, ayurveda, spiritual philosophy, Buddhism, Jainism and wellness destinations. India has one of the richest cultural, religious, historical and political heritage tourism, in the form of caves, temples, mandirs, forts, gardens, monuments, museums, art galleries and palaces that reflect not only medieval, but also ancient Indian heritage and all these could be converted into successful tourist hospitality sites.

MODEL HOSPITALITY UNIT FOR MODERN TOURISM

All requirements of a model hospitality unit, keeping in mind the requirements of a well-informed and eco-friendly international tourist. A model hospitality unit has the obvious and much more. The scenery against which the unit is set up might change; but, the original concept will remain the same. Let us take the most obvious into consideration, for example, a unit near a coast, or one on the slope of a mountain range, overseeing a fantastic, unending rain forest. The most preferred hospitality units are near coasts with stunning sunsets, with possibilities of elaborate, deserted sunning beaches, run with professional efficiency, more so, in a tropical country, can be an unparalleled attraction to tourists world over. Or, a high spot on the mountains with ethereal sunrises could be another such atmosphere. These units can have tropical gardens, pools, spa, bed rooms with at least two-side views, musicians, classical music for nights, to complete the atmosphere. Excellent food, friendly service-oriented staff, fresh fruits and vegetables can complement the scene. In addition to these almost unbelievable set ups, for any hospitality sector to run efficiently, there is a great need of complete strategic management, without which, it will not run like a well-oiled machinery and produce results. Strategic planning provides an immensely competitive edge that is needed for internationalisation of any unit.

WORKING IN UNISON FOR ENVIRONMENT

The tourism industry keeps growing. Worldwide tourist arrivals in foreign countries have increased by 6.5% yearly since 1950 reaching nearly 900 million arrivals in 2007; whereas in 2013, it is 1087 millions. According to UNWTO Report (2014), the forecast for 2030 is around 1.8 Billion international Tourists. However, this growth often comes with unsustainable consumption practices endangering ecosystems and natural resources. There is hence a need for greener hotels that are at the heart of the tourism industry. Hotel guests are more conscious of environmental problems and have started to consider the environment in their accommodation choice. —The quality of the environment, both natural and man-made, is essential to tourism. However, tourism's relationship with the environment is complex. It involves many activities that can have adverse environmental effects. This is also becoming valid for luxury hotels. The development of eco-labels is thus helping tourists in their choice. Without cutting on clients' comfort, many efforts can be made in the backstage by the hotel management industry through the application of best available practices and technological innovations. The hotel industry is now conscious of this new trend and has set policies in this respect. For implementation of daily rules and reduce the gap between commitments and concrete measures, it is necessary to have a set of eco-efficiency practices and easy-to-implement instructions.^{cccxlvi} It is absolutely necessary to understand that the environment, eco-balance and biodiversities have to be protected from extreme tourism. To prevent an irreparable damage to the ecosystems around us, Tourism and Hospitality have to work for environment along with the help of main participants, the tourists. Remote places like the Antarctica are extremely susceptible.

INDIA'S OUTLOOK FOR MICE TOURISM

Amidst, the countless ways that India can capture world attention as a tourist paradise, there

also exists a dynamic business opportunity as a splendid venue for MICE tourism of no less than global standards. According to Ministry of Tourism, MICE has been identified as a major area of promotion under the “Incredible India!” campaign. According to it, India’s MICE tourism attracts 1% of the total international MICE market. Enchanting India’s image as a conference destination is also projected through the chains of hotels: providing international standards in facilities and services, exclusive business hotels and exotic resorts with meeting rooms of distinction, spacious convention facilities India is in a continual process of upgrading its MICE facilities. There are multiple plans on the anvil for more world class convention centres, airports that contest with the best in the world and efforts to team the famous Indian hospitality with customization as per a visitor’s requirement. India is globally connected to a network of over 50 international airlines and several domestic airlines which provide convenient connectivity within India. Add to this India offers an educated manpower base where fluency in English and other official International languages can be expected. With the expansion in the network of airlines operations, better surface transport system including the Indian Railways, new centres of information technology, many new convention centres, hotels and meeting facilities; India is now an important MICE destination.

A large number of convention centres are available in India with a seating capacity of up to 1700 persons. The important conferences centres in the country are at New Delhi, Mumbai, Agra, Bangalore, Chennai, Cochin, Goa, Hyderabad, Jaipur and Kolkata. The Government of India has recognized the emerging importance of MICE, and has announced several schemes to increase the capacity of existing infrastructure, in addition to setting up four new world class mega convention centres in New Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur and Goa. The latest electronic equipment required for conducting conferences including mega screen audio-visual projection systems, digital sound recording and editing, video/text/data/fax transmission facilities and media and satellite network connections are available at all the selected venues.

S.NO	PLACE	MICE CENTRES
1	New Delhi	Vigyan Bhawan, Habitat World, The Ashok, Taj Palace, Park Royal, Hyatt Regency, Inter Continental, ITC Maurya Sheraton, Le-Meridien, Uppals Orchid, India Expo Centre, The Taj Mahal, The Oberoi, Hotel Samrat, The Park Hotel, Jaypee Siddharth, Radisson, The Centaur Hotel, ITC Welcome Hotel, The Claridges, Taj Residency, Grand Ashok, The Leela Palace, Palms, The Taj West End, Hilton, Royal Orchid
2	Chennai	Le-Meridien, ITC/Park Sheraton/Towers, Connemara Hotel, Taj Coromandel, Chola Sheraton
3	Goa	Majorda Beach Resort, Goa Marriot Resort, The Leela Palace, Taj Exotica
4	Hyderabad	Hyderabad International Convention Centre, Hyderabad Marriot Hotel, Taj Krishna, ITC Hotel, Kakatiya Sheraton & Towers, Taj Residency, Taj Banjara, Green Park, Minerva Grand, Ramoji Film City
5	Agra	Mughal Sheraton, Jaypee Palace, Taj View, Holiday Inn, Clarks Shriaz, Hoard Park Plaza, Grand Hotel
6	Jaipur	B. M. Birla Science Centre, ITC Rajputana, Hotel Clarks Amer, Mansigh Towers
7	Srinagar	Sher-I-Kashmir International Conference Centre
8	Mumbai	The Taj Mahal Hotel, Hilton Towers, The Leela, Taj Lands End, Renaissance, ITC Hotel Grand Marath Sheraton and Towers, Grand Hyatt, J.W. Marriot Hotel, Taj President, Le Royal Meridien, Hotel Rang Sharda

9	Kolkata	Science City, The Oberoi Grand, Taj Bengal, Hyatt Regency, ITC Hotel- Sonar Bangla Sheraton & Towers, Taj Bengal, Hotel Airport, The Park
10	Bhubaneswar	Swosti Plaza
11	Kochi	Le-Meridien - Hotel & Convention Centre, The Renaissance, Abad Plaza, The Avenue Regent, Casino, Abad

MICE centres of India

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one can argue that all these travellers who visited India have not mentioned any kind of hospitality, racism or discrimination. Their not mentioning any unsavoury incidents or lack of food/shelter itself, from a research point of view, were testimonies that India was hospitable to its illustrious visitors as well as common people. In their extensive journeys, these scholars could not find any ungracious inhospitality anywhere in the land. Some of them came again and again and were welcomed and were never ill-treated in any part of the country. Traditional hospitality existed in India everywhere. Merchants, traders, seafaring people, political representatives and scholars, that is, people from all countries and all faiths and occupations found India friendly and hospitable. Some married and had family here, while others took occupations and settled down here. Indians too found distant shores pleasing enough to set up their arts and trades abroad. It is easy to argue that hospitality in India always continued as an unbroken chain and it did not concentrate in a particular region. These travellers went to remotest places and unheard of regions; still they always met with kindness and generosity. India was not ruled by a single king in those days. But, the law of the land about generosity was single. India is flexing its muscles in the MICE sector both as a market (domestic and outbound) and as a destination (inbounds). The Indian MICE market is growing rapidly with a strong domestic sector, and a booming outbound traffic. At the same time, with the country's efforts to increase its inbound corporate travel, hotels and convention centres are witnessing massive expansion programmes to make India into a leading corporate meetings destination and hub. While foreign NTOs are making an aggressive bid for the Indian MICE traffic, Indian state tourism boards, venues, hotel chains and MICE operators are also not far behind in growth plans to capture the maximum share. India's MICE infrastructure has undergone a sea change with the setting up of new convention hotels of international standards in Mumbai in western India which includes Renaissance (1750 pax), Grand Hyatt (1300 pax), J. W. Marriott (650 pax). The other important convention destinations in southern India include Kochi - Le Meridien, Cochin convention centre with a main auditorium seating 1600 pax, Chennai - Le Meridien (800 pax) and Hyderabad Hotel Viceroy (200 pax), ITC hotel Sonar Bangla in Kolkata (700 pax), and Hyatt Regency (550 pax). In addition, facilities are available in the existing hotels like, Ashok and Taj Palace in New Delhi, and Jaypee hotel and convention centres at Agra and other business hotels. All these hotels and many others provide world class exceptional facilities for international meetings. Another important reason for the holding of international conferences in India is the recent increase in the air seat capacity, with the signing of bilateral agreements with a number of countries.

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