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25.0 OBJECTIVES

Our past profoundly affects our lives. Much of it is also passed on from age to age sometimes in the form in which it really "happened" but more often as "myth" or "fable". In either form it is of cardinal importance to a tourism professional, especially in the situations such as the one obtaining in India with rich cultural heritage having continuity from the ancient. Our objectives in this Unit, therefore, have been to make you:

- appreciate the relevance and role of history in tourism,
- understand why history is termed as a tourism product,
- know the subtleties of difference between history and myths and fables along with their importance in tourism,
- realise the implications of distorting history for our own times as well as for the posterity, and
- learn to handle history, a potent weapon in the hands of a public man like you.

25.1 INTRODUCTION

The past i.e. history has a lingering trait for all of us regardless of our liking for it or not. And every age has to reckon with "the attempt by human beings to give a continuing, present existence to what no longer actually exists, the past". The past is so important to the present that we continuously attempt to produce some sort of **account** of our past. This is what becomes history. This accounting, not many of us though realise, is fraught with **serious** implications. Since it is difficult to apprehend past directly we have to **interpret** the past. It is here that we tend to deviate from the objective "truth" and induct our personal fancies, notions and sometimes images.

It is high time for us to realise the importance of history. History writing has now been evolved so much that it has almost become a scientific process. **Based on evidence, logic, reason and critical analysis we can follow the rules of objectivity in history writing.** In this Unit we have aimed at making you aware of the importance of correct-listing and its great use for the purpose of tourism. The Unit starts with a discussion on history as a tourism product. It further analyses the difference between myths, fables and history along with a description of the use and misuse of history in tourism.

25.2 HISTORY AS TOURISM PRODUCT

India is primarily a cultural destination in international tourism – in these are the features of India marketed as a tourism product in international circuit. Not only in international tourism but in domestic tourism also history and its by products remain prime attractions. People often plan their travel so as to have a feel of their cultural heritage along with several other interests. In fact, tourism perhaps is the most important area today where history seems to become operative as an attraction, the pull factor or a product for the consumption of the tourists.

As a tourism product it figures in the:

- promotional literature,
- travel and tourism writings,
- descriptions and interpretations provided by the guides and escorts.

Offering historical destinations and museums as travel packages has been an old trade with tourism industry. With the growth of special interest tourism the relevance of history has further increased. For example those interested in painting can be attracted to Ajanta caves or Bhimbhetka; Forts and palaces attract tourists to Rajasthan; there is no dearth of destinations for those interested in temple architecture, etc.

In many cases fairs and festivals have also emerged as strong tourist attractions because they provide a good example of continuity and change. The age old rituals, traditions and customs are located in modern ambience in these fairs and festivals. Hemiz festival in Leh, Carnival in Goa, Cattle Fair at Pushkar or the Boat Races in Kerala are some illustrative examples. Moreover, history also figures in shopping and entertainment. For example, many tourists like to know the history of the designs, styles etc. of the jewellery or crafts they wish to buy; theme dinners are based on historical situations and sound and light shows bring to life historical periods. All this provides entertainment to tourists. Hence, it is necessary for tourism professionals to have a sound knowledge of history.

25.3 MYTHS, FABLES AND HISTORY

Myths and fables are an integral part of the Indian cultural tradition. Stories of divinity and miracles abound and events are assumed to have taken place. Very often imagination is transmited as reality. In most of the cases myths and fables become the beliefs of a community or a region. Here arises a crucial question - can myths/fables be accepted as history? Though the answer is in the negative the importance of myths and fables should not be lost to the historians. In spite of their being imaginary or creations of the fancies of individuals or groups we must remember that beliefs emerge in a given social context. In that sense they are a reflection of the existant social order and realities. According to Romila Thapar "the significance of myth to the historian lies more in its being the self image of a given culture, expressing its social assumptions". It is for this reason that we find myths in a variety of forms:

- origin myths,
- myths that provide social sanctions,
- myths that legitimise the changing political or social order, and
- myths that provide status, etc.

A similar situation is in the context of fables. Take for example the fables attributed to Akbar and Birbai. They cannot be explained in terms of history. But they are fine specimens of social satire, sense of quick-wittedness etc. In the same manner certain jokes demonstrate symbolic passive protest in a sort of mental satisfaction when one is not in a position to physically challenge the political order. For example, you must have heard the joke about an Englishman who was offered saag (vegetable) on a maize chapati. He ate the saag and returned the chapati saying "thank you and please take back you plate". What is demonstrated in this is the fact that here are persons ruling over us who don't even know our life styles.

Tourism is one area where myths and fables are used extensively to market the exotica of our culture. In doing so it often gets trapped in projecting these as "the history" of a given culture or region. At its face value this appears something very innocent and harmless. However, people fail to realise that this presentation as "the history" can also have disastrous results. Suffice it to mention here that despite the fact that the historians do take note of myths for a critical analysis as a source, mythology is not history per se.

Check Your Progress-1

1. How is history used as a tourism product?

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2. How should a historian look at myths?

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25.4 USE OF HISTORY IN TOURISM

It has already been mentioned that history is offered as a product in tourism. In this Section we attempt to analyse this relationship in terms of its merits and demerits.

History figures prominently in promotional literature. Many destinations have always, been promoted through their historicity, like Bangalore as the Garden city; Jaipur-Pinkcity- City of palaces; Fatehpur Sikri - a city of Mughal splendour etc. But history figures prominently in other forms of tourism also, for example:

- history of Golf courses figures in Golf tourism
- Rock climbing, Mountaineering, Skiing etc. have their own history- in terms of peaks, trails taken by famous mountaineers. etc.

Similarly, in travel writing history is a popular theme to write upon and it can be the history of many things - destination, fort, palace, art, crafts, people, airline, railways etc. However, a major problem with such write ups is that most of them do not differentiate between history, mythology and legends. Not only this but on many occasions distortions are put in as history and the element of evidence is totally ignored. This is also very common among the guides while describing monuments etc. These distortions take place:

- i) Due to a lack of awareness about scientific history and dependence on unauthenticated history books.
- ii) Intentionally, in order to propagate one's own bias and interpretation of history
- iii) Unconsciously, just to add spice to write ups and make the destination look more attractive, etc.

Let us examine the implications arising out of these distortions.

- 1) Making generalisations that are not substantiated by evidence can lead to embarrassing situations. Take for example Nandi Hills near Bangalore. The guide describes a particular spot as **Tipu Drop** from where Tipu Sultan used to get people thrown down the hill. When you ask him about the authenticity of this or how many times Tipu visited this place, he either shies away or tries to create another story. At the same time there are many tourists who believe in the description and carry the tale back home to be told to friends over the coffee table. But imagine their embarrassment if asked for evidence by anyone and the answer being "Oh the guide told us".

- 2) **Attributing things to divine powers or mythology is in fact denying the people of that particular age the credit due to them in terms of their knowledge, wisdom or creativity.** For example, in a promotional brochure of a particular state tourism department it is mentioned that Sun rays go right upto the **garbhagriha** of a temple till late evening because an epic hero had changed the direction of the path of the sun. Pilgrims may believe it but historically speaking the architect and artisan's creativity is totally lost through such a description.
- 3) We all know how dangerous communalism is to the progress of a nation. Yet, thousands of domestic tourists are given communal versions of history at various destinations daily. Let us cite one example from Delhi. A plaque of the Archaeological Survey of India outside the Quwwat- ul-islam Mosque at Qutab Minar mentions that 27 Jain and Hindu temples were destroyed for constructing the Mosque. The guide picks up from this and narrates about the destruction of temples by Qutbuddin to built the Qutab Minar. But the trouble begins when the narrative attributes to Sultan slaying of the 5000 Brahmins and the river Yamuna becoming red with their blood. This is how he creates a past suiting his own conviction, away from the "truth of history". Further, he adds in the commentary something he had read somewhere that it was not Qutab Minar built by Qutbuddin. It was a tower that was built by Prithviraj Chauhan. When these two contradictory versions are given, the tourist, by applying some logic, can ask was it Prithviraj who destroyed the temples? At the same time many may take home both the versions and further communal feelings.

This is not to say that there were no acts of barbarism during the medieval period. In many cases plunder and demolitions did take place. However, the crucial question is how far we can go back in relation to our contemporary social realities. **If we have a history of destruction and plunder we also have a history of harmony, cooperation and understanding between the different religious communities. The need of the hour is to strengthen this phase rather than harping upon the divide.**

25.5 SOME TIPS

In this Section we suggest to you some interesting ways regarding the application of history in tourism. You must remember that all that is termed as history has to be based on evidence or what is termed as historical sources. These sources are varied and they differ according to periods also. For example archaeological evidences generally tell us about the ancient and medieval periods.

In order to make a better presentation and use of history the following tips will be useful:

1. **History has to be taken as a discipline seriously and there is no scope in historical writings or presentation for imaginary events or even mythologies.**
2. **Where the commentary or write-up is based on myths and legends it should be clearly spelt out along with a mention that there is no historical evidence to substantiate them.**
3. **Similarly, anecdotes should be presented as anecdotes and not as history and there is always a way to do it. Look at this example. At Dauna Paula in Goa are the statues of a man and a woman. Many guides describe them as lovers; the woman, being the daughter of the Governor, committed suicide by jumping in the sea as the father was opposed to her marriage to the poor lover. But a good guide after mentioning this further tells the tourists: please don't ask me to point out the spot from where she jumped into the sea for there is no such spot, nor she jumped into the sea nor is this story a real one, in reality these are the statues of so and so who loved this country and lived here.**
4. **You must also remember that the tourist is well informed in many cases. This is because of the availability of good guide - books and literature on the destinations. You come across situations where the tourist opens his guide-book to cross-check. Hence you should not take the tourist for granted. Imagine a guide telling the tourist that Shah Jahan used to present a rose to Mumtaz Mahal everyday sitting near the back minaret of Taj Mahal. The tourist smiles at the poor knowledge of the guide for he knows that Taj Mahal was built after the death of Mumtaz.**

5. While describing monuments give due weightage to:
 - art styles and designs
 - architecture, and
 - artisans etc
6. Do not create history but re-enact it through sound reading based on authentic works.
7. Do not let your personal bias or perceptions overshadow historical reality.
8. Wherever necessary, draw comparisons with other sites but do not make over statements.
9. Avoid descriptions that may lead to communal hatred or divide. Remember **communalism not only hinders progress but is also an obstacle in the growth of tourism.**
10. Keep updating your knowledge' of history through recent publications and interaction with historians.
11. In your presentation or write up give due weightage to political, social, economic and cultural aspects rather than only harping upon the role of the kings or the deeds of the dynasties.

Check Your Progress-2

1. Why do distortions emerge in history?
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2. On what would you base your knowledge of history?
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3. Mention which of the following statements are right or wrong?
 - a) Myths, history and legends have no difference.
 - b) Since the tourist is ignorant about the history of a site you can give him anything you like as the history of the site.
 - c) It is good to narrate incidents which encourage communal hatred.
 - d) Historical description should be based on concrete evidence.

25.6 LET US SUM UP

History is a discipline based on evidence. Hence, when it is packaged or marketed as a tourism product this aspect has to be taken care of at the same time. One has to be extremely careful in making a distinction between myths, fables and history while making use of history in tourism. Similarly, personal bias and interpretation should be avoided in historical writings or descriptions. You must update your knowledge of history by reading recent authentic publications. In your commentary or write up equal emphasis should be given on social, economic, political and cultural aspects of any given historical period. History is not just a study of kings and dynasties. It has varied facets and tourism professionals and researchers should take note of this.

25.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) There are several ways eg. destination, promotional literature etc. See Sec. 25.2.
- 2) See Sec. 25.3.

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) The distortions creep in history as a result of personal fancies and biases being accepted as a part of history. See Sec. 25.4.
- 2) Primarily on historical sources. See Sec. 25.5.
- 3) a) Wrong; b) Wrong; c) Wrong; d) Right.

