



Tourism in Arunachal Pradesh: Evolution of Tourism Area and its Effects on the Guest-Host Interactions

Hibu Dindie

Department of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Arunachal Pradesh is a land-locked frontier state of India. It lacks a robust industry and is deficient in infrastructure and other amenities. One of the ways mooted by the state government and entrepreneurs to overcome this challenge was to give an impetus to the tourism sector in the state. It is physically non-invasive unlike other traditional industries and blends in comfortably with the natural and cultural features of the local people. Many clusters of destinations were chosen all over the state to implement tourism policies. Yet, only three of them, namely- Tawang, Ziro and Menchukha has managed to attract and retain some tourists and tourism-based economy. The present paper is based on fieldwork done in the three sites. It seeks to analyse the guest-host interactions and understand how the stage of the tourism industry according to the Butler's Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution affects the behaviour of both. And also, how it in turn affects the kind of tourism growing in the three sites.

Introduction

People have travelled for as long as humanity existed, but the concept of people travelling solely for leisure which is also known as tourism is a relatively recent phenomena in humankind's long history. Tourism can be both domestic (within the traveller's own country) or international, that is across borders. This has become an important industry which can be gauged from the fact that in 2011, it accounted for 30% of the world's trade in services and 6% of the overall export of goods and services in the world (WTO, 2011). It generates cash and employment, so much so that some countries are entirely dependent upon it, which is especially true of the small island nations. The flipside to so much reliance on tourism can be that, it erodes the very cultural and natural features on which it was based upon over time through overuse or mismanagement of resources. Depending on the visions and policies of the implementers, tourism can be a boon or a bane for the communities involved.

Tourism as an industry is warmly welcomed in most places to generate revenue and employment. It is technically less invasive than traditional factories and other large-scale industries. It is also espoused globally as being sustainable and culturally friendlier, although the situation may go reverse along with its progress. Since tourism is hugely labour intensive in nature, WTO (1998) suggest that developing and least developed countries are in great advantage with a strong potential for tourism.

To tap on in this phenomenon, and cash on in the traveller's curiosity about hitherto unknown people and places, the government of Arunachal Pradesh, is also giving a push to the tourism sector in the state. From being the feared locals of an obscure frontier state in the North Eastern tip of the country, locals have witnessed the gradual rise in the number and types of visitors that visit their natal villages, towns and state. As much as the visitors are fascinated by their tribal customs, traditions and the natural landscape; the locals are fascinated by the sight of curious guests and visitors foreign to their land. However, the share of tourist flow in the state, Arunachal Pradesh is only about 3.71% of all the tourist flow in North Eastern India, in spite of its great potential; at the country level, the share of tourist flow of the state is absolutely insignificant (Baruah and Goswami, 2017).

The government to cash on in the traveller's quest for hitherto unknown destinations, has set up a department solely devoted to tourism and its affairs. The state sells under the brand- "*Arunachal Pradesh: A Paradise Unexplored*". The whole state has been divided into twelve circuits to cash in on the uniqueness of each destination. Yet, only three regions- Tawang, Ziro and Menchukha attract some tourists and visitors. In these three regions, the government as well as the local entrepreneurs have had a big role in attracting and developing the tourist industry. The economies in the three areas are not entirely dependent on tourism, and the market for tourism has not developed yet. But more and more entrepreneurs and the general population are taking to the idea of an employment based on tourism.

This paper is an attempt to understand the evolution of three tourist areas – Tawang, Ziro and Menchukha – and its effect on the guest-host interactions. The methods used were intensive interviews and participant observation spread longitudinally over three years of fieldwork in these three sites. Secondary sources were relied on, which were obtained from libraries, catalogues, advertisements, websites and archives. Emic and etic perspectives of the tourism phenomenon were taken into account while trying to understand the phenomenon as taking place in this sites. Guest-host interactions and its narratives were observed and recorded.

Conceptual framework

Butler (1980) put forward the concept of 'tourist area evolution': according to him, a tourist area evolves or grows in a pattern, which can be plotted on a curve, which follows six stages of growth. At the first stage there is the exploratory stage, wherein a new tourist site is discovered, and which is devoid of standard facilities and has limited access with the wider world. During this stage visitors are less in number and interactions with locals are intimate. After that, the site progresses into the involvement stage, as facilities grow and more people get involved in the tourist business. Next comes the development stage, where non locals get involved in the growing tourism market in the site, and tourist numbers grow as well. After that comes the consolidation stage where the tourist market becomes fully developed. It is followed by stagnation, where maximum number of visitor potential is reached. After that either a decline of the tourist site occurs or a rejuvenation of the site with newer attractions occurs. Thus, a basic asymptomatic curve in the evolution of a tourist area is followed.

The 'Guests' are the visitors, travelers or tourists who travel to an area other than their usual residential places for a visit, pleasure or leisure. The term 'Hosts' means the community, person or persons that receive the tourists coming to their village, town or locality. They are the locals who may or may not be a part of the economic activities that occur due to tourism at the destinations. The study of guest and host interactions and the changes in them have always formed an integral part of tourism studies since its inception. Many studies have focussed on tourism from the viewpoint of the tourists' (Graefe and Vaske, 1987; Murphy et al. 2000, Pizam et al. 1978). Also studies have focused

on tourism from the hosts' viewpoint (Thyne et al. 2006). Though colloquially the term 'Guests' and 'Hosts' may imply a very genial and receptive tone to the uninitiated, the fact is a multitude of factors work in both directions between hosts and guests. The type of response elucidated from the guest or the host depends largely on the attitude, behaviour, status, age, experience and knowledge of both, and also to a large extent on the penetration of tourism into the local economy.

The stage of penetration of tourism into the local economy can be gauged by the fore mentioned attributes as described by the tourist area cycle of evolution. The stage at which a tourist area stands can thus speak volumes on the type and nature of interactions that may or might be occurring between guests and hosts. The complex problem of the development of a tourist area or site are influenced by the relationship between tourists and hosts. This relationship either in its positive or negative form may boost or curtail the further growth of tourism in that area.

The host communities in the three study tourist sites are - the Monpa tribes in Tawang, the Apatani tribe in Ziro and five smaller tribes (Ramo, Bokar, Pai Libo, Tagin and Memba) in Menchukha. The Monpas of Tawang are agriculturists and traders; they have religious and cultural ties with the Buddhist religion and regimes of Tibet. The other mentioned tribes are animists and agriculturists, who have traditionally followed the tenets of nature worshipping now termed- '*Donyi-Poloism*'. Along with education, health and infrastructural development, and contact with other cultures, many have taken to Christianity. They have ventured into salaried government jobs, horticulture, business and entrepreneurship. Tourism has been introduced in the three areas to capitalise on their unique cultural and natural attributes.

Findings and Discussion

In all the three tourist sites under study, visitors often come on a very short tour, often as a stray visit of some other holiday plans, when they happened to chance upon the three sites, more so the latter two sites of Ziro and Menchukha. The study or analysis of guest-host interactions can be described as an undeniable fact that – "*Tourism is an industry which uses the host community as a resource, sets it as a product, and in the process affects the lives of everyone involved*". (Murphy, 1985). As observed in the field, the response of the locals to the guests, and also the initial impression of the first few visitors upon the locals have had a long lasting impact on the growth and number of visitors. Along with it, the stage of development of tourism in the three sites clearly exemplifies the types and nature of interactions taking place between hosts and guests.

At the beginning of the tourism per say in the state, only a few, mostly Euro-American, visitors, of the wanderers and researchers type attracted by the tribal land came to visit the place. These were mostly the middle-aged or the retired professionals visiting at the behest of politicians or the pioneering few. The locals were very innocent about the economics of hospitality back then, and they were also not very educated and had little knowledge about the world outside their own. The interactions were of amazement and curiosity from both sides. Despite the infrastructural bottlenecks, responses were warm and encouraging. The sight of faraway visitors amidst them emotionally overwhelmed the locals and they would freely welcome the visitors, lavishly entertain them and give away souvenirs as gifts for the visitors to take back home, who came to take stock of the curiosities in their homes. This impression of the tall, white tourists has impinged upon many, especially the older, rural folks who do not consider or know of the fellow Indian plainsmen as tourists.

The younger folks and the entrepreneurs realised the potential of this section of tourists though, which often forms the bulk of tourists that visit the state, as the foreign tourists visiting the state are very few. Over the years, a trend is being observed in the guest-host interactions based on the degree of the penetration of tourism in the local economy, the number of visitors, the extent of visits, the number of establishments in the neighbourhood that caters to tourists, the degree of involvement of the government and private stakeholders, and the cultural and natural imagery preformed in the visitors minds by virtue of marketed imagery or experienced reality preformed in a similar setting elsewhere. This can be illustrated and graphed on for the three sites on the basis of Butler's Tourism Area Cycle of Evolution (1980) in the following figure.

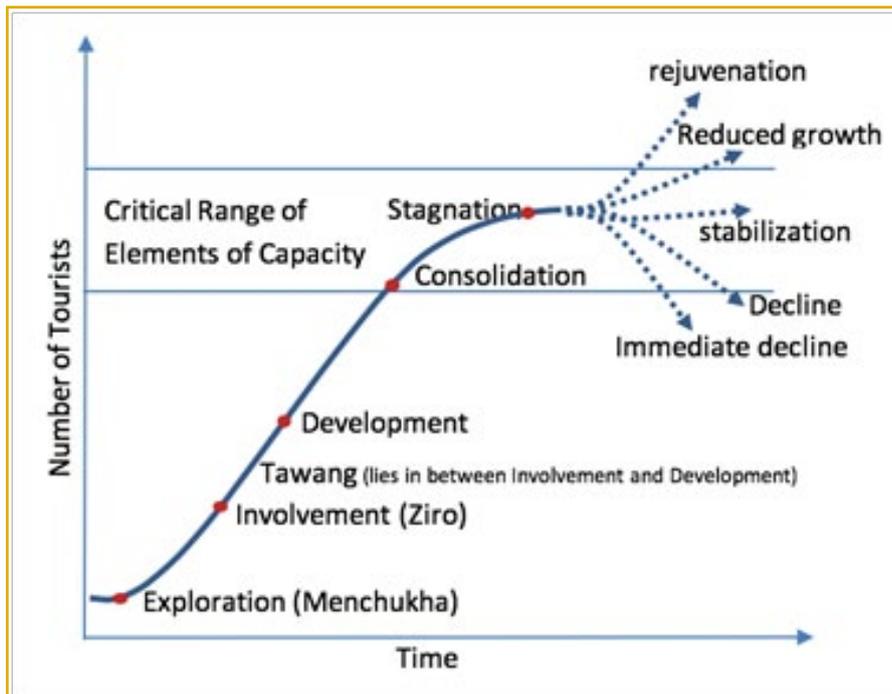


Figure: Position of the three tourist sites under study on Butler's Tourism Area Cycle of Evolution (adapted from the Butler, 1980)

Menchukha

In Menchukha, tourism was introduced by way of *Adventure@Mechukha* in 2014, an annual festival which happens in November every year. It has managed to attract some domestic tourists and few international tourists since then. The place is famous for its culture, religiosity and gentle, rolling mountain tops. Here the tourist season starts with the onset of winter and continues till spring. During the summer and the monsoons the tourism business is almost nil, as the roads and communication are in a bad shape due to landslide and heavy rain. Homestays are being run by some entrepreneurs, they and the locals have high hopes from tourism. The expectations from tourism range from too high to low in Menchukha. It reflects in their interactions with the tourists who are highly deemed or lowly condemned. This is directly related to the amount of income they bring or do not bring to the establishment owners and non-involved locals. There occurs a difference of mannerism and worldview between the locals who have only recently been connected to the wider world via all-weather road and communication and the tourists. And this sometimes is a cause of conflict between hosts and guests. The low-budget backpackers are especially chided for their thrifty attitude, which stands in stark contrast with the tribal notions of generosity and lavish entertainment.

The guest-host interactions are still at an exploratory stage, interactions are of curiosity and awe, and the locals are shy respondents. The idea that tourism is a business like any other, with its own

rules and ethics of bargaining, haggling, striking deals and overlooking differences has still not sunk in among the majority of locals. Some respondents complained that among all the foreign tourists the Israelis were the thriftiest and most aloof of all, that they do not respect the local culture and ethos. Many tourists who were interviewed expressed their thrill at discovering a place still unexplored and innocent, that they had anticipated that it would be far and low on infrastructure. Yet, they wished that the roads, electricity, communication and transport could have been better. From this exploratory stage in the tourist area cycle of evolution, Menchukha still stands a long way to go on the path of tourism development. Also reports of violent clashes between the locals and the tourists due to misunderstandings were reported in an event recently.

Ziro

Ziro saw an earlier arrival of tourists than Menchukha. It receives more tourists than Menchukha and the number of tourists especially the domestic ones, visiting it each season, is growing every year. The tourist season in a year encompasses the sowing, harvesting and festive season spread over the summer, autumn, winter and spring months. Tourism was introduced to Ziro by some entrepreneur locals and NGOs collectively. Among all the study three tourist sites, Ziro is the closest to the state capital, Itanagar and acts as a weekend getaway for the city dwellers of the steamy foothills especially during the summers. The local culture and the man made landscape are the main attractions here. In addition to the traditional festivities, newly introduced festivals like the Ziro festival of Music, meetings and conventions and trekking expeditions are other sources of attracting visitors to the place.

More people are getting involved in the business of tourism in Ziro, both directly and indirectly. The idea of economising on tourism to supplement their main income is readily being picked up by the locals. Tourism is also an opportunity for the educated youngsters to communicate and gather information from the visitors about people and places. When interviewed both the locals and the guests reiterated that it was a rich learning experience for both. But for the villagers, elders and non-involved locals in the business of tourism, they happen to be just passive onlookers of the phenomenon of tourism growing around them. They do not benefit from tourism but are actively marketed and advertised to bring tourists to Ziro. The place is self-sufficient economically as of now, but the pressure on limited land and resources is being felt with each growing generation. And tourism happens to be one of the alternative employment avenue open for many. As such the educated entrepreneurs are trying to reign in professionalism and business ethics in their interactions with their guests. The maintenance of the culture and landscape by the locals have been capitalised on. The interactions of the guests with them are innocent, cordial and in a few instances hostile. This has been due to misunderstanding and miscommunication about the local culture and ethos, wherein the guests often cross the boundary between private and public ceremonies, religious affairs or by treating the locals as antics or curiosities themselves. Also the hosts have been in the eye of conflict due to their non professionalism in dealing with the guests and their issues.

Tawang

The last tourist site, that is Tawang is the westernmost district of Arunachal Pradesh bounded by Tibet (China) to the north, Bhutan to the West and South West, and West Kameng district to the South. The level of evolution of tourism here can be said to be lying somewhere between involvement and development. The place sees the maximum number of visitors in any season of the year in Arunachal Pradesh. Tourism here is a more organised and recognised activity than in the other two places. A whole network of services and establishments cater to tourists and their needs. Many

hotels, homestays, restaurants, caterers, cabs, drivers, bike and equipment rentals abound in the place. A network of well-established logistics and holiday companies operate in the area. Every day sees a bunch of tourist vans and vehicles carrying tourists on package tours from the plains of neighbouring states and beyond making its way into Tawang.

Among all the three sites it is the most well-known among the domestic tourists by virtue of its Buddhist culture and political history. The interactions observed here are balanced, of proper business exchanges and mutual interactions. Unlike Menchukha and Ziro where interactions are either innocent or straightaway hostile, the interactions observed here are warm and cordial. There exists more professionalism in the way tourists are dealt with here. It is also the most involved and dependent on tourism among all the three places. It is steadily moving up the curve towards development in the Butler's tourist life-cycle as more and more outsiders are getting involved in bringing tourists and business to this place.

Tawang lacks a robust agricultural economy, but this is complemented by huge activities in infrastructural development and construction. Many households are entirely or partly dependent upon tourism. Fees are collected for viewing curiosities like in the Tawang Monastery, and it is not chided upon by the guests and guides unlike in Menchukha and Ziro where guests are escorted into private ceremonies and celebrations by guides; and food, photos, and souvenirs are often expected to be given freely.

Conclusion

It can thus be concluded that Menchukha and Ziro lies in the exploratory and involvement stage along Butler's Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution. Here, interactions are innocent or of repulsion between the host and the guest as both are new to each other. Each of them have discovered new culture and people, and interactions are of curiosity, awe, amazement or repulsion at ideas and behaviour not in consonant with the ideals and mannerisms of hosts and guests. Gradually, however the economics of hosting guests and visitors are setting in these places, and more people are getting involved in tourism. The interactions as such are also likely to change in nature, as more people gets educated and comes in contact with the wider world and professionalism required of tourism.

In Tawang, the keen sense of a people who were historically traders and agriculturists has lent itself easily into the professionalism demanded from the hospitality business. Here both tourists and hosts know the purpose and economics of tourism and behave as such. Curiosity about the religion and culture has been diligently cashed on. This however is lacking in many instances in Ziro and Menchukha, where the locals are treated as curiosities themselves. Guides are seen escorting tourists into traditional homes, ceremonies and even death rituals freely, especially in Ziro, which many natives find intimidating. The overlapping of tourism as business and discovery of a new place in Arunachal Pradesh is often the source of conflict between hosts and guests, which leads to discord in interactions. The guests expect humble, tribal folks unaffected by the vices of modernity and the hosts expect too many benefits too soon from tourism. Thus the development and sustenance of tourism in Arunachal Pradesh will depend not only on the infrastructure and amenities provided for tourism, but also on the kind of response that interactions between hosts and guests elucidates.

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