

Promoting Peace Through Tourism: Role of Co-operatives

Sanjay Kumar Verma

Jr. Editor

National Co-operative Union of India, Delhi (India)

E-mail : sanjayverma422@hotmail.com

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India Marching Ahead

In the recent years India has emerged as a major global power. India's economic reforms have made the Indian economy as vibrant as ever. A climate conducive for foreign investment has been created. Indian democracy despite its contradictions has given the nation political stability, which has no doubt strengthened the country's developmental plank. However, despite all this India has been straggling with peace as the problems of poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, social inequalities, insurgency, etc. continue to plague the nation. The strategies formulated to tackle these problems have not paid full dividends. Tourism as an effective strategy to promote peace has not been discussed or debated despite tourism sector remaining in prominence in the recent years.

Boost to Tourism

The economic liberalization in India has given a big push to Indian tourism. Tourism is today projected as an engine of economic growth and an instrument for eliminating poverty, curbing unemployment problems, opening up new fields of activity and the upliftment of downtrodden sections of society. New opportunities are being tapped to promote eco, adventure, rural, postage, wildlife and health and herbal including medical tourism. With the increasing number of foreign tourists coming to India every year and domestic tourism gaining popularity, public and private sector bodies are actively involved in promoting tourism in the country. The international and regional dimensions of tourism are also getting due recognition. For example, travel links leading to establishing people-to-people contacts between India and Pakistan are given prime importance. As a result of this, tourism has been instrumental in softening the relations between India and Pakistan leading to peace.

Peace Through Tourism

At a time when tourism initiatives have gained momentum in India, the situation is ripe for popularising the concept of "Peace Through Tourism" in a big way through strong advocacy and practical action. Tourism as a strategy to promote

peace by solving the problems of poverty, unemployment, etc. can succeed if effective inter-linkages are established between "tourism initiatives" and "peace", and appropriate action plans are devised accordingly. India has strong community and democratic ethos. Community-based initiatives based on people's participation have been quite effective in India in solving the socio-economic problems of the people. They have also been successful in building up strong collaborations based on people's efforts, which have led to creation of a peaceful and cordial atmosphere. In fact, the peaceful under-currents of Indian democracy are evident in the working of community-based ventures. Limitations of the centralised form of planning have compelled the policy-makers to pin their faiths on such people-based ventures. The paper argues that if the tourism strategies are geared towards involving the community-based organisations, they can promote peace in a real way.

Co-operatives and Peace

Co-operation means living, thinking and working together. It is working together to learn to live in our society peacefully and harmoniously. A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common, economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

In an age of declining values, peace can remain elusive if the values are not well propagated and communicated to the society at large. No doubt, in this scenario the value-based organisations have an important role to play in peace building. The co-operatives have a strategic advantage over other organisations in this respect. The principles and values of co-operatives are the best guidelines to create a sustainable and peaceful world. They are intended to safeguard the human rights and enable the members to practice democracy and enjoy freedom of action. Co-operatives are the organisations, which have strong community roots. They are embedded within the communities in which they exist. They work for sustainable development of communities through emphasis on values, which create a peaceful atmosphere within the community.

Co-operative Contribution to Peace: An Indian Perspective

760 million people around the world are members of co-operatives. In Kenya 20% of the population is a member of co-operative, while in Argentina it is over 29%, 33% in Norway, 40% in Canada and US. The contribution of co-operatives to poverty alleviation can be gauged from the fact that they provide 100 million jobs

and in some countries and areas are among the largest employees as in Columbia where a national health co-operative is the largest employer at national level.

Worldwide the co-operative movement has contributed to peace by helping eliminate poverty, sustain environment, provide employment, and enrich social standards of the people. The value-based orientation of the co-operative movement has played a crucial role in checking the capitalist tendencies in the society by creating an equalitarian society through which chances of conflict are minimised.

In India the co-operative concept has worked wonders. Starting in 1904, the co-operative movement has made rapid strides in all areas of socio-economic activities. Today, there are more than 500,000 co-operative societies in the country with a membership of 230 million and working capital of Rs. 198.542 million. IFFCO and KRIBHCO are two co-operative fertiliser giants, which have matched global standards of performance. The co-operative credit institutions are disbursing 46.15% of agricultural credit and co-operatives are distributing 36.22% of total fertilisers in the country. Dairy co-operatives in India with their strong and extensive network have excelled in their areas of operations. They have ushered in milk revolution in the country. India is the largest producer of milk in the world. The housing co-operatives in India have not only reaped economic reforms, but have also contributed to peace through promoting social harmony and community living.

The co-operatives in India have played a pioneering role in saving the poor from clutches of moneylenders by providing them credit at reasonable rate of interest so that they may start economic activities through a long chain of credit co-operatives set up at various levels. Besides, the co-operatives have convinced the poor that they are the institutions for their welfare, not exploitation. In the recent years the Self Help Groups based on co-operative principles have mushroomed in large numbers, which have mobilised the rural poor by providing them avenues of income generation.

In India the co-operatives have played an important role in employment generation. About 15.47 million individuals are employed in the co-operative sector and the number of persons who are self-employed in the co-operatives are more than 14.39 million. The co-operatives have shown their strength in social sector too. For example, the sugar co-operatives in Maharashtra have come up in the field of education and health. In the field of environment, the co-operatives have played an important role in environment preservation. IFFCO has played a laudable role in protecting environment through pollution control measures through its plants and farm forestry co-operatives.

Co-operatives and Tourism

Considering the contribution of co-operatives to peace and the value-based peaceful orientation of co-operatives, it is natural that the co-operatives are well positioned to strengthen the agenda of tourism. Tourism spreads the message of peace. If tourism becomes a key agenda of all the nations, a peaceful world order is bound to emerge. The institutions like co-operatives can play an important role in peace building if they are involved in tourism. In India tourism policy shift towards promoting decentralised form of tourism in which there is participation of all sections of the society is clearly visible. Though instances of co-operatives involved in tourism are negligible, the Indian co-operatives have strong potentialities to emerge as a lead player in the field of tourism.

CO-OPTOUR (*co-optour@gmail.com*), a co-operative organisation of 55 members, is involved in mainly ticketing and outgoing tourism. Besides the business and support from co-operative organisations, its professional services have led to increasing business with non-co-operative organisations. CO-OPTOUR feels that it has tremendous opportunities of growth in the areas of international co-operative tour packages, transport, rural tourism, etc. if there is full support from national and international co-operative organisation.

The government has identified **Rural Tourism** as one of the thrust areas. The strength of rural tourism lies in the villages, and the co-operatives field 100% of the villages. A large chunk of foreign tourists have a high level of involvement in whatever they do about rural tourism as they want to participate in cultural affairs, traditional lifestyle, etc. The co-operatives in the rural areas in India have strong cultural affiliations. The co-operatives cannot only acquaint the foreign tourists with rich culture of the region, but they can also understand their urge to participate in and experience the local culture closely. The co-operatives can play a big role in strengthening international bonds of cultural heritage by making the tourists feel that they are a part of co-operative culture, which is built on peace. Formation of tourism co-operatives for guiding, escorting, maintain local handicrafts, etc., can generate jobs, and end their poverty. In India the primary agriculture co-operatives are the strength of the co-operative system in the rural areas. They can promote rural tourism directly. Their contribution in poverty alleviation along with their emphasis on rural tourism as a potential area of development can be important in promoting peace.

The Indian Government is already sensitised on the importance of rural tourism, and the need for involving community based organisations in this field. The UNDP-Ministry of Tourism Project, which has been started in India, talks about strong community-private and public sector partnership for giving a boost to rural tourism. The Government has decided to develop necessary infrastructure for promoting rural tourism and has identified 31 villages to be developed as tourist

spots. UNDP is helping in areas of capacity building, involvement of NGOs, local communities and artisans, etc. There is a dominant view that co-operatives and NGOs are the best agencies to promote rural tourism. Uttaranchal is a top tourist state in India. The Government is involved in formulating effective tourism strategies to promote tourism in the state. Uttaranchal Government has launched Community-based Tourism in which certain number of villages/clusters are developed for attracting foreign tourists. Development of environment friendly tourism development is a focal area of tourism policies in Uttaranchal in which co-operative societies of rag pickers are formed so that the environment is not affected. Similarly, tourism leading to self-employment ventures is also noticeable in Uttaranchal. Self-employment scheme in which the focus of project is on setting up PCOs, small hotels, is being implemented. The large number of beneficiaries benefiting from the scheme is a symbol of its popularity.

Infrastructure is the biggest stumbling factor in development of tourism. The co-operatives, which have stronghold over the rural areas in the recent years, have taken initiatives to promote infrastructure development. For example, the dairy co-operatives in Gujarat have built up the roads, and have come up with schools. The areas in which co-operatives are strong in infrastructure can be developed for formulating effective tourism strategies. The Government is willing to support the co-operatives who desire to come up in the field of tourism by providing them assistance in infrastructure development.

Ethical Tourism

Co-operatives by practising ethical tourism can promote peace and justice in a big way. In India insurgency has been an age-old problem. For example, Jammu and Kashmir has struggled with terrorism for a long time. In this respect, an example of Manchester based workers co-operative practising ethical tourism is worth mentioning. Olive Co-operative (www.oliveco-op.com), a small workers co-operative in Manchester has been achieve on organising 'solidarity' tours to Israel and West Bank to meet Palestinians and Israelis working at the front-line for peace and justice, in their communities and with national and international organisations. This has useful pointers for India where workers' co-operatives can be formed to promote ethical tourism. Even in the areas, which are effected by natural disasters, ethical tourism can be an effective instrument to promote peace. For example, in the Tsunami hit areas in South India, need was felt for community based organisations to spread the message of peace. The co-operative in the India due to their effective community inter-linkages can promote ethical tourism in the conflict-ridden zones. National Co-operative Union of India along with International Co-operative Alliance are already involved in rehabilitation work in the tsunami hit areas.

Co-operative Diversification and Tourism

A review of the co-operative trends in the recent times indicates that co-operatives are aware to diversity in new areas like tourism. The India tribal life is rich in cultural tradition. Tribal life and tribal products can emerge as focal areas in tourism. Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation of India is the national level organisation of tribal co-operatives in the country. It has already identified certain regions for promoting tourism. The organisation stands for holistic development of the tribal sector in all aspects and in this regard tourism is considered an important component. TRIFED is planning to start Tribes shops in all the major international airports so that all the traditional and ethnic tribal products are showcased for foreign tourists.

The example of TRIFED clearly indicates that co-operative sector is aware of the need for marketing its products from a tourism point of view. UHP milk powder is already distributed in all the pilgrimage tourist sites. The co-operative products have developed strong brands, which clearly indicate that co-operative principles and values can be used for effective business. For example "Amul", brand of Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation is a household name in India signifying milk revolution. The co-operative products spread the message of peace.

Successful Model of Co-operative Diversification in Tourism

Eco tourism is a dominant plank of tourism strategies of any country. India is no exception. Tourism initiatives providing eco friendly clean environment with emphasis on sustainable development promote peace. A successful example of a co-operative in India venturing in tourism mentioned here symbolises this trend very well. Medially Fishermen's Co-operative Society (MFCS) in Calcutta is a successful fishery co-operative, which has successfully utilised wastewater to produce fish. It has a membership of 100 fishermen and around 300 families of fishermen are dependent on the society. The genesis of the co-operative can be traced when fishermen in Anta village of Howrah had to migrate to wastelands near Kolkatta Dock in search of jobs due to drying up of Damodar River. By using the urban refuse and polluted water of the city, the society now undertakes these activities:

- Improving waste water quality
- Using wastewater to produce fish, marketing fish, etc.
- Providing credit facilities to fishermen, engaged in poultry, piggery, dairy and cottage industries

The society has now ventured into developing a Nature Park, which has now emerged as a hot tourist spot in the city where pollution is a big problem. The Park

has attractive boating facilities and an ecosystem has been created that attracts many birds. The animal Park is another attraction having deer, rabbits, tortoise different kinds of ducks, etc.

The society has adopted professional norms in functioning by indulging in multifarious activities. The production of fish by the society has been soaring high. The example of this society indicates that co-operatives involved in preserving environment can venture into tourism activities by diversifying their operations. Commercialisation of tourism may lead to neglect of ecology as economic considerations for developing a tourist site may lead to neglect of social aspects, like environment. In this scenario forming a co-operative to promote eco tourism can be highly successful.

Conclusion

The tourism scenario in India is ideal for formulating effective tourism strategies for promoting peace. Amongst the tourism strategies for promoting peace, the co-operative strategy merits consideration. The Indian co-operative movement, which is the largest movement in the world, is best suited for promoting peace through tourism. National Co-operative Union of India is the apex organisation of the co-operative movement in the country. 196 co-operative organisations at all levels are as its members. Being a promotional organisation with emphasis on training, education, advocacy, research, publication, NCUI has worked hard to promote the co-operative movement in the country. It has always formulated effective policies to promote co-operative diversification. For example, due to strong champing of NCUI, the co-operatives were recently allowed entry into insurance. The NCUI has also taken initiatives in the new fields of insurance, electrification environment, etc. IFFCO, a major co-operative fertiliser giant, has already made effective forays in the fields of insurance, electrification etc. The NCUI has effectively popularised the concept of co-operation amongst the rural population by its Co-operative Education Field Projects located all over the country. NCUI is in a good position to promote rural tourism in the country. Taking into account the strength of Indian co-operatives in promoting peace through tourism, the international tourism bodies like IIPT, WTO, etc. must think of forging collaborations with Indian co-operatives in the field of tourism.
