

Tourism Development and its Impact on the Peripheral Society: A Case Study of Ladakh

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Abstract

Tourism has strongly been considered as an agent of change and widely used as a major tool for achieving the goals of development. Since the prefix '*Sustainable*' has been added to the term development and subsequently applied to all major economic sectors, the dimensions of development stretched to a greater extent than before and desired goals of development have been redefined. Tourism industry, often regarded as world's largest and fastest growing economic sector has also come under the diameters of sustainable development. The impact of tourism is not limited to the economic sector only. This industry has proven to be a strong stimulus for socio-cultural changes too. These impacts become more apparent in remote and peripheral regions where the societies are traditional and closed and where the cultural elements are preserved in authentic form.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the nature of tourism development in Ladakh, which is a peripheral region and explain how socio-cultural changes occur in this region since the introduction of tourism. Further, assumptions have been made through discussion regarding the future impact and the nature of tourism development in Ladakh.

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Background

Ladakh is one of the emerging tourist destinations of India. For the past few years, there is a rapid growth in the number of tourist arrivals in the region. The destination is becoming popular for its astonishing natural beauty, distinctive landscape, and exotic culture. Tourists were not allowed to enter in the region until 1974 due to certain political and safety reasons. In the year 1974, when the region was reopened after a long period of gap, it offered an exotic appeal with its age old culture and society, well preserved in the same way as they were centuries ago. It was a virgin land for the study of Buddhist art, culture, history, anthropology, and religion. In the Indian context the location of Ladakh may seem peripheral, but in an international setting the region occupies a crucial point. Before 1947, Ladakh was a major international midpoint which was linking Tibet, China, Afghanistan, Turkistan, and Kashmir and the rest of India with each other and hence, facilitating major trade, cultural and religious intercourse amongst these countries.

This strategic location of Ladakh brought it into the arena of international polity and influenced the culture, society, economy and religion of the region to a great extent. But in the later phase, when Ladakh was incorporated into the Indian nation and subsequently as the political relations of India with its neighbouring countries turned hostile, all international interactions through Ladakh were closed, due to the cessation of borders. The rugged terrain and mountainous boundary kept the region isolated from the rest of the world and did not allow much change to intrude into the region. This resulted in the existence of a well preserved, age old culture, tradition and an ethnic community in Ladakh.

Hence, all these, cultural, historical and religious uniqueness of Ladakh attracted a huge sea of scholars and art historians to the region. In the first year of reopening, there were 500 foreign tourists and 27 Indian tourists (domestic) which all together constitute 527 arrivals. The number of arrivals gradually increased in the subsequent years; 778 arrivals in 1975, 2051 in 1976 and it reached up to 14117 in

1980. In the year 1980 the region was swept away by a wide spread and deadly plague which caused a huge damage to lives.

It had direct impact on the domestic arrivals and the number recorded for home tourists was NIL. This state continued until 1984, though, this disastrous situation could not deter the passionate explorers and scholars from western countries. The number of foreign tourist arrivals did not cease and continued to grow. In the beginning, Ladakh was a popular destination among foreign tourists only, primarily for explorers, drifters and scholars. Its rugged terrain, difficult accessibility and hostile climatic conditions discouraged the interest of domestic tourists. Compared to the foreign arrivals, domestic visits were less.

Gradually, the exotic culture, unspoiled environment and enchanting surroundings resulted in a considerable flow of domestic stock.

Table 1. Data of Tourist Arrivals in Ladakh

Year	No. of Foreign Tourists	No. of Domestic Tourists	Total
2001	15439	4260	19699
2002	5120	2959	8079
2003	15362	13031	28393
2004	21608	13483	35091
2005	24536	13444	37980
2006	26114	17707	43821
2007	28178	26168	54346
2008	35311	39023	74334
2009	30570	48517	79087
2010	22115	55685	77800

Source: Tourist Office, Leh, Jammu and Kashmir

Since 2007, there is a visible change in the nature and number of tourists in the region. Ladakh, which was once dominated by international tourists is now witnessing a huge flow of domestic travellers. In the year 2006, the total number of arrivals was 43821 out of which 26114 were foreigners and 17707 were Indian. The number of domestic arrivals doubled in the following year and reached 26168 in 2008 and continued to increase rapidly in the following years.

One of the prominent reasons behind this changed phenomenon is the improved tourism infrastructure, which includes:

1. improved connectivity
2. better accommodation facilities
3. development of shopping centres
4. enhanced adventure activities
5. and widespread publicity and advertisement of the destination as an adventure spot with diverse cultural and natural attractions

Methodology

The study has been completed by visiting and staying at the tourist sites of Ladakh, interacting with the members of the host community, tourists and service providers (including the locals and outsiders). The methodology adopted here is of an explorative design and both primary and secondary data have been used. A keen observation, concerned with tourism practices in the region, has been made while visiting the sites and in-depth interviews were undertaken for obtaining the information and better understanding.

Tourism and its Impacts: A Brief Review of Literature

Much of the recent literature on the development of world tourism has been concerned with the impact of tourism on the host community. As the countries (and region within countries) have turned to tourism

as a means to increase national income, employment and living standards, and to end the dependency on limited range of primary products, pressure from tourism and its associated development have begun to affect the local population (Sevgin, Nicos, & Jonathan, 1996)

Tourism brings people of different cultures together, provides a direct contact between them and thus serves as a powerful means of diffusion of world cultures. It provides an opportunity for friendly and peaceful dialogue leading to better understanding between people and nations. It can build bridges and create friendship between nations leading to the establishment of peace - the penultimate goal of the United Nations. But from another perspective, tourism is a factor of acculturation which affects attitudes, alters popular beliefs, changes mentalities and spreads new concepts relating to work, money, and human relationships. Sometimes it also destroys the ties that bind people to their faith, religion and aesthetics. With the restaurants, bars, discos and other entertainment may come disturbing public behaviour, drunkenness, vandalism, crime, and indecency. Local youth in many cases emulate the visitor's behaviour and social and cultural conflicts arise.

The socio-cultural impact of tourism is numerous and varied, but most of them can be classified under one of the ten major topics: community involvement in wider frameworks, the nature of interpersonal relations, the bases of social organization, the rhythm of social life, migration, the division of labour, stratification, the distribution of power, deviance, and customs and the arts. There is a broad agreement among scholars on the findings on most of these topics. Under tourism the local community becomes increasingly involved in the wider national and international systems, with a concomitant loss of local autonomy; the community's welfare comes to depend more and more upon external factors (such as changing fashions and worldwide prosperity or recession) over which it has no control (Greenwood 1972).

Over the past 15 years, the literature on the impact of tourism on particular local communities has grown significantly. The impact of tourism on the socio-cultural environment of the host community has thoroughly been explored and a detail discourse has been made by Jafari's (1989) and it gives a good overview of the literature up to the late 1980s. In a pioneering study, Belisle and Hoy (1980) found that, in Colombia, attitudes varied with the distance between the tourist resorts and the respondent's home. Rothman (1978) found that the impact of tourism in Delaware was not disruptive. Var et al (1985) examined attitudes to different ethnic groups. Pizam et al (1994) compared the perception of workers in the tourism industry in Florida and Fiji. Allen et al (1993) examined attitudes of the residents of selected Colorado towns towards tourism development. The author concluded that low economic activity and low tourism development tended to cause positive perception of tourism: the residents of such areas had high hopes and expectations of the benefits of tourism. In 1980, R.W. Butler, in an influential article, postulated a link between tourism development and the attitude of residents to tourists. Doxey's Irridex Model (1976) claim that residents attitudes will go through a number of stages: from 'euphoria' to antagonism.

Tourism and Socio-cultural Changes in Ladakh

One of the major factors which influence the magnitude of tourism impact is the location where tourism takes place (rural/urban, coastal/inland, developed/peripheral region) (Mason 2008). The socio-cultural impact of tourism is likely to be more apparent and greater in peripheral regions where there is a large contrast between the culture of the receiving society and the indigenous culture. For a long period Ladakh remained a closed region, uninterrupted, unnoticed and isolated from the rest of the world and retained its distinctive culture and society with a combination of different ethnic groups. This closed-society, least exposed to the outer world and development, when first came into contact with tourists, who represented an entirely different and strange culture, a new

phenomenon arose. Initially, the tourists, who constituted a very small number, were treated as 'guests' under the traditional system of native hospitality. Pi-Sunyer has also suggested that tourists are treated as part of the traditional guest-host relationship at the initial stage of tourism development (Pi-Sunyer 1977). However, as the number of tourists increased, they become less and less welcome (Cohen 1982a). Pressures then build up that transform the guest-host relationship that is based on customary, but neither precise nor obligatory, reciprocity into a commercial one that is based on remuneration. Studies of this evolution usually present the process as a commercialization or "commoditization" (Greenwood.1972) of hospitality.

Tourism in Ladakh grew on the same pattern, where initially the tourists who were small in number were treated as 'guests' but now with the growing number of tourist arrivals, tourism is established as an industry in the region and hospitality became commercialized.

One decisive point which determines the nature of the impact of tourism on the destination is the stage of tourism development. Butler in 1980 has propounded an influential theory in this regard, known as 'Tourism Product Life Cycle'. Butler proposed that tourist destinations move through five stages beginning with discovery, then involvement, development and consolidation. From here destinations may move into decline, rejuvenation or stabilization, depending on innovation or measures designed to ameliorate the negative impact of tourism. The impact of tourism also changes at different stages. In the context of Ladakh, tourism is gradually growing and moving through the initial stages, with the characteristics of minimal negative impact, frequently benefiting to local community, moderate tourist facilities, growth in the rate of tourist arrivals, and growing economic opportunities, suggested by Butler (1980). The host community of Ladakh is enthusiastic and thrilled by the development of tourism in the region. They welcome the strangers and there is a mutual feeling of satisfaction. There are opportunities for them and money flows in along with the tourist. This state is similar to the level of

euphoria as described by Doxey (1976) regarding the attitude of the host community.

The most visible impact of tourism development in Ladakh is on its society and cultural elements. Though socio-cultural changes are induced by the factors which are both internal and external to culture and society the cultural changes may occur even in the absence of tourism. (Wall, 1997). It is difficult to differentiate the impact created solely by tourism with the other cause/ means of modernization. However, it is certain that the Ladakhi Society, which represents the traditional closed-society of peripheral areas, has profoundly been influenced by tourism. Tourism has facilitated the interaction between the ethnic society of Ladakh and a comparatively 'advanced' society represented by tourists/ or culture of tourists. Certain noticeable socio-cultural changes induced by tourism in Ladakh are:

Demonstration effect: The introduction of foreign ideologies and ways of life into societies that have not been exposed to tourist lifestyle has tended to call up that all-embracing concept, the demonstration effect. Turner and Ash see tourism as an exporter of western lifestyle to developing countries, disseminating metropolitan values and decadence. Alien commodities are rarely desired prior to their introduction into the host community and for most residents of destination areas in the developing world, such commodities remain tantalizingly beyond reach. UNESCO (1976) suggested that at the outset the host may develop an inferiority complex, which set heighten economic expectations among the local population who aspire to the material standards and value of tourists would leading to the copying of their consumption patterns. Greater wealth and upward social mobility would become increasingly desirable, particularly for young members of the host community. In consequence, class distinctions within the host community would be accentuated and they reflect the degree of involvement in tourism.

The demonstration effect is advantageous if it encourages people to adopt or work for things they lack. In the context of Ladakh, tourism

is credited for introducing both positive and negative changes in the society, most of them are as follows:

1. **Awareness and better understanding:** As stated above, Ladakhi society was cut off from the flow of development for centuries. It was tourism which gave Ladakhi people an exposure to the outer world and development for the first time. Interaction with the tourist who represents distinct cultures helped the local community to enhance their awareness and information about the outer world and diverse cultures.
2. **Education:** Ladakhi society represents an ethnic society, where literacy was absent. People were engaged in their simple and fixed roles. Encounter of this simple community with the tourists from the developed world and a close interaction helped them to understand the value of education. Sometimes tourists were themselves engaged in educating the children and encouraging the literacy voluntarily. Later government and army facilitated the education and as a consequence, today the literacy rate of Ladakh is 65.34% (census 2001).
3. **Hygiene and sanitation:** Ladakhi population was notorious for their filthy life style. Ladakh, often called as 'cold desert' represents a cold climatic region with a long severe winter. Temperature remains below minus degree almost 8 months in a year. Such climatic conditions, accompanied with the old pattern of living caused complete negligence towards personal hygiene and sanitation. Bathing was not a part of daily routine of Ladakhies. They seldom wash their dress or brush their teeth. Coming into contact with new people who looked neater and clean they got their first experience of hygiene. Especially, the families who were engaged in providing services to tourists had to maintain a certain level of hygiene and sanitation and gradually, the local people learned hygienic practices.

4. **Dressing:** Ladakhi people like other ethnic groups have their specific and unique dress code. A drastic change in the dressing style of the Ladakhi community can easily be noticed in the region; particularly the young members of the society are highly influenced by the tourists and adopted the dressing style of foreigners.

Rejuvenation of culture: Tourism has raised the identification and recognition of Ladakhi people and culture. Their art and tradition received much popularity and notice on national as well as international levels due to growing tourism. This gave rise to a sense of pride amongst the local community about their culture and old history. Along with this, conservation of old monuments and architecture was also encouraged because of their touristic attraction.

Attitude of host community towards growing tourism: One of the major impacts of growing tourism on the social organization, particularly in the simple and traditional society of Ladakh, consists of an expansion of the economic domain: some areas of life that were not primarily regulated by economic criteria became commercialized or "commoditized". Moreover, considerations of economic gain took a more prominent place in locals' attitudes and relationships not only in their dealings with tourists, but also among themselves.

Stratification: The impact of tourism on stratification has been noted by many researchers (e.g. de Kadt 1979). Tourism certainly promotes a change in the criteria of stratification (Stott 1978) by placing greater emphasis on the economic domain. It enhances the value of money as a criterion of stratification versus more traditional criteria such as a person's origin or status honour. It thus tends to effect a transformation of the existing stratification system (Greenwood 1972; Reynoso Valle & de Regt 1979). Moreover, even when its consequences are less profound, it creates new social strata, particularly middle classes (de Kadt 1979). In Ladakh, tourism has provided an additional means of earning to the members of the host community. Those who are involved in this business gained better

economic prosperity than others and thus represent a different socio-economic class in the society.

Lifestyle: Ladakh had a small farming based rural economy which was supporting the simple needs and demands of a tiny population. Since tourism has been introduced as a growing and lucrative business, the economy and income of the local community has improved. The increased income raised the desire and demand for lavish items, seeking for comfort. Further, increased employment opportunities for both male and female and involvement in providing tourism related services have brought changes in their routine life.

Discussion and Predictions

Tourism is increasingly becoming an integral part of Ladakhi economy. Tourism is credited for bringing several positive changes and development opportunities in this less-known region. However, the nature of tourism planning and governmental concern can be a worrying issue as there is no mechanism or planning to control this growing industry and the absence of proper monitoring can eventually lead towards disastrous consequences. Tourism literatures are encumbered with the study of the socio-cultural impact of tourism and most often condemning this industry for damaging the socio-cultural fabric of traditional societies, commercialization of cultural elements, introducing foreign ideologies, increasing the rate of moral problems as crime, gambling and prostitution and creating strain on the local hospitality leading to local resentments. Butler suggested that tourism impacts are likely to change over time as a destination area develops. (Butler, 1980). According to Wall (1977), key factors contributing to the nature of the impact are the type of tourism activities engaged in, the characteristics of the host community in the destination region and the nature of the interaction between the visitors and the residents. Tourism in Ladakh is undergoing a stage of drastic transformation. There is a noticeable change in the number of tourist arrivals, tourist spending and consumption patterns of

facilities, duration of stay and activities at the sites, from what it was few years before. The nature of interaction between tourist and host community has also changed. Ladakh which was once occupied by the foreign tourists, particularly explorers, adventurers, scholars characterized by less number and least demands, is now bustling with domestic tourist arrivals. The number of domestic arrivals outweighs the international ones. Subsequently, changes are occurring in the demand and consumption pattern of tourist related facilities too. Earlier, Ladakh was a less-known tourist destination, and its harsh and hostile accessibility made domestic leisure travellers reluctant to come to destination. The number of visitors was limited and small. Hence, the negative impacts were nominal. But as the form, size, pattern and nature of the tourism industry is changing, and the impacts are growing uncontrollably, leading towards the possibilities of negative consequences for which tourism is often condemned. Tourism literatures and books are encumbered/ stuffed with the study of socio-cultural impacts of tourism, particularly negative.

Commoditization of culture, which is the most common negative repercussion of tourism, is likely to occur, as the traditional ways of life become commercialized for tourist consumption (de Kadt, 1979, Cohen, 1988b, Greenwood). MacCannell (1973) termed it 'staged authenticity, cheap imitation products sold to tourists as local craftwork (Graburn, 1967).

Further, as Doxy (1976) suggested that the attitude of the host community also changes from 'euphoria' to 'antagonism' as the industry grows. One of the most important factors in the growth of hostility to tourism relates to the physical presence of large numbers of tourists. This numbering impact is clearly relative to the size and spatial distribution of the host population, as is evidenced by some of the smaller island economies: the ratio of the host population ranges from almost 33 per 100 in the Maldives. Another factor is of 'demonstration effect', which is the adoption by local residents, especially young people, of tourist behaviour and consumption patterns (Rivers, 1973). In Ladakh this process has created some

benefits as the local people are encouraged to get a better education in order to improve their living standards. However, in addition it can prove to be the most evident points to the social disbenefits as locals adopt the marks of affluence paraded by tourists, and live beyond their means. As part of this adoption process, the population often starts to demand more luxury items which tend to be imported goods, thereby generating an economic drain to the local economy (Clevedon, 1979). The adoption of foreign values also leads to what Jafari (1973) has described as a premature departure to modernization, producing rapid and disruptive changes in the host society. Under these circumstances social tension develops as the host become subdivided between those adopting new values (usually young people and those deeply involved in the local tourism economy) as opposed to those retaining a traditional way of life. Such social dualism has been recorded by Smith (1977) in her study of Eskimo communities, Greenwood (1976) in rural Spain, Lundberg's (1974) studies of Hawaii and Cowan's (1977) work on the Cook Island.

In Ladakh the societal changes brought about by tourists are not always easy to isolate from other 'modernizing' influences, but they appear to impact on a range of social elements. Tourism brings changes in moral conduct also. The moral changes attributed to tourism, are particularly the rise in crime (Nicholls, 1976; Pizam, 1982; Chesney-Lind & Lind 1985) gambling (Pizam & Pokela 1988) and prostitution (Graburn, 1983; Fish, 1984; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Heyzer 1986) at the destination.

Tourism, if planned, controlled and properly monitored, can help in achieving the desired stage of development, but at the same it has tremendous possibilities to cause deleterious impacts on the socio-cultural environment of the destination, if it grows unplanned and uncontrolled. A positive attitude toward tourism may indeed accompany the initial stages of its development (e.g. Belisle & Hoy 1980), but as the tourism grows it imposes several threats too. Tourism in Ladakh is growing followed by the changes in its impacts, particularly on society and culture. A serious concern from government should be paid on planning and assuring that the tourism

growth confirms to the guidelines of sustainable development. Ladakhi society and culture is unique and fragile. It constitutes a significant segment of the tourism product of Ladakh. So attempts must be focused towards preserving and maintaining the distinctive elements of Ladakhi society and culture.

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