



## IS RESPONSIBLE TOURISM (RT) A SOCIALISTIC CONCEPT?

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**Abstract-** Responsible Tourism (RT) is a new concept linking tourism with all its stakeholders to its environment. RT concept is more holistic and recent in its approach, which has to a greater extent bridged the ambiguities of the earlier sustainable development tourism models like ecotourism. In fact, RT is projected as alternate tourism that assimilates positive impacts in a sustainable way, unlike Mass Tourism. Protecting and enhancing nature, society, and culture from the negative impacts of tourism, destination centric optimization of the economic impacts, etc are theoretically stated equal to that of the visitor experience, as evident from the famous punch line “better places for people to live in and better places to visit”. The paper attempts to compare the views of mass tourism and RT, against the economic models of capitalism and socialism. The authors propound that Mass Tourism, with its exploitation of tourism resources, is more of a capitalistic phenomenon. Whereas RT with its sustainable approach is more of a socialistic phenomenon. The authors also attempt to historically analyze the evolution of the two tourism philosophies, and economic systems along with some light on Marxian thoughts on the environment, sustainability, and Responsible Tourism.

**Keyword: Responsible Tourism- Sustainability-Sustainable Development- Sustainable Tourism-Eco-Tourism-Marxism-Economic System.**

### I. INTRODUCTION

Conventionally, tourism developed on large scales as mass tourism, with few redeeming qualities for the destination region, their people, and their natural resource base. Capitalist economies had been in the driving Tourism, earlier regarded as a smoke-free industry, has later proved to have profound multipronged negative impacts. Too often, the negative impacts of tourism often become evident not until sometime after the damage has been done. Yet, when tourism works, it is an outstanding development tool (Beeton, 2019)

Mass tourism is a form of tourism that means mass movement of people towards a destination. Two main characteristics of mass tourism are 1. participation of large numbers of people in tourism; and 2. the holiday is standardized, rigidly packaged, and inflexible. Poon 1993 identifies mass tourism with additional features: “*Firstly, the holiday is produced through mass replication of identical units with economies of scale as the driving force. Secondly, the holiday is mass-marketed to an undifferentiated clientele, and thirdly, the holiday is consumed en masse, with a lack of consideration by tourists for local norms, culture, people, or the environment of tourist-receiving destinations*”(Poon, 1993, p.10).

The noticeable benefits of mass tourism are income and job creation. The business motive of mass tourism is simply nothing but earning profit. It is the most popular form of tourism as it is often the cheapest way to holiday, and is often sold as a *package deal*. A package deal is one in which all of the tourist's needs are catered for by one company, these needs include travel/flights, activities, accommodation, and sometimes food. These types of holidays are often the opposite of sustainable tourism. The nature of mass tourism as a form of mass consumption gives rise to a number of social, economic, and environmental implications. By assembling a large number of tourists in small areas creates immense environmental pressures. Though mass tourism has its negatives, it has been instrumental in the development of the economies of many small nations like Cyprus (Sharpley, 2009).

Concern towards earth, nature, and culture brewed in the Capitalistic West as the impacts of uncontrolled human activities began to surface. This congregated into a “conservation ethic” paving the way to the concept of ‘sustainability’ as proclaimed in the famous Brundtland Report in the mid-1980s. Arguments for the development of more harmonious alternative forms of tourism in the place of conventional mass tourism emerged in the era of “*adaptancy platform*” of the 1980s (Murphy & Murphy, 2004). Explicit within this platform was the view that mass tourism was inherently bad and small-scale alternative tourism (i.e., tourism that is deliberately structured to contrast with conventional mass tourism) was inherently good. This gave rise to supposedly more appropriate options such as ‘alternative tourism’, ‘ecotourism’, and ‘sustainable tourism’. Ecotourism has been considered important by environmentalists,

so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention (Martha Honey, 1999)

According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 1990), Ecotourism is "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (Wood, 1990). The United Nations, acknowledged that there is not a universal definition of ecotourism (WTO, 2000). Nevertheless, it attempted to provide some parameters for ecotourism by describing its general characteristics as:

1. *"All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.*
2. *It contains educational and interpretation features*
3. *It is generally, but not exclusively organized for small groups by specialized and small, locally owned businesses. Foreign operators of varying sizes also organize, operate and/or market ecotourism tours, generally for small groups.*
4. *It minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment*
5. *It supports the protection of natural areas by*
  - *generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes,*
  - *providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities.*
  - *increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists". (UNWTO, n.d.)*

One definition of ecotourism is "the practice of low-impact, educational, ecologically and culturally sensitive travel that benefits local communities and host countries" (M Honey, 1999). Many of the ecotourism projects are not meeting these standards, and even if some of the guidelines are being executed, the local communities are still facing other negative impacts, and often conflicting views and tension prevail over rights on land, resources, and profits (Chaudhary 1996; Boora 2005; Miller 2007; Kamuarohas 1996). Kamuarohas described ecotourism in East Africa as a deficient and ambiguous concept. He adds that the trend towards the commercialization of tourism schemes disguised as sustainable, nature-based, environmentally friendly ecotourism ventures has become the subject of considerable public controversy and concern. The medium-term economic-benefits are outweighed by the negative psycho-social impacts. Uncontrolled use of the term eco-tourism has also been widely used as a marketing strategy to cash-on the conservation concerned elite tourists. This can be called Green-washing, Eco-selling, Eco-labeling, etc (Wight, 1993) that presents a greatly distorted image of ecotourism among various stakeholders.

Concepts like nature tourism, green tourism, sustainable tourism, etc were also getting attention during the period, which was often considered analogous to ecotourism. Criticism on the practical implementation of ecotourism must have the impetus in the evolution of alternative strategies like Responsible Tourism. Although many definitions of ecotourism have included the term 'responsible', it has to be understood that the emphasis that every stakeholder has to become 'responsible' was diffused as all of them attributed responsibility to others. Moreover, mass tourism and alternative tourism can both be either sustainable or unsustainable, depending on the circumstances that pertain to any particular destination (Weaver, 2000). The concept of RT evolved in the present knowledge-based platform of tourism which is characterized by its multi-disciplinary approach to guide the development of tourism on a more harmonious scale.

#### **"A Better place to Live, a Better place to visit"**

According to the Cape Town Declaration (2002), Responsible Tourism (RT) may be defined as tourism "that creates better places for people to live in and better places to visit". RT is about enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and improved natural resource management. At the same time, RT is also about providing better holiday experiences for guests and good business opportunities for tourism enterprises. Here tourism and related activities are conducted in a manner not harming or degrading natural, cultural, and economical environments. Instead, RT enhances the same, resulting in the prosperity of local people.

According to International Centre for Responsible Tourism (2012), RT minimizes negative and maximizes positive impacts in environmental, social, cultural, and economic contexts; involves local people and enhances communities; contributes to conservation; provides access for physically challenged people and engenders respect and connections between hosts and guest.

RT is an approach mainly focused on less harm and less negative impacts on the social and natural environment. In the meantime maximize the positive effect on the economic, social, and environmental aspects of tourism. Through this approach, local people can enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and improved natural resource management. Owning of responsibility

must be the underlying principle of all tourism practices. It must reflect our commitment to conservation, improving local livelihoods, and sustainable resource uses whether cultural, land, or otherwise. There is a need to identify better goals and baselines for measuring and monitoring the level of responsible behavior in tourism

The key elements of RT can be defined in terms of:

- *“Developing, managing, and marketing tourism in ways that create competitive advantage;*
- *Assessing and monitoring the environmental, social, and economic impacts of tourism developments and openly disclosing information;*
- *Ensuring the active involvement of communities that benefit from tourism, including their participation in planning and decision-making and the establishment of meaningful economic linkages;*
- *Maintaining and encouraging natural, economic, social, and cultural diversity;*
- *Avoiding waste and over-consumption, and promoting the sustainable use of local resources”.*

(Gauteng Tourism Responsible Manual, n.d.)

Responsible tourism aims not only to alleviate damage due to mass tourism but also to benefit host communities socially (on both socio-economic and socio-cultural levels), while also conserving the physical environment (Carasuk, 2011). A responsible tourism approach aims to achieve the triple-bottom-line outcomes of sustainable development, i.e. economic growth, environmental integrity, and social justice. RT helps to poverty eradication and social improvement in the local environment. It also helps to prevent economic leakage and enhance the money circulation within the local economy.

The distinguishing characteristic of the approach is the focus on the responsibility of role-players in the tourism sector, and destinations in general, to take action to achieve sustainable tourism development. Increasing numbers of consumers are looking at the reputation and responsibility of the companies they buy from; they want to have “guilt-free” holidays. This affects their direct purchases from companies in tourism destinations and it influences the choices of source market companies too. The UK and other European and Australian companies and increasingly American companies are asking about the responsibility of their suppliers and introducing checklists that rate the sustainability of their practices.

#### **How Responsible Tourism differs from Sustainable Tourism**

Responsible tourism and sustainable tourism have an identical goal, that of sustainable development. The pillars of RT are therefore the same as those of sustainable tourism – environmental integrity, social justice, and maximizing local economic benefit. The major difference between the two is that in RT individuals, organizations and businesses are asked to take responsibility for their actions and the impacts of their actions. This shift in emphasis has taken place because not much progress has been made on realizing sustainable tourism since the Earth Summit in Rio. This is partly because everyone has been expecting others to behave in a sustainable way. The emphasis on responsibility in RT means that everyone involved in tourism – government, product owners and operators, transport operators, community services, NGO's (Non-Governmental Organization) and CBO's (Community Based Organization), tourists, local communities, industry associations – are responsible for achieving the goals of responsible tourism. RT does not only take place in protected natural environments – Any tourism business, whether located in a thriving metropolis, a desert, rural village, sub-tropical island, medieval town – can be Responsible Tourism.

#### **Economic systems v/s tourism philosophies: Exploring Analogies.**

Economic systems exist to serve the needs and wants of man. The underlying motive of most businesses is profit. The degrees of freedom to manipulate the business environment for the motive of profit vary across economic systems and geographies. Karl Marx, in his stages of history, depicts the evolution of mankind through various economic models. The past ones being primitive communism, slave society, and feudalism, which is already over) and the present stages of Capitalism, Socialism, and communism. These are stages, that every society needs to pass through, though not sequentially (Musto, 2008).

Capitalism is an economic and political system in which individuals own economic resources and industry. Under socialism, the state plans and produces goods, and either owns or redistributes resources among its citizens. In a capitalist economy, the political system emphasizes competition for resources as a means of increasing capital (or wealth) and developing personal success. In a socialist economy, the emphasis is on distributing wealth so that individual needs are met with collective capital. There are different versions of capitalism and socialism; most modern societies are a blend of the two.

The capitalist economies in its concept boasts higher levels market freedom in its attempt to satisfy the ever expanding and complex human needs and wants, with no limits to amass wealth. A myriad of brands of products and services are offered by competing corporate players to satisfy the ever-expanding human needs and wants. Corporate strategies give primacy to their growth/profit than addressing the causes of man and environment; accused as exploitation by the socialist schools of thought.

Socialism relies on governmental planning, rather than the marketplace, to distribute resources. While it is usually possible for individuals living in a socialist country to own businesses or offer professional services directly to consumers, they are usually taxed heavily on their profits. Public services are typically numerous and funded by taxpayer money. Citizens are expected to work, but the government provides services such as education, healthcare, and public transportation for free or at very low cost. Socialist countries also often have extensive social welfare systems to aid the unemployed, disabled, and elderly. In addition to paying higher taxes, business owners in socialist countries are often expected to comply with very strict labor laws designed to protect workers against exploitation (Hoppe, 2007).

### **Tourism in different economic systems**

Tourism, in its post dark age renaissance largely was the monopoly of the feudalistic society. The royal, noble, and elite traveled in search of pleasure, business, and wellness. Destinations were (re)discovered in England and Europe, and developed for the leisure of the king and royalty. Destinations patronized by the royal began to be visited by the other elite and cream of the society, resulting in a trickledown effect. The fashion of destinations changed as the royal and noble explored newer and prime destinations unvisited by the lower strata of the society. The peasants remained locked to their hamlets and knew nothing of the world.

The idea of a vacation in the erstwhile socialist Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc was never easy and simple unlike the hassle-free mass tourism in the Capitalist West. Emphasis was on individual-self improvement and socialist tourism was heavily laden with rules and prescriptions. There was no much mass tourism when compared to the capitalist west. China is cautiously introducing elements of the market economy, within their socialist fabric. And China is the third-largest by numbers in world tourism with a booming mass domestic tourism as well.

Revolutions in the polity and science resulted in the evolution of capitalism in the place of feudalism. The industrial revolution transformed peasants into workers, who migrate to the bubbling urban industrial centers. Worker's rights got recognized and they had leisure and disposable income. Entertainment as an escape from the urban work pressure created a huge demand for recreation centers and many tourist spots began to grow, marking the beginning of the phenomenon of mass tourism.

Mass tourism is a distinctive form of tourism stemming from its character as a form of Fordist mass consumption. It is in line with mass production, featured by monopoly, minimal product differentiation, limited market choice, and dominance of the producer over consumer (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Here production creates demand. It can be seen that Mass tourism fits into this model as evident from its characteristics (Sharma, 2004)

- *"The sheer numbers involved mean that the tourism product has to be offered under conditions of mass production.*
- *There is a growing level of expenditure on consumer goods associated with tourism.*
- *A few producers dominate particular markets, Disney in the field of theme parks, and travel companies like Thomas Cook, Cox, and Kings in the world of package holidays.*
- *Producers take the lead in developing new tourism attractions.*
- *By and large, mass tourism products are little differentiated".(Sharma, 2004,p.186)*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the ripening of capitalism in the west and the resultant economic independence of individuals. Leisure and disposable income are accessible and the tourism industry is hugely dominated by multinational giants. Mass tourism also experienced huge growth powered by money and hedonistic motives. Concern for nature against the ill-effects of development including mass tourism gave rise to a cry for alternative tourism from within the capitalistic west. The principal objective of alternative tourism was, or is, to develop tourism that is appropriate to the local environment, social and cultural values (that is, tourism that minimizes the negative consequences for local communities) and to optimize the benefits in terms of control, enhancing the local economy and promoting proactive, meaningful encounters between tourists and local people. Moreover, alternative tourism is perceived as an oppositional approach to tourism development, falling within the 'development against capitalism' category (Sharpley, 2009). It is clearly a socialistic approach in tourism development.

### **Nature and Culture, and Tourism in Socialist Thoughts**

Socialist school of thought famous for their critique of capitalism and for advocating social revolution, pioneered by the works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels are far less known for their concern for the destruction of the environment and the need for sustainability. Marx didn't see nature as different from society. When Marx wrote his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, he was likewise concerned with the problem of man's (specifically, the worker's) alienation from nature. Marx argued that the exploitation of nature is fundamental to the profit system, similar to the exploitation of working people (Foster, 1999).



Marx opposed the capitalist economic notion that the air, rivers, seas, and soil can be treated as a "free gift of nature" to business. He said "Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations"(Butler, 2009), same as the definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland Committee Report - "*Our Common Future*" which defines "*Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*"(Brundtland, 1987,p.50).

Marx continued that the capitalist market system is incapable of preserving the environment for future generations because it cannot take into account the long-term requirements of people and the planet. Even though Marx had lived in a time where no eco-dangerous pollutants were present he could predict the destruction of nature because of the exploiter approach of the Capitalist system towards nature and its resources. Marx has stated that capitalism is unstable by its nature because the problems such as exploitation, war, hunger, and poverty, etc. cannot be solved by the free-market system. Meanwhile, Engels warned, "*Let's not however flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories on nature, for each victory nature takes it poverty and environmental revenge*"(*Friedrich Engels: Can Humanity Conquer Nature?* 2012).

One of the most-cited examples of Marx's commodity analysis in regard to tourism has been Davydd Greenwood's essay on the commodification of a local festival in the Basque region of Spain(Shepherd, 2002). Echoing Marx, Greenwood argued that anything sold assumes a commodity form, including culture. However, because culture does not belong to anyone, the marketing and selling of cultural productions to tourists is a form of community-wide expropriation. When this happens, local culture is 'altered and often destroyed' and 'made meaningless' to its people. In the case he cites, the Spanish Ministry of Tourism's interference in the *Fuenterrabí* festival had transformed an authentic, inward-looking, meaningful practice into a public spectacle for outsiders, which had led to a decline in local interest. By transforming a local cultural practice into a development resource, the Ministry of Tourism robbed local participants of the meanings they had used to organize their lives. In Greenwood's words, 'The ritual has become a performance for the money and the meaning is gone' (Cohen, 1984,p.375).

More recently, Lanfant et al., 1995 has argued that once heritage is transformed into a tourist product, its 'cultural value' is also transformed into a 'commercial value', a process which stimulates the reinvention of the past. That is to say, rather than being a reclamation of the past, heritage and tourism function as a new form of cultural production (a value-added industry) that takes the past as its theme.

Sklair, 1994 has noted that the debate over the social impact of tourism rests on a conflation of social consequences and social problems. An increase in international tourism in a particular place may well bring an increased multinational or transnational presence, a monetarization of traditions or other social activities, and a shift in local social relationships, occur among other consequences.

As developmental economists argue uncontrolled exploitation of nature and culture as part of consumptive civilization including mass tourism, the fundamental questions of extinction of resources and loss of culture fail to be addressed. It can be assumed that responsible tourism is an attempt to address these issues. Criticisms for RT are also emerging, and the concept is bound to evolve and get modified; for 'there is nothing permanent except change'.

## II. CONCLUSION

Responsible Tourism is the latest concept linking tourism, sustainability, nature, and culture, emanated out of the *adaptancy platform* of the 1980s, rooted in the Capitalist West. Sustainability is the core of RT like Ecotourism.

The striking difference from the previous sustainable tourism models is that RT stresses all the stakeholders to be actively responsible, as it attempts to eliminate diffusion of responsibility. The concept of RT as it emerges so far sounds like addressing solutions to many of the problems caused by tourism in a reasonable way. The present world has a greater role in mass tourism which cannot be ignored or replaced by RT. At the same time, aspects of responsibility can be infused into the fabric of mass tourism, to minimize the impacts and introduce more sustainability.

Modern mass tourism is a form of tourism with the characteristics of a capitalist market economy based on exploiting resources for profit maximization whereas, R.T. with its sustainability core is in line with socialist philosophy as it emphasizes on the general principles of socialism like the welfare of society, protection of nature, and equitable development. Responsibility comes with a set of do's and don'ts requiring soft and hard tourism measures that voluntarily draw the proactive involvement of all the stakeholders. In a socialist system, the state and individuals forming the greater society are presumed to behave responsibly for the welfare of mankind. The concept of Sustainable development was well

addressed by Karl Max. Resources are not to be blindly exploited for pleasure and profit. Thus it can be concluded that RT is in line with the socialist concept.

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