

# TOURISM

## Learning from Giritale

There are two fundamental types of international tourism in the world. There is firstly tourism between relatively equal (economically, socially and culturally) countries for instance the tourism between the U.S. and Britain or France and Germany or Japan and Europe etc. There is on the other hand a second type of tourism between strongly unequal (socially, economically) countries as for example those between the developed countries and their colonies and ex-colonies. To this category belong the tourism between Hawaii and the United States, Korea and Japan, Thailand and Western Europe and the Caribbean and also Britain and America. In a midway category lies the tourism between countries of Western Europe and weaker ones in Southern Europe like Spain, Italy and Yugoslavia.

The first type of tourism between relative equals has been underway for several decades now. The second form of tourism is perhaps more recent and arose also coincidentally with the beginning of nominal independence of the subordinate countries, although tourism between the Caribbean including then Cuba and the West predate independence. This type of tourism is based on an ultimate contradiction in that it uses the inequality of incomes between the rich and poor countries to overcome that gap; once the gap is closed the inflow of tourists will presumably fall or even cease. It invites mass tourism from countries with high incomes to those with low incomes. And, this gap in incomes as has been explained in several Third World declarations like the call for a New Economic Order is due to the historical and continuing exploitation of our countries and unequal exchange, in trade that exist between us and the developed world. The tourists arrive because of this disparity of incomes and the hope is that this tourism would be able to overcome this disparity.

Recently however, there has been in the Third World increasing academic and policy attention drawn to this latter type of tourism, called dependent tourism. The attention

that has been drawn, varies from the oft repeated observations such as that tourism in Thailand was built on the infrastructure of massage parlours and the like which grew up concurrent with the rest and recreation programmes (R & R) for U.S. soldiers on holiday from Vietnam and that the present structure of the industry carries the same negative connotations. Similarly the tourist link between Japan on the one hand and Korea and Taiwan on the other hand has been criticised on the grounds that tourism between these sets of countries was built on similar lines in that a temporary Korean or Taiwan mistress invariably came with the tour package.

At a less sensational but deeper level, criticism of dependent tourism is highlighted in new work being done on dependent tourism in the Caribbean and African countries like Senegal.

These criticisms relate to the fact that dependent tourism distorts economic, social and cultural relationships between the peoples of the touring and host countries. Thus it has been pointed out that the enclaves created to house "The Golden Hordes" (the title of a well known book published last year on this phenomenon) are in a way very reminiscent of the enclaves that grew up concurrent with the plantation economies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example there is a high differential in consumption, social and cultural patterns between the enclave and those outside. Often there is also a racial pattern to the enclave phenomenon in that visitors are often white and the residents black, again reminiscent of enclave plantation economies. The presence of this differential and the fact that the local population resent; this has meant an increasing use of armed guards in the case of the Caribbean and Thailand to protect the enclaves from the surrounding population.

Sri Lanka's tourism belongs to the dependent category in that it is between a weak poor country inviting tourists from the rich ones. But Sri Lankans have made some declarations,

as well as attempts to remove some of the objectionable features of the dependent situation—for example (as yet) Sri Lanka tourism does not have a large infrastructure of organised prostitution and differs from other countries in a similar situation like Thailand, Korea and Taiwan. Yet the Sri Lanka's tourism, because it exists in a fundamental framework of dependence, has not been able to escape, negative connotations. Thus the enclave mentality exists in the tourism plan itself which divides the country into virtually different tourist areas as little islands of luxury. This was perhaps unavoidable and intentional in that the main tourist plan was put forward by a Hawaiian based firm of consultants, Harris Kerr & Co. This was in the middle 60s at a time when the current criticisms being made of the experiences of dependent tourism in other countries had barely begun to be heard. (More importantly, current concepts of the relationships of dependency like the call for a New Economic Order had hardly been voiced). These enclave resorts with relatively their high prices for locals and FEED supported cheapness for foreigners has inevitably, tremendous distortions as well as ripple effects due to their presence.

One of the more obvious of these ripple effects has been the "elimination" of many middle class eating places. The earlier middle class restaurants have either now raised their rates to the new tourist levels and priced themselves beyond the middle class or have experienced drop in quality. This has had a marked effect in that hitherto middle class places of rest and eating like the former Rest Houses are virtually beyond the reach of their former patrons.

However, in addition to these perhaps inevitable negative aspects there have also been attempts to make tourism more equally accessible between those of human equals. In this respect one of the more successful ones in almost every aspect has been the national tourist resort at Giritale.

### Giritale

The national tourist resort at Giritale is about a mile away from the main Anuradhapura - Polonnaruwa road and is easily reached by bus and other road transport. The resort consists of a camp site where layout and facilities are better than those

obtainable in similar European ones. There are twelve tents with accommodation for upto six adults each. The tents are built on a concrete platform and camp beds are provided. Linen too is provided at a very nominal charge and there are facilities also for caravans (basically affluent—for Sri Lanka—contraption has so far never been seen in the resort).

The camp is situated on a hill covered with forest cleared of undergrowth. It faces the large Giritale tank and the hills beyond. The undergrowth is regularly raked and the pathways are daily swept so that the impression of a well maintained park is created. The whole area is lit at night and there are regular watchers looking after the security of belongings which are often kept hanging outside the tents. There are very excellent kitchen facilities and extremely clean toilet and bath facilities both of the Sri Lankan and European varieties. Further a very efficient camp officer tends the camp.

The costs of accommodation are very reasonable Rs. 12/- per tent per night which works out to Rs. 2/- per person, if six camp beds are used. This would undoubtedly be one of the cheapest rates for such facilities. One mile away from the camp site is an interesting shopping area where all needs can be bought and above the camp site is a large tourist hotel where facilities such as the swimming pool (Rs. 2/- a swim) can be used by visitors.

An interesting aspect of the Giritale national tourist resort is that it breaks through the enclave situation. It is economically, socially, culturally and psychologically open to any strata of Sri Lankan society, as well as to any type of visitors from abroad. In fact the informality and the holiday spirit prevailing in the camp is very much reminiscent of the holiday atmospheres that exist in the relationship of tourism between equals as mentioned earlier. The flexible life style possible in the camp suggest that virtually any strata from Sri Lankan society (at least in that strata from the lower middle class upwards) can make use of these facilities. That psychological feeling that even some of the local rich experience when they walk into the new enclave tourist *lagers* is lacking here. Further

there is no sign of the institutionalised supplication before the white races by the service personnel (reminiscent of the colonial era 30 years ago) that often exist in the other tourist complexes.

Tourism has established itself in the country today in the various resort areas, but the historical evolution of the difficulties of this tourism are yet to be seen. The only prior examples of such tourism have been in Thailand, Hawaii islands and the Carribean and the reports from these do not indicate a rosy future in the decades to come for dependent tourism. The economic, social and cultural tensions which such tourism creates, specially in internationally awakened Third World countries is acute.

Giritale is only a camp site, but the same philosophy of at least relative equality between locals and foreigners and between various classes among the locals themselves can be easily transported into non-camp type tourist hotels. Cheap clean, low cost and comfortable hotels without the enclave padding, which incidentally even most of the foreign tourists are *not* used to, in their countries of origin—are called for and would be welcomed by both locals and foreigners. Such a transformation would bring tourism more in line with the type of tourism that prevails between equals, for instance those between France and Germany and between England and Britain. In France and Germany no armed guards protect the tourist regions (for example the Black Forest or of the Riveira) from the local population. However the latter aspect of "guarding" (even with machine guns) is an increasing feature in tourism in Thailand, Carribean and similar countries. There are incipient movements towards such guarding in Sri Lankan too.

Elimination of the need to develop such fortresses in which the tourists protect themselves from the locals is a necessary development both from the tourist point of view, as well as from the local point of view. This becomes more urgent in a country like Sri Lanka with an extremely articulate, politicised and educated population. The philosophy engrained in the Giritale complex is a good pointer towards what we can hopefully avoid in the years and decades to come.