Role of Tourism in the Economy of Orissa

Dr. Kamal Kumar Pani

As we all know, the economy of a State or a country consists of various income generating productive activities. These activities taken together constitute the structure of an economy which can be broadly divided into three sectors. These include the primary sector secondary sector and the tertiary sector. In our society most of the people are engaged in firming while some others are employed in the other two sectors. Though the primary sector in India is supporting most of the people for a long period of time, the other two sectors are coming out strongly in recent years. In fact the wheel of progress has turned full-circle and the primary sector has now been relegated to the third spot in terms of relative share of different sectors to our GDP.

To have a glimpse of what has happened to the structure of our economy over the years, it may be mentioned that the contribution of the primary sector has declined from 56.5% in 1950-51 to 19.7% while that of the services sector has gone up to 54.1% in 2005-06. This sector has thus now become the leading sector of the Indian economy.

Services sector consists of different kinds of services including banking and insurance, trade and commerce, transport and communication as well as tourism and hotel industry. Among these sub-sectors, Tourism has a special place and it is better known for its employment potential. Apart from earning valuable foreign exchange, it stimulates hotel industry, retail trade and transport services of the country concerned. As per the estimates of the Planning Commission, a capital investment of about Rs. 10 lakhs in the tourism industry creates employment for 89 people while the same investment could create jobs for 45 people in the primary sector and only 13, in the secondary sector, thus signifying the role of this sector in the field of employment generation.

Apart from traditional tourism, medical tourism, eco-tourism and adventure tourism have added new dimensions to the tourism industry. In recent years, high-end Indian hospitals providing world standard health care facilities at comparative cheap rate have been attracting a sizeable number of patients from the advanced countries like U.S.A, UK and others. By promoting its private health care sector as a tourist attraction, India is on the brink of becoming one of the world's important medical destinations. Not only the remedial access time here much quicker, but also healing has now gone high tech. All these have made India a hub of medical tourism. In fact Indians tourism industry has gone to new height in recent times. Both tourist arrival as well as revenue earned thereof are showing a steep hike. As per the World Travel and Tourism Council estimate, this sector now generate more than 4% of the country's GDP and more than 20 crore jobs.

As a whole, Tourism is expected to generate 13 billion of economic activity now and by 2014, it is expected to grow to $ 25.08 billion. By that time, It is expected to create 28 crore jobs, which is of paramount importance in a labour
surplus country like India. This is made possible due to 'Incredible India campaign,' rapid growth of hotel industry in general and private tourism enterprise in particular. Massive development of transport and communication facilities through the length and breadth of our country has contributed a lot in this field.

Among the different regions of the country, North India attracts the highest number of tourists. As a whole, 49% of foreign tourists throng to this part of the country while Western India attracts 29% of them. With 18% of foreign tourist, South India remains in the third spot while Eastern region has a very negligible share of only 4% of foreign tourists.

Situated in the Eastern part of the country, Orissa has been the tourists' paradise right from the hoary past. In the ancient times, religious preachers and social reformers had come to Orissa to countenance the cult of Jagannath. Saints and savants had visited the land to strengthen their religious convictions. Now-a-days, tourists come to Orissa not merely for visiting places of pilgrimage, but also to see the art and architecture of the temples. Orissa otherwise known as 'Utkal' stands for excellence in the field of art and architecture. Its glorious past is best explained in Kapilamuni’s description, that reads:

"Vershanam Bharata Srestho, Deshanam Utkala srutah, Utkalasya Samodesha Nasti Nasti Mahi Tale"

Apart from the religious places, beautiful temples and artistic sculpture, there are several other spots of scenic beauty that attract tourists from far and near. Puri, Bhubaneswar and Konark have been attracting hundreds of thousands of tourists from different parts of the country and abroad. Festivals like Rath Yatra attract millions of tourists from different parts of the world while Snanayatra, Jhulan Yatra, Kartika Brata and Chandan Yatra of Lord Jagannath at Puri and Ashokastami Rath Yatra of Lord Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar attract millions of Hindus. Artistic excellence of the black pagoda at Konark enthralls tourists from different regions and the improvement in infrastructural facilities proved immensely useful in development of tourist industry in Orissa.

Persons interested in antiquities come to Orissa to have a glimpse of Dhauli and Khandagiri in the neighbourhood of Bhubaneswar as well as Pushpagiri Buddha Vihar at Lalitgiri in the district of Jajpur. Health seekers come to golden beach at Konark, Puri or Gopalpur to spend sometime. Chilka, the largest brackish water lake in Asia where migratory birds and Dolphins are of special attraction is another tourist spot in the state. Nature lovers also find enjoyment by going to Nandankanan near Bhubaneswar, Similipal National Park and Tiger Project in Mayurbhanj, Saptasajya and Kapilas Hills in Dhenkanal, Bhitarakanika wildlife sanctuary in Kendrapara as well as beautiful waterfalls of Duduma, Ghagra and Khandadhar.

Inspite of the presence of such picturesque tourist spots and places of historical importance, tourism in Orissa has occupied a backseat. Tourist arrival in the state has kept a very low profile. As per the official estimates, the annual foreign tourist arrival to the state is limited within 25,000 to 30,000 while inland tourist arrival is limited to about 40 lakhs. Again more than half of them are found to be local tourists. This means Orissa gets a very negligible share of tourists coming into the country. Leaving behind Puri, Konark and Bhubaneswar, no other tourist spot could attract sizeable number of tourists. There are a number of factors responsible for such sorry state of affairs and immediate attention is needed to develop it. Our discussion would be incomplete without mentioning them.

We know that the growth of tourism depends on the existence of attractive tourist spots, proper transport and communication facilities including well connected rail network and frequent air services. Airports of international
standard is a must for the tourism industry to prosper. It also depends on safe accommodation for which we need motels, hotels and guest houses of high standard. Besides, the mindset of the local people and the cordiality with which they accept tourists has a lot to do in this regard. A close look at all these aspects reveal that a number of snags are there to act as stumbling blocks on the path of tourism industry in Orissa. We mention few of them.

(1) Except attractive tourist spots, what we lack is satisfactory connectivity. Transport and communication facilities are not developed enough for the convenience of the tourists. We in Orissa do not have rail network all-round and there are more than 10 districts without rail connectivity.

(2) Apart from poor transport and communication facilities, the absence of good accommodation act as a bottleneck in the field of tourism in Orissa. We do not have sufficient number of hotels and rest houses of international standard in the vicinity of tourist spots. Safety rather than luxury matters and here also we lag behind.

(3) Though Oriyas are known for their hospitality since time immemorial, some unwanted changes have now crept into the mindset of the local people. Tourists are often subject to harassment even by the servitors at different religious places. We come across incidents of robbery, extortion, exploitation, molestation and manhandling of the tourists in different tourist spots. These acts have a damaging effect on tourist arrival to which the authorities give a blind eye.

(4) People world over are now concerned over the issue of environmental degradation while we in Orissa are sitting idle. We find garbage here and there, hoards of polythene bag and satchet wherever we go. What is more disgusting is the fact that people often answer the calls of nature in open spaces, road sides or even in public places, thereby creating unhealthy atmosphere. This is partly due to overcrowding and lack of sufficient number of public toilets and partly to lack of consciousness. Parking fees and entry fees are collected everywhere from the tourists but not much attention is given to the improvement of the site in particular. Be it Chilika lake, Nandankanan, Puri or Dhauligiri, everywhere we take note of the same thing.

(5) There is also the absence of effective promotional campaign to woo the tourists into Orissa. A proper tours and travel campaign depicting the rich cultural heritage and scenic beauty of different tourist spots along with other essential information on the lines of "incredible India campaign" should be aired in Television channels as well as world wide web. It is proved beyond doubt, that a well thought-out tourism policy will help a lot in this regard.

(6) Another gray area in Orissa tourism is the absence of public-private co-operation. For the wholesome development of tourism industry like the one achieved by Sri Lanka, what we need is effective public-private co-operation.

(7) There is also Government apathy and lack of public interest for which tourism has not made much headway in Orissa.

To make Orissa a tourist hub what we need most is a well developed transport and communication facilities, development of tourist spots, creation of eco-tourism and adventure tourism spots and to have a realistic look at the tourism policy. Orissa could gain much through the development of tourism and time has come for the planners, economists, bureaucrat, travel industry and each and everyone associated with tourism to come forward to make tourism a leading sector of the state's economy. There is also the need to educate the people regarding the benefits of this activity. A well-thought-out tourism policy is also urgently needed.

Dr. Kamal Kumar Pani is working in the Department of Economics, Astarang College, Puri