

Indian Tourism

Synopsis: Indian tourism industry holds excellent prospects both in terms of domestic and foreign tourist. Tourism is becoming more and more popular because of many modern developments. Tourism in India has developed many new dimensions and fascinations which need to be fully exploited to generate new employment opportunities and earn more foreign exchange. Tourism infrastructure and tourism friendly culture should be developed fast. Many new and innovative measures are being taken to encourage tourism. Tourism in India occupies a strategic position but this position needs to be strengthened by liberal government help and private participation both from India and abroad. In near future India is likely to emerge both as a travel and tourism destination.

Indian tourism is the third largest export industry after gem and jewelry and ready-made garments with estimated earnings of 9,200 crore and employing nearly 7.8 million people directly. The Tourism Ministry is seeking an outlay of 58 billion for the Ninth Plan which shows 12-fold increase compared to 4.5 billion Eight Plan outlays. But India's share in the world tourism industry is only 0.7 per cent. Tourism today is world's one of the fastest growing industries with a turnover of 3.5 trillion per year. At present there are 500 million international travelers which would rise to 660 million by the turn of the century.

The fascinations of travel are not new things they have more dimension now than ever before. The tourists are travelling to such diverse and distant places as Andamans and Lakshadweep and yet the whole of the north-eastern region remains undiscovered and unexplored. The potential of domestic and foreign tourists in India is very vast and should be exploited and developed speedily. Tourism helps and strengthens the bonds of national unity, and integrity and brings people more close to one another culturally. Indian tourism industry has much capacity to generate employment opportunities even in remote and backward areas of the country. The direct employment in tourism industry in India during 1994-95 was nearly 7.8 million persons accounting for about 2.4 per cent of the total labour force.

To give a major lift to Indian travel and tourism industry the National Tourism Policy is being evolved. Under the policy, tourism is brought in the concurrent list, tax-structure is being rationalized and guidelines for Eco-tourism being framed, the participation of panchayats is also envisaged. There is an urgent need to improve India's image as a leisure and business destination. Tourism infrastructure needs to be increased and improved. Hotel-

capacity should be increased, new hotels with acceptable standards opened, air, train and luxury bus-services be increased private investment in the industry be made attractive and more trains like the "Palace of Wheels" be introduced on popular travel circuits.

India is a full of colorful festivals and fairs. They occur round the year. They too can be turned into major tourist attractions as has been done in some cases. What is needed is strong will, imagination, vision, drive, initiative and enterprise on the part of all those connected with the industry. Only then tourism will be able to contribute significantly to the country's economic growth and industrial development. Tourism in India occupies a strategic position but this position needs to be significantly strengthened by liberal government help and greeted private participation both from India and abroad.