

History of Nepalese Tourism Industry

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is not a new phenomenon in Nepal. People had been travelling by different means since ancient times when the modern concept of tourism was not introduced. Due to the Rana autocracy, Nepal was closed to the international visitor. After the restoration of democracy in 1950 Nepal government has recognized tourism as a key vehicle of development. Many developing countries are incorporating tourism into their industrial value and government of Nepal also has recognized tourism is as a high-paying industry and a key source of revenue which was priorities in tourism policy. Nepal's Tourism Policy-2009 focuses on enhancing quality, accumulating foreign reserves, and creating job opportunities to help Nepalese people improve their living conditions and protecting environment for its sustainability. Nepali tourism saw ups and downs between 1999 to 2021; including an Indian plane hijacking, a Royal massacre, a decade-long Maoist insurgency, an international economic crisis, the 2015 earthquake, and the COVID-19 epidemic. Since its inception, the Nepali tourist sector has struggled. Despite the government's priority, the private sector has established itself as a high-paying enterprise. This article is based on qualitative research and aims to address historical development of tourism in Nepal. Descriptive and analytical methods were used in this research to investigate the history of Nepali tourism industry. In-depth interviews and library research are being used to gather data about the subject. It is limited to historical study on the subject. Finding of the research can be generalized to study the entire situation of tourism in Nepal.

Keywords: *Tourism Industry- Professionalism- Revenue -Sustainability- Tourism policy.*

INTRODUCTION

Touring and traveling have existed since the dawn of civilization and is an important feature of human culture. Tourism is not a new phenomenon; if we see prehistory we would discover that humans have been moving from place to place for around one million years (Kunwar, 2006). It is not a novel concept to Nepal as western scholar defines. Different words for tourism evolved from the root *atan*, which signifies leaving home for a period of time to visit other locations (Negi, 1982), such as *paryatan*, *deshatan* and *tirthatan* to represent tourism. Such phenomenon was in practice before the practice of modern tourism concept. Nepal was the hub of international visitors in ancient and medieval period but because to the Rana Policy Nepal was isolated from international interaction until 1950. In 1950-51, the Ranas were deposed by a popular democratic movement. Changes occurred, Nepali people were emancipated, and the country was opened to foreigners again (Ojha, 2018). Prior to the 1950s, just a few tourists were permitted to visit Nepal by the Rana dictatorship.

Tourism is now acknowledged as a high-paying business industry and a significant source of income. After the establishment of democracy Government of Nepal has priorities tourism as a key vehicle for national development. For the development of tourism government has formulated tourism policy in different time frame. Nepal Tourism Policy 2009 focuses on improving quality, collecting foreign reserves, and generating job opportunities to help Nepalese people for their better living standards. Nepali tourism industry after crisis is in improving condition so it the right time to focus on sustainable tourism for the local people and preserves the potential for the future visitors. Many developing countries like Nepal are trying to incorporate fundamental of sustainable principles in the industry to achieve sustainable tourism goal. Nepal has a lot of opportunities in the industry thus the government policy must be integrative, collaborative and comprehensive.

Many of the studies conducted by the native and foreign scholars describe tourism. Wall (1982) defines temporary migration as the temporary relocation of persons to locations other than their regular areas of work and housing, the activities undertaken during their stay in such regions, and the facilities established to meet their requirements. Touring and traveling have been around since the start of civilization and are an integral part of human culture (Kunwar, 2006). Tourism is not a new phenomenon; in fact, it dates back to antiquity. Archeology would reveal that humans have been traveling from place to place for around one million years. For Hindus, this is not a fresh idea. Negi (1982) states that tourism terms developed from the root *atan*, which means to leave home for a length of time to visit other places such as *paryatan*

(going out for pleasure). These literatures don't support the raised research questions but it is partially helpful to conceptualize the history of Nepali tourism business. The gap left by the previous studies has been chosen as a research problem for this research.

DISCUSSION

Until 2019, tourism was in flux. International visitor visits in Europe surpassed 1.4 billion in 2018, a 6% increase over 2017. In 2018, 343 million foreign tourists visited Asia and the Pacific. Arrivals in South Asia increased by 5%, in South-East Asia by 7%, and in Oceania by 3%. Arrivals in North East Asia grew by 3%. In 2018, 217 million foreign visitors visited North America, while 67 million tourists visited Africa. In 2018, the Middle East rose by 10%.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization the number of international tourists declined by 65 percent in the first half of 2020 compared to the same time in 2019. COVID-19 and the lockdowns imposed by several nations in 2020 have led in a considerable decline in international travel, resulting in a loss of 440 million foreign arrivals and about \$460 billion in worldwide tourist income. International tourism was in decline from 2008 until 2021. Tourism has geared up since 2022. Tourism's recent expansion demonstrates that it is now one of the most significant drivers of economic growth and development. According to the world travel and tourism council (2017), travel and tourism contributed 10.4 percent of global GDP and supported 313 million jobs, or 9.9 percent of overall employment in 2017, corresponding to one out of every eleven jobs in the global economy. By 2026, it was expected to provide approximately 370 million employments worldwide.

Tourism in Nepal

Nepal used to be a popular tourism destination. During the ancient time, Emperor Ashoka, a great traveller, visited Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha (Regmi, 1970). Huen Tsang, a famous Chinese explorer, stopped at Lumbini, Nepal on his way to India in 636 A.D. Pai Yan, another Chinese adventurer, visited Lumbini in 430 A.D. (Khatiwada & Dahal, 2010). Since ancient times, Nepal has been considered a holy destination for both Buddhists and Hindus due to the birthplace of the Buddha and Sita and the existence of Pashupatinath. Both Hindus and Buddhists have traveled to Nepal to pay tribute to fearful shrines in various locations (Collier, 1989). Mallas, the kings of Medieval Nepal, were interested in welcoming pilgrims who visited Nepal since pilgrims are responsible for promoting tourism. The number of visitors visiting Nepal was low due to a lack of transportation and other infrastructure. At

the time, the bulk of visitors to Nepal came from India and China (Ojha, 2018). Since ancient time Nepal has been priorities by the visitors as a tourist destination.

Ancient Period

Tourism in Nepal was seen differently in ancient times. According to Buddhist mythology, the Buddhist mystic 'Manjushree' entered Kathmandu Valley and slashed the Chovar Hill with his sword to allow water to flow (Sharma, 2033). He emptied the water and took up residence. Manjushree is supposed to have arrived in Nepal as the first tourist from Mahachin. According to the chronicle, Gautam Buddha visited Nepal during the reign of Jitedasti, the seventh Kirat King, who remained in the western section of the country, near Swayambhu. However, Nepalese historians disagree. There is no evidence of Buddha's visit to Kathmandu. They believe that Buddha never visited Kathmandu (Khatiwada & Dahal, 2010).

Emperor Ashok had also been to Nepal. King Ashok went to Lumbini, Lord Buddha's birthplace, and constructed the Ashok Pillar there. He subsequently proceeded to Kathmandu and constructed identical pillars in several locations (Ojha, 2018). According to the inscription, Emperor Ashoka visited Lumbini and Kapilvastu during his tour. He also carved another inscription in Niglihawa. Ashoka's visit to Kathmandu was only recorded in chronicles, which were not considered reliable sources for scientific history writing. It has never been proven historically. Four Ashoka-style pillars discovered in Patan may have been constructed by others dispatched by Ashoka (Khatiwada & Dahal, 2010).

Licchavi Period

From the standpoint of tourism, the Lichchhavi period was regarded as the golden era. Art and culture advanced dramatically during the Lichchhavi era (400 A.D. and later). The main attractions of the Lichhavi era were Kailashkut Bhawan, Managriha, and Bhadradiwas Bhawan. The way art and culture were growing in Nepal at the time prompted Chinese tourists to visit and write about Nepal (Ojha, 2018).

The marriage of Bhrikuti and Tibet's King Srong-sten Gampo resulted in the development of special connections between the two kingdoms (Sharma, 2033). As a result, individuals from these countries naturally traveled from one to the other. Following that, for a long time, Nepal was the sole way to reach China via Lhasa and to go from China to India via Lhasa. This resulted in an increase in foreigner arrivals in Nepal (Ojha, 2008).

Huien-Tsang, a famous Chinese adventurer, began his voyage to India in 629 A.D. In 643 A.D., he returned to China through Nepal. Huien-Tsang visited Lumbini on his trip to

Nepal. Another Chinese adventurer, Li-Yi-Piao, arrived in Nepal through Lhasa in 643 A.D. and subsequently went to India. Another Chinese adventurer, Wang Hiuentse, used to travel to and from Nepal with his companions while serving as an ambassador to India from 643-657. During the Licchhavi period, Buddhist monks, monastics, and preachers visited Nepal, including Shantarakshit in 742 A.D., Padma Sambhav in 474 A.D., Kamalsheel in 760 A.D., Atisha Dipankar in 1040 A.D., and Milarepa in 1010 (Pradhan, 1988).

Medieval Period

Following the Licchavis, the Mallas ruled Nepal. This is referred to as medieval history. Christian missionaries arrived in Nepal during the Malla dynasty with the intention of spreading Christianity in Tibet. Nepal became a transit point for missionary activities. Many foreigners visited Nepal for missionary purposes during this period, up to the reign of Jaya Prakash Mall. During the reign of Laxmi Narshing Malla, king of Kantipur (1620-1641), a foreigner, Portuguese Father Juan- Cabral, reached Nepal for the first time in the medieval era in 1628. Later, more missionaries arrived in Nepal with similar goals. Since 1737 A.D., King Jaya Prakash Malla has granted Christians written permission to reside and preach Christianity in Kantipur (Ojha, 2008).

When Prithivi Narayan Shah captured Kathmandu Valley, he ordered Christian Pastors and Nepali Christians to leave the kingdom. Pastor Giuseppe and 58 Nepali Christians fled Kathmandu Valley on February 4, 1769, to live in India's Bettiah, near the Nepal border (Vaidya, 2003). Foreign visitors visiting Nepal at the time were European missionaries. Furthermore, Chinese, Tibetans, and Indians used to visit Nepal for religious and economic reasons. Similarly, Nepalese businessmen used to travel to Lhasa for business, while Tibetan traders visited Nepal and vice versa. Thus, religious and trading activity had contributed to the development of tourism in Malla period (Khatiwada & Dahal, 2010).

Modern Period

In 1767 A.D., King Prithvi Narayan Shah united the petty hill states into a single and integrated Nepal (1825 B.S.). Until the time of King Prithivi Narayan Shah, Nepal was off-limits to foreigners, particularly Europeans. The advent of tourists in Nepal in contemporary history was established by the William Kirk Patrick Mission in 1792. Despite the fact that Kirk Patrick came to Nepal as a military officer to gather data about the country, his book "An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal" served to promote Nepal to foreigners (Khatiwada & Dahal, 2010).

Following the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, Wallich was appointed as a British Resident in Kathmandu to enhance Nepal's ties with British India. Following that, British nationals made regular travels to Kathmandu. From 1850 to 1851, Jung Bahadur Rana visited Britain, which played an important role in presenting Nepal to the western world. Sir Brian Hodgson and Sir Joseph Hooker later visited Nepal. During the era of Prime Minister Bir Shamsher, French scholar Silva Levy visited Nepal. He authored a book on Nepal called *History of Hindu Kingdom* in French (which was translated in Nepali language by Dilli Raj Uprety) (Ojha, 2008).

During the term of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher, Percival Landon visited Nepal. Similarly, in 1911 and 1921, King George V and the Prince of Wales visited Nepal for hunting. The oldest documented record of foreign visitors to Nepal is found in Percival London's book 'Nepal,' (Volume 11, Page 299- 305), where 153 Europeans, largely British, are mentioned to have visited Kathmandu between 1881 and 1925. In 1924, George Mallory and Andrew Irvine attempted to climb Everest but went missing. Other mountaineers were also granted permission to ascend the peak under careful monitoring. Despite these achievements, the Rana kings kept Nepal secluded from outside influence until 1950 (Ojha, 2018).

The year 1950 is a watershed moment in Nepal's history. Prior to the 1950s, only a few visitors were permitted to visit Nepal by the Rana dictatorship. In 1950, Nepali tourism was thriving. Tony Hagen, a Swiss geologist, marketed Nepal to the international audience as the "Switzerland of Asia." Maurice Herzog, a French citizen, became the first person to reach the peak of Annapurna. Sir Edmund Hillary (New Zealand) and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa (Nepal) reached the top of Mt. Everest (8848m) for the first time on May 29, 1953 (Ojha, 2018).

On the other hand, Tony Hagen a Swiss geologist first came to Nepal in 1950 with Swiss development mission. In 1952, he was employed by Nepal government for exploring and mapping geography of Nepal. Nepal issued its first tourist visa to Boris Lisanevich, Russian hotelier invited by King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah to allow Thomas Cook Company to send tourist in Nepal. Boris established hotel Royal and began catering tourist (Ojha, 2018).

In 1956, National tourism council set up first five-year tourism development plan under Ministry of industry and commerce. Royal Nepal Airlines Cooperation (RNAC) was established in 1958 and became member of International Union of Official Travel Organization. During 1960's Nepal began direct links to Indian cities. First travel agency "Mountain Travel Nepal" now "Tiger Mountain" was established by Colonel Jimmy Robert. He had started "Tiger Tops" in Chitwan National Park to accommodate tourist who enjoy jungle activities. He is regarded

as “father of trekking in Nepal” and role model in teaching and implementing management in tourism of Nepal (Khatiwada & Dahal, 2010)

Nepal became popular tourist destination for the Hippies during 1960’s and 70’s. Hippies who followed radical and liberal anti-war philosophy with “mind exploring” activities such as sex, drug and religion began travelling in Nepal. Hashish and marijuana was legal in Nepal until 1979 when Drug Enforcement Administration was established by Nepal government to discourage use of drug. Hippie played the role of ambassador and keep on telling cultural and natural beauties of Nepal to outer world (Ojha, 2018). The film was pictured about Hippie and their activities in a Hindi movie “Hare Ram Hare Krishna” by late Dev Anand (Respondent 2). In 1972, Tourism master plan was formulated with German assistance that led to concept of spreading economic activity in Nepal (Respondent 1). HMTTC, now Nepal Academy of Tourism & Hotel Management (NATHM) was established by Government of Nepal in 1972 aiming to produce skilled workforce required by hospitality and tourism industry. Chitwan National Park was officially established in 1973 (Ojha, 2018).

During 1975-1991, Nepal became hot spot for holiday makers, adventure seekers and cultural tourist. The flow of tourist increased in Nepalese tourism industry. Downfall of tourism in Nepal started with hijacking of Indian airlines from Tribhuvan International Airport in 1999. Because of Royal massacre (2001) and moist insurgency contributed to downfall until 2006. Tourism slowly started booming after 2006. Nepal marked 2011 as “Nepal tourism year” with slogan “Naturally Nepal” when 736,215 international visitors visited Nepal. Similarly, Lumbini visit year was celebrated in 2012 and government forecasted 2020 as the Visit Nepal year but again industry was suffered from Covid-19 pandemic. After 2022 tourism slowly geared up but the condition is not satisfactory.

CONCLUSION

Nepal, a Himalayan country home to several castes, ethnic and religious groups, is a heavenly land for foreign travelers. Since the country’s opening to international tourists in 1950, the Nepalese government has prioritized tourism. Tourism employs over one million people directly and indirectly and contributes approximately 4 percent of GDP. Nepalese tourism industry has a long history. Due to the political instability and other related issues it faced many ups and downs in the industry. The Nepal government has already priorities tourism as a key component for the development of a country but the will of political leadership and ignorance and incompetency of the bureaucracy it has been facing several issues in the industry. Nepal’s

tourism is failing to reach its objectives due to a lack of appropriate strategy, planning, and programming. Professionalism is a big issue in Nepali tourism industry. Nowadays, the Nepali tourist industry is in crisis because of Covid-19 pandemic as well as other related issues. Now it has geared up after a long rest but still the government authority, concern stakeholders are not aware of the coming days situation. Private sector has contributed a lot to develop the industrial sector without the support of the government which is not enough. To sustain Nepali tourism industry much more have to be done for its sustainability and long-term growth.

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