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Tourism in Nepal, Real or Hyperreal: A Postmodern Perspective

Prakash Upadhyay, PhD

Lecturer, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara

Western Nepal

Email for correspondence: prak-socio@hotmail.com

Abstract

The major argument of this paper is that many countries including Nepal have been active in devising tourism policies to support ideologically driven definitions, cultural heritage and symbols of national identity and ethnicity. However, innovative alterations in the field of tourism, economic, political events and emerging paradigms clarifies that post-modern tourism in Nepal and other countries is facing the challenges of not only about prospects, increasing diversities in tourism types, behaviour, but also about risks, uncertainty and quandaries of emic and etic behaviours. Post-modern tourism has always been associated with mystification, pluralities, prospects, challenges, risks and ostracism. The focus on confusions, risks and uncertainties both real and hyperreal (perceived) associated with behavioural changes, bizarre tourism, perplexity, media roles, political instabilities call for a need to re-conceptualization of culture, tradition and legitimacy and to build up an innovative socio-cultural-political and technological understanding of the issues embedded with post-modern tourism.

Key words: Precarious, simulational, orient, shaman, imaging, communalism and perplexity.

Prelude

Tourism emerged as a distinguished sociological subject-field mainly during the 70s suggesting tourism as an action, archetypal behaviour or quality, signifying the action of movement around a circle representing a starting point, destination and returning back to its original starting point (Wood, 1993). Tourism study is based on Sociology of leisure which is the study of how the humans organize their including a broad range of activities, such as tourism, , playing of etc. With the world's highest mountain peak Mount Everest, Nepal is an admired but precarious tourist destination for the international tourists. The decade-long insurgency and a global economic deceleration threatened the tourism industry due to which the tourists' arrival in Nepal has been always unpredictable. The Year of Tourism 2011 failed to meet the expected target of 1 million international tourists in Nepal.

In the global context, amid the increasing post modern tourism industry, the multidimensional global phenomenon of travel-for-fun or leisure, recreation is offering many fascinating confusions and chaos in research topics across different disciplines. In sociology and anthropology tourism-related ethnographic research has come a long way, from anthropologists overlooking tourists during their fieldwork and disregarding the seriousness of tourism research to academics taking active roles

in tourism planning and development (Tracy, 1996). The effort of socio-cultural anthropology with holistic mixed-methods to tourism studies is being widely endorsed. The interpretive approach in sociology and anthropology characterizing this discipline is ethnography, a methodology that has been applied successfully to the study of tourism. Nevertheless, amid the dilemma of changing cultures even in remotest part of the globe, severe predicaments are eminent in the field of postmodern tourism in Nepal.

Methods

The major objective of this paper is to understand the mystifications of postmodern tourism as a kind of transformation of the self focusing on predicaments of risks and realities in the post-modern tourism, both real and hyperreal (perceived), associated with behavioural changes. I have developed this paper, based on secondary information congregated from books, journals, and internet. The sketch of my understanding on researching issues follows six layers of interpretations; postmodern tourism, local encounters with globetrotters, paradigm shift in tourism, postmodern tourism predicaments, and reality of postmodern tourists' consumption behavior as well as re-conceptualization of culture, tradition and legitimacy.

Postmodern Tourism: A Kind of Transformation of the Self

The philosophy of postmodernism is characterized by a world of culture in which consensus values, tradition, absolutist forms of knowledge, universal beliefs, standards, normative control are challenged, undermined and rejected for heterogeneity, differentiation and difference (Urry, 1994). The very reality of the emergence of a postmodern world has inevitably set up a new agenda for the social sciences since the existing one and its whole set of concepts, assumptions, aspirations, method are no longer relevant. Its foundations lie in the investigation of and programmatic attempt to control and direct the highly modern world with an assumption that it is impossible for anyone to have objective and neutral knowledge of another culture. Embedded with a condition of the torpid state of culture, social structure, and self referring to a point of vanishing or departure for works of art, science, etc, as well as in tourism business and the interpretation of local culture, and civilization via emic and etic perspectives, Postmodern tourism signifies confusion and mystery. Recent trends in tourism in Nepal, such as the rise of specialized travel agencies, hotel/motel industry, the growing attraction of nostalgia and heritage tourism, the thriving of nature-oriented tourism, and the increase of simulated tourism-related environments, are labeled as aspects of postmodern tourism. It is the manifestations of global flows that blur traditional territorial, social, and cultural boundaries, and create hybrid forms and adapting to rapidly changing global trends and markets while trying to maintain, or even increase, local distinctiveness. The competitive struggle to obtain a piece of tourism pie becomes a question of how the local is (re) produced through the practices of touristified representations.

Discourses on post-modern tourism and culture emerged from the reshuffle of capitalism and the resulting cultural shifts in tourism types and tourist motivation. A cultural and intellectual phenomenon postmodernism in tourism is undergoing through swift movements in the culture and arts, while focusing on social and political outworking and innovations globally. The view of the contemporary modern world has been called into question from around the 1960's but with seeds taking shape at an earlier stage, the whole shape and organization of modern western society at the levels of the communal, social, the administrative, cultural, economic have been subject to disintegration,

transformation and change to produce a postmodern world. The disintegration of societies of the world has created apathy on the part of the people and hence they are willing to explore the new and grey cultures, societies, items etc. The consumption of services and experiences has a vital symbolic meaning to play. The innovative middle class has an important role in producing and consuming new forms of postmodern travel, particularly to the economically less developed country like Nepal. There is some concern, however, in endeavoring to mark out a relationship between post-modern culture, class fractions and tourism.

The sociological discourse of postmodern tourism consists of two theoretical frameworks, the simulational (fake) and the other postmodern tourism. The simulational line of scholarship is focused around the analysis of hyperreal experiences and refers to simulated theme parks and other contrived attractions as typical postmodern environments (Umberto, 1986; Urry, 1994). Conceptualizations of the other postmodern tourism stress the search for the real and point to the growing appeal of the natural and the countryside as postmodern expressions (Urry, 1994). The issue between the mass and the counter mass movement is also one of emancipation or salvation, or the transformation of the self, through the touristic experience, by engaging with the other on equal terms which facilitate to get in touch with a region beyond the limits of the tourist, as for example the Space tourism, compared to the authentic experiences like the Shiva Ratri Mela in Pashupati temple, Kathmandu. This form of tourism is said to be sustainable with low impact on environment and resources of the destination. Its success depends on low frequency, remote locations and low numbers. Annapurna region has seen the rapid decline and cultural degeneration and could not endure the tourists blitz and the continued prosperity of Pokhara, the tourist legroom expands as the environmental and cultural features become more and more susceptible.

Local Encounters with Globetrotters

It's a fastidious challenge to be encumbered with postmodern tourism in Nepal amid all socio-cultural, ethnic and other diversities. The post-industrial world of information system, communication and mass-media has furthermore paved the way for the augment of postmodern tourism. It signifies highly developed society organized on make-orientated world of consumption rather than work and production. Under it a pluralistic global culture and lifestyle, mercantilism, privatization and internationalization are prime. Under the quick process of globalization, various types of tourism is revolutionizing the postmodern world viz. space tourism, virtual tourism, sex tourism, cigar tourism, shaman tourism as well as without destination tourism etc (Umberto, 1986).

One classic that smack vehemently amid rhetoric of postmodern tourism is that among the travelers roving in mountains of Nepal, most are the people from the developed West or from USA, Germany, or Britain, who are in search of illumination, antiquity, peace of heart, and all the things they can't get in the west. However, the Nepali villagers they meet are in Lee jeans, Reeboks, and Madonna T-shirts who are looking for the paradise that they associate with Las-Vegas a paradise for recreation, of material prosperity and abundance. It's provoking because we can better see what we don't have. The other man's lawn is always greener and now we can actually go and visit his lawn much more and feel the absence of green in our own lawn and lives. The illusion of understanding between cultures is one of the features of postmodern tourism

Paradigm Shifts in Tourism

Postmodern tourism is characterized by the multiplicity of tourist motivations, experiences, and environments (Urry, 1994). In Nepalese milieu, the conceptualization of postmodern tourism head off from the tendency of the earlier theories of modern tourism to homogenize the tourist experience as a general type. In this respect, the notion of a diverse and plural realm of postmodern tourism goes one step beyond regarding the variety of tourist experiences. In Nepal the discourse of postmodern tourism consists of compromising statements and stresses the multiplicity of tourist experiences. Hence, it is argued that while the theorizing of modern tourism took the form of a modernist system of knowledge, the sociological discourse of postmodern tourism could be distinguished as a postmodernist form of theorizing. One side of the debate took the form of social criticism, in which tourism was viewed as an indicator of modern corruption or decadence. This conceptual approach was represented by those who perceived the modern tourist experience as a trifling and superficial activity which involves a quest for contrived experiences. The opposing approach represented and conceptualized tourist as a meaningful modern ritual involving a quest for the authentic. Amid debates, three types of structural shifts (i.e. after modern, return to the pre-modern and against the modern) can be traced (Mackerras, Taneja, & Young, 1994).

After modern signifies consumerist postmodernism and celebrates commercial vulgarity. Art and life are combined in playful borrowing of ornamental style. Earlier elements of culture are mass produced and no longer imply anything in particular. Also imperative are the architecture of surfaces and appearances, playfulness and imitation. Return to the pre-modern signifies what is celebrated is the classical form, the architecture of elite. The need to view classical buildings; preserved buildings for living. Against the modern conviction that modern is western privileged and metropolitan and professional over the people. Fervor that modern space is absolute, generalized and independent of context, while postmodern is common, localized, specific and context-dependant. Postmodern tourists have a preference places outside cities where they find pleasurable buildings that seem suitable to place and which mark that place off from others. Tourism has been seen as modern pilgrim with guidebooks as devotional texts and museums functioning as a metaphor for the power of the state, learning of the scholar and genius of the artist. The late seventies theories of modern tourism turned towards the contemporary discourse of postmodern tourism. Beyond the different notions regarding the nature of tourism, this shift involves a change in the style and form of theorizing within sociology of tourism.

Postmodern Tourism Predicaments; Real or Hyperreal

Post-modern tourism has always been associated with mystification, pluralities, projections, confrontations, risks and isolation. Innovative alteration in the field of tourism, economic, political events and emerging paradigms have emphasised that post-modern tourism is facing the challenges of not only about prospects, increasing diversities in tourism types, behaviour, but also about risks, uncertainty and dilemma (Tracy, 1996). Known and unknown risks are imperative simultaneous to the uneven and defective nature of knowledge and particularly the extent to which certain types of unspoken knowledge of local cultures, institutions etc) can be acquired in advance of a tourist trip, rather than through direct experience in field. Tourism embedded cultural risk is socially constructed in particular historical and cultural contexts and fabricate a typology of risk rationalities based on norms and group cohesion which provides insights for tourism. Amid the increasing cultural diversities, in

postmodern world people are born with a global village on two legs. Even within a physically small country like Nepal more and more visitors are in the position of enjoying hundreds of different cultures singing and clashing and conspiring within locals. The global village is increasingly internalized within the visitors. The hub is also on mass and minority, oriental, non-western cultures, religious traditions, ethnicity, environment, ecology and folkways offering real qualities and real places to discern the other side, the host society leading to materialization of a new movement often called tourism critique (Richter, 1989).

The computers knowledge, cybernetic models, information processing via internet, television and FM radio etc dictates the current tourism world. Media world depicting tourism world is experiencing differentiation. Real or hyperreal is the apprehension of the postmodern world of tourism. The world stands as a hyperreality or partially true for example, the media stops to be a mirror of reality, but become that reality, or even more real than that reality. Tabloid news shows highlighting the new tourist destination with the so called extra facilities (of hotels) are popular on Nepali and international media as television for the reason that the falsehoods and misrepresentation they advertise to viewers are more than reality-that is hyperreality. It is taking on in a new historical era, a new cultural products and a new type of theorizing about the tourism world. It share the perspective that something new and different has happened in recent years that can no longer be described by the term modern that those new developments are replacing modern realities, hence preparing the ground for the rise of mystification bent on searching loopholes in tourism industry and suggesting.

Reality of Postmodern Tourists' Consumption Behaviour

Tourism money can significantly revitalize, diversify, and stabilize the economy by bringing new money into the community and by creating jobs and business opportunities which may even influence migration patterns (Richter, 1989). Besides, tourism requires relatively little investment in resources because it relies on local areas culture, tradition, historic, ethnic, geographic, and local uniqueness. Mahatsov (cultural & trade functions) organized in different localities of Nepal may be an instance of postmodern tourism. Mahatsov cultures have created a tremendous opportunity for businesses, industrial and trade associations and the need for rural communities to inflating their cultures and economies by attracting internal and external tourists. The opportunity lies in the integration of the trends where businesses, trade associations and Mahatsov are hold in rural areas. This integration will have advantages for both towns and villages.

Within the postmodern tourist industry it is now common for people to pay for experiences which they know are not real or even necessarily similar to real. Cultural and historical experiences are staged simply for the benefit of tourists. It will not be a surprise in *Nepal* if Rautes are visible in the repertoire of Soaltee Hotel in Kathmandu sponsored by donor agencies, rather than wandering in forest. Likewise, if any tourist goes on a package holiday to China he/she will very likely be entertained by fake Samurai fighting each other on more than one occasion even if they know that it is only a game. Tourist experience is largely commodified and that there is not much point in searching for any real authenticity. We are sure that there is a lot of fun to be had there but it is the symbols and signifiers that are the main attractions pulling people there at despite their busy schedule, rather than the substance of what *really* is there. This fits into characterisation of postmodern culture as being one of contrived depthlessness.

Nepalese Hindu Pilgrimage for religious tourism to Kedarnath, Kurukshetra or Dwarika in India is the examples of myths. There are many more examples within postmodern tourism of (myth?). From artificially constructed lakesides, beaches within inland leisure resorts, spa, motels, complexes and shopping centres, to film sets at Kollywood, Bollywood or Hollywood; these are all places that, in the true spirit of have been commonly marketed as tourist attractions. Disney world in USA can be considered to be a prototype for such postmodern places, with its movement of tourists from scary ride to spectacular illusion; children's cartoon worlds; varied national cultural settings; and historical and futuristic scenarios. Widely varying experiences and cultures are experienced in just few places or cities, such as within Pokhara, Kathmandu, Lumbini in Nepal, and in various themed restaurants and bars and so on. Additionally, the post-modern tourist doesn't even necessarily have to leave his own living room to experience tourism, as he can do it through the television and other audio-visual and even sensory entertainment centers.

Re-conceptualization of Culture, Tradition and Legitimacy

Much of the research and debate on postmodern tourism has focused on whether its effects are beneficial or negative and whether they are developmental or anti-developmental. Increasingly a number of analysts of tourism development are inquiring the naive assertions that tourism is destructive of culture and tradition. Such criticism is characterized by the billiard ball model (Wood, 1993). In this model the cue constitutes the interests of tourism (big business, investors, government planners, etc.). These are the forces behind the white ball (tourism) which strikes a static (red) ball, culture. The red ball can only move in the direction dictated by the white ball at a pace determined by the white ball: it has no control over its own movement. This approach attributes passivity to the host community, thus denying that community has the capacity to respond creatively to the presence of tourism within its social space. It asserts the destruction of pre-existing host culture's structures and the degradation of cultural integrity and cultural pollution as due to the impact of the hedonist pleasure seeking, materialistic consumerism and ostentatious effects of tourism on the local socio-cultural structure. The cultural degeneration of host community in Baidam, Lakeside can be attributed to this drift.

Each generation label its tradition in response to new-fangled understandings, new experiences and new inputs from an ever-increasing range of external contacts, especially in the context of migration and globalization. There is a new diversity (of cultural expression) based relatively more on interrelations and less on autonomy. This is a shift from a naturalistic to a symbolic concept of tradition. What is traditional for one generation may be reshaped by later generations. Who then is to settle on which of the traditions is authentic and is to be saved? Berno (1996) has remarked that the imposed etic approach often involves judgmental statements about what is right and good for others. In Nepal, Shaman tourism the touristic element of propagating magico-religious, where tourism has been the source of its re-emergence is condemned by many as insensitive and superstitious commoditisation with tourism as the perpetrator of superstition. An emic approach to shamanism, focusing on actor-oriented, culture-specific values reveals that many Nepalese visitors regard magico-religious tourism confirmatory. Magico-religious tourism may be regarded as reconstructed ethnicity which is the maintenance and preservation of ethnic forms for the entertainment of ethnically different others. Such renovated ethnicity is not necessarily less authentic than natural ethnicity in postmodern tourism.

The imaging and re-creation of national cultures and ethnicity in Nepal is the crux of postmodern tourism. Many other countries have been also active in devising tourism policies to support ideologically driven definitions and symbols of national identity and ethnicity. Richter (1989) suggests that the Philippines under Marcos were the classic case of using tourism development politically in an attempt to add legitimacy to his regime. Leong (1989) also has an incisive study of Singapore and the way in which the Government has channeled its many different ethnicities into four official CMIO 'races' (Chinese, Malays, Indians, Others) and then portrayed artificial stereotypes for tourism, the underlying political objective being the need to maintain harmony between its ethnic divides. The Indonesian Government has attempted to use tourism to present ethnic and cultural differences in benevolent, non-threatening forms to prevent communalism from getting out of hand (Kipp 1993). China provides another example of the involvement of the state in determining ethnic identity and presenting acceptable manifestations of minorities' cultures for tourism. It officially recognizes 55 minorities (Mackerras, Taneja and Young, 1994). Although their numbers are comparatively small, they occupy about 65% of China's total area. Their territories include much of China's border areas so the minorities enjoy a strategic importance well beyond their numbers. Policy formulation towards the minorities is therefore bound up in foreign affairs, defense and national security, as well as economic development, education, health, social welfare and so on. China has used tourism as an authoritative tool to help in bringing the minorities into the mainstream by promoting and developing tourism activity based on their cultural heritage. Tourism policies and development have played a key role in China in assisting the state to manage tensions generated between Government's determinations to maintain political stability under Communist Party and attempts to find the apt mix of traditional Chinese culture, socialist culture and modern culture necessarily incorporating western values, systems. The interface between politically driven goals of power and government, preservation of nation's cultural heritage, sustainable environmental values, and sustainable postmodern tourism are problematic for politically instable Nepal.

My Reflections

Postmodern tourism in Nepal appearing in different forms will be influenced by a range of factors that will probably lead to expansion of tourism demand from certain groups in society with demographic change in western countries with growth in 'third age' market (elderly). Tourism for youths, children, students, disabled, diplomatic/political travelers, religious tourism by missionaries, Buddhist, Hindus and more non-Christians traveling. Development of new types of tourism products from alteration in flavor, tourism offerings, tech innovations, social concerns, stimulate new products such as vacation resorts with short holidays involving stays with families. Health-enhancing holidays; stress reducing trips via sex and massage tourism. Change in consuming habits, changes in the way in purchasing tourism products, internet, smart card, global distribution system to package own tours and mergence of Mahatsov and exhibitions culture in new ways. The anticipated impacts of postmodern tourism are; economic benefits of tourism supposed to be gaudy with leakage factor (importing many items for tourism industry, foreign exchange earned spends on importing foreign goods. Seasonal tourism has been generating mostly part-time, unskilled jobs for local people. Outsiders become makers and managers and the greater benefits flow to investors (multi-national companies, hotel

chains, international airlines) rather than to host communities. Degrade traditions, destroys natural environments, commodification of people and culture, cultural corruption and dishonest tourism and desolate rural area and de-agriculturalisation (younger people leaving rural farm areas for paid employment in the tourism industry of urban areas).

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