

Cultural heritage of buddhist monuments and its importance to develop pilgrimage in andhra pradesh.

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Abstract

Tourism in India has emerged as one of the major segment of the economy. India, with its rich cultural heritage, ancient monuments, world famous temples, architecture masterpieces, wild animal's sanctuaries, country holds a great attraction for the overseas as well as domestic tourists. Tourism is inherently the fore runner of economic development with the entire cultural heritage at its foundations. However, it is also a form of development even if restricted or limited by economic realities, and is, nonetheless, a means by which individuals and societies can access to and gain insight of one another's places of interest and events of the past. Through experience, education and enjoyment, tourism can be a liberating vehicle for gaining and exchanging knowledge and understanding in an intellectual, emotional and spiritual sense. Mahatma Gandhi eloquently expressed that "I do not want my house to be surrounded by walls or all sides of my windows to be barricaded. I want all the world's cultures to be free to blow around my house but I don't want to be carried away by any one of them". The State Government after considering the tourism potential of at least 22 Buddhist sites out of 150 discovered, selected for developing 3 Buddhist circuits, operational from Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam. Nagarjunakonda in Hyderabad circuit, Amaravati in Vijayawada circuit and Thotlakonda, Bavikonda, Sankaram and Salihundam in Visakhapatnam circuit are provided with whole lot of tourist amenities. Though, the number of tourists visiting these sites for domestic sector, Government of Andhra Pradesh aims at drawing large number of visitors from Far East Countries. Now Andhra Pradesh State is included in the Buddhist circuits of India. This paper will give detailed status of cultural heritage of Buddhist monuments in Andhra Pradesh.

Keywords: Culture, Heritage, Buddhist, Monuments and Tourism

I. Introduction

Visiting historic, Buddhist and cultural sites is one of the most popular tourist activities today. As a result, nations are paying attention to one of the fastest growing niche market segments in the travel industry today heritage tourism. The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines heritage tourism as "traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present".

Most of the inscriptions of the Andhra Ikshvaku period record either the construction of the Buddhist Viharas or the gifts made to them. All the donors and builders of the Viharas were the female members of the Ikshvaku royal family. Although Santamula I is reported to have performed the Vedic sacrifices, nothing is known about the religious leanings of his successors. This was the period during which Andhra became a flourishing centre of Buddhism and a place of pilgrimage for the Buddhists. The patrons were ladies from the royal household, the merchants and artisans and the people at large.

The great stupas of Jaggayyapeta, Nagarjunakonda and Ramireddipalle were built, repaired or extended during their reign. Buddhist pilgrims and scholars visited the Buddhist centre at Nagarjunakonda. The attraction for this Buddhist centre can be accounted for from the sea trade which was carried on between Lanka and the Ikshvakus though the ports situated on the mouths of the Krishna and the Godavari.

Buddhist Culture and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship which therefore strengthened the attractiveness and competitiveness of regions and countries. Culture therefore is increasingly an important element of the tourism product. It also creates distinctiveness in a crowded global marketplace. At the same time, tourism provides an important means of enhancing cultural exchange creating income which in turn can support and strengthen cultural heritage, cultural production and encourage creativity. Creating a strong relationship between tourism and culture can therefore help destinations to become more attractive and competitive locations to live, visit, work and invest in.

II. Profile

The state of Andhra Pradesh extends between 12.40 and 19.50 Latitudes and 76.45 to 84.50 longitudes and occupies the 5th place in India covering approximately 2,75,000 square kilometers in area. It is the 4th most populous. Drained by such mighty and perennial rivers as Vamsadhara, Godavary, Krishna, Pennar, and Swarnamukhi, etc. and possessing important geological rock and mineral formations, covered by alluvial soils, Andhra Pradesh was most congenial for the survival and sustenance of mankind from the pre-historic times.

According to F.R. Allchin, the most numerous foreign visitors, particularly from Europe and America, visit India, Andhra Pradesh which we may broadly call cultural historical interests. In view of India's rich and varied monuments and the fact that they offer much that is unique, this class of tourism has clearly a great potential for development and in our view can be exploited to a far greater extent than at the present time. These tourists may further be broken down into those with general interest wishing to see a small selection only of the most important monuments; and those with more limited regional or thematic objectives. The monumental heritage may in broadest terms be divided into four principal sub-groups: monuments of Buddhism, starting with the sites associated with Buddha himself; Hindu monuments, ranging in time from the early centuries of the Christian era to the present day; and enormously varied in styles: the Indo-Islamic monuments; and, the monuments of European and British association with India. Each one of these four deserves to be exploited for purpose of Cultural tourism.

III. Heritage tourism centers on history and culture

While the term usually refers to cultural heritage embodied in historical and archaeological sites, arts, festivals, and pilgrimages some observers include natural heritage as well, particularly where it is linked to a way of life. Heritage Tourism schemes do not exclusively involve the Diasporas. The United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated outstanding landmarks as World Heritage Sites and by doing so, attract many international tourists. Such sites serve as a significant development resource for poor countries since they attract international funds for their restoration and preservation as well as tourism revenue.

Heritage tourism strategies in various countries have in common development which make them major growth areas. They can be used to boost local culture, aid the seasonal and geographic spread of tourism, because of people's inclination to seek out novelty, including that of observing traditional cultures. Heritage tourism has become a major "new" area of tourism demand, which almost all policy makers are aware of and anxious to develop.

IV. Economical development

All types of tourism in Andhra Pradesh have registered phenomenal growth in the last 12 years (2000-2011) ever since the Andhra Pradesh government decided to boost revenues from the tourism sector by projecting Andhra Pradesh as the ultimate tourist destiny. The reason why Andhra Pradesh has

been doing well in all types of tourism is that the people of have always been known for their hospitality, affability and polite behavior that has been attracting foreign travelers to Andhra Pradesh in hordes. Andhra Pradesh Government, in order to boost tourism of various kinds in Andhra Pradesh has set up a separate Ministry of Tourism and Culture. This ministry recently launched a campaign called "Take Andhra Pradesh to the World and, Bring the World to Andhra Pradesh" in order to encourage different types of tourism in Andhra Pradesh.

In the year 2009 foreign tourists spent around US \$ 15.4 billion on their travel in Andhra Pradesh. Being a state with tremendous diversity, Andhra Pradesh has a lot to offer in terms of tourism and related activities. The diversity that Andhra Pradesh is famous for ensures that there is something prominent for all tourists, no matter what their interests are in Andhra Pradesh. Varieties of Tourism forms are available. The Andhra Pradesh Government, in order to boost tourism of various kinds is taking special steps to promote Pilgrimage Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Wild life Tourism, Beach Tourism, Leisure Tourism, Tribal Tourism, Rural Tourism, Business Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Health Tourism, Medical Tourism, Endogenous Plants-Tourism. The State has deliberately adopted; Culture tourism as the principal instrument to help and transform the area (region); and, culture as the authentic representation of human skills and means of preserving its cultural heritage.

V. Buddhist monuments

The State Government after considering the tourism potential of at least 22 Buddhist sites out of 150 discovered, selected for developing 3 Buddhist circuits, operational from Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam. Nagarjunakonda in Hyderabad circuit, Amaravati in Vijayawada circuit and Thotlakonda, Bavikonda, Sankaram (Plates 2, 3) and Salihundam in Visakhapatnam circuit are provided with whole lot of tourist amenities. Though, the number of tourists visiting these sites for domestic sector, Government of Andhra Pradesh aims at drawing large number of visitors from Far East Countries. Now Andhra Pradesh State is included in the Buddhist circuits of India.

As the Satavahanas and the Ikshvakus patronized Buddhism, this area has several Buddhist monuments. They were divided into three types, namely, the Stupas, Chaityas and Viharas. Originally these structures were devoid of images but they were gradually included in them. The legends of Buddhism and the mythology of Hinduism provided inexhaustible material to the artists. The Buddhist erected many Stupas from Salihundam near Srikakulam to Nellore, and among them, the Stupa at Amaravati (Plate 4) in Guntur district was the biggest and the most famous monument. The Stupa at Bhattiprolu is a wheel-shaped Sariraka Stupa. It is the first example of this model and the later Stupas constructed on the lines of later Satavahana period. The ruins of such Stupas came to light at Chandavaram, Ghantasala, Gudivada,²⁸ Jaggayyapeta, Goli and Nagarjunakonda (Plate 5). Some Chaityas were also in view at Kondapur in Medak district, Vihara is found at Sankaram near Vishakhapatnam, but it is rock hewn. Kondapur, Ramathirtham, Simhachalam, Bhattiprolu, and Guntupalli are accessible from Vijayawada, while Panigiri and Dhulikatta are close to the State capital-Hyderabad. The massive monolith of Buddha standing 17 meters high on the 'Rock of Gibraltar' in the Hussain Sagar Lake. The installation of the statue is a story by itself. The monolith weighing over 320 tones was literally carted all the way from Raigiri in neighboring Nalgonda District, a distance of 60 km.

The village Nanduru lies about 16 kms to the North of Bapatla in Guntur District. In the year 1930, while digging at the site Mahachaitya was unearthed along with a reliquary. It is very interesting to note that according to some scholars, the Buddhist scholar Aryadeva, the disciple of Acharya Nagarjuna was born at Nanduru. The structures resemble those of Bavikonda, another Buddhist site at Visakhapatnam. The village Pedavegi lies 12 kms North of Eluru town in West Godavari District. In ancient times it is known as Vengipura capital of Salankayanas. Few Brahmi label inscriptions were reported from the excavated mound locally known as Dhanamdibba. There are museums at places like Nagarjuna konda, Guntur, Amaravati and Hyderabad that display various Buddhist antiquities and

relics gathered during the course of excavations at the various sites. Andhra Pradesh is emerging as a repository of enlightenment as far as Gautama the Buddha is concerned.

VI. Conclusion

Andhra Pradesh Cultural tourism in view of its glorious heritage in the form of magnificent cultural monuments and antiquities are overflowing with rich art and architecture. The music, folklore and dance during Jataras at temples provide a cultured and sophisticated entertainment to the tourists. Andhra Pradesh Tourism authorities have good strategies to cater the needs and expectations of National and International tourists. Since the responsibility of the development of tourism lies under the State Government, one of the major impediments in the proper developments of tourism which includes the maintenance of the monuments, protection of their architectural, historical and cultural value, is inadequacy of funds. The Central Govt. therefore, has to take up the responsibility of augmenting the developmental activities initiated by the State Government, with allocation of adequate funds at proper time, so that the pilgrimage tourism may be developed not only in the study region but throughout the country.

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