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Domestic tourism of the urban Bengalis: A shared observation of the culture

Abstract

The research reported in this paper attempts to give an overview of the culture concerning domestic tourism of the urban Bengalis, the linguistically distinct people of India. The urban Bengalis, especially the people of Kolkata metropolis are, since colonial period, one of the largest sections of the tourists in India. This paper is an exploration of relationship between the significant Bengali representations of travel and the contemporary preferences of urban Bengali domestic tourists. With that objective, the authors, being Bengali themselves, tried to encompass and analyse all the significantly popular Bengali representation in literature, films and other agencies centred on tourism and also the real experience of the purposively selected one hundred contemporary tourists from Bengali families living in Kolkata metropolis. The former is seen to prevail as the backdrop of the later, though the later is undergoing some shifts from the former vision. The observation shows that the decision-making for the domestic tours of the Bengalis depends on the locally understood criteria of preferences and the specific operation of the criteria as actively selected by the tourists. A current account of preferences of the informants is given in order to focus on the present trends of preferred domestic tours. The approach of the work ultimately explores the repertoire of the varied, but changing cultural motivation and representation of the tourists, the continuity and change in the trends of domestic tours of the Bengalis, and other relevant issues of the local internal tourism.

Keywords:

tourism; tourist; travelogue; Bengali; India

Introduction

The present paper is an endeavour to articulate the shared understanding of both the local urban residents in an Indian province practicing domestic tourism and the authors who belong to the same culture-about the experiences of tours and some pertinent representation of the culture motivating tourism. The account is based not only on the shared narratives of the Bengalis living in the older part of Kolkata metropolis in India,

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Tourism, anthropology and the issues

but also, on some of the related documents of other cultural resources accumulated so far (e.g. popular Bengali literature, films, other governmental and non-governmental representations in media etc.). The work intends mainly to associate two aspects regarding tourism: firstly, to explore, interpret and classify the selected cultural representation related to tours and travels across time and secondly, to present the traditions and changes in attitudes in regards to preferred behaviours and destination of tours of a section of urban Bengali domestic tourists. As the authors belong to the same culture, they contribute as well to the formation of the outline of the traditions and changes in urban Bengali tourism experienced from within the community. In spite of the strong auto-ethnographic implications the authors, avoiding the direct engagement of personal narratives, chose to engage themselves only in authenticating the data from within the experience of the culture.

Anthropologists have taken serious interest in the issues of tourism for nearly last four decades (Cohen, 1972, 1979b, 1984, 1985; Dann, Nash & Pearce 1988; Cooper, et al., 1993; Towner, 1994; Chambers, ed., 1997; Burns, 1999, etc.). After the most widely accepted definition of tourism, as proposed by IUOTO and as classified under one of the following headings of Leisure (recreation, holiday, health, study, religion and sports) and Business (family mission, meeting) [IUOTO, 1963] anthropologically a tourist is seen as "a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change" (Smith, 1989, p. 1). Tourism is understood to occur under certain conditions essentially including three simultaneous elements: temporary leisure, disposable income and travel ethic. It is the sanctioning of travel that within a culture converts the use of time and resources into spatial or geographical social mobility. The conceptualisation of tourism differs in a range from the passive image of the tourists to the active process of tourism. Boorstin (1964) depicts modern tourists as passive onlookers, enjoying the extravagantly strange from the secure vantage of the familiar and thriving on "pseudo-events". MacCannell (1971), as a post-modernist, sees tourism as a universal quest rather than contrived illusions or a quest for authenticity (of the pre-modern extensions to the modern, of significantly symbolic heterogeneous attractions etc.), which is a reflection of the human concern for the sacred. On the other hand, Cohen's (1974) formulation is based on Turner's (1967) understanding of tourism as part of a liminal process, which includes rites of separation (from the structural contexts of their normal world), transition (as entrance to an unusual setting as "learners") and re-incorporation to their old status as changed in some way from their touristic experience. In spite of the lack of any conclusive position, all three somewhat different theoretical positions seem complementary rather than opposed. Of both taking up an etic stance, Boorstin focuses on the individual and MacCannell focuses, at least nominally, on the social structure, though relating to tourist as an individual. Turner shifts emphasis to the integration of the analysis of individual experience with social dynamics, thus privileging social process and culture. According to level of analysis, MacCannell's emphasis on structural, semiotic significance comes closer to Turner's tradition of going to the deeper, cultural symbolic meaning of the touristic experience within the broader social process. On the basis of direction of the touristic quest, all three traditions refer, at least implicitly, to the centre-other continuum, albeit in different senses, and with contrasting intentions.

The present study takes up the "centre", the regular tourist community, seen from within their own cultural setting and their traditional and changing criteria for selecting tours. In doing so, even the different principal classifications of tourists and their destinations (e.g. Cohen, 1974; Smith, 1989; Plog, 1974) are not seen to be completely

viable. The third world by itself has become the fertile site for examining a lot of issues like marketing, industry, pilgrimage, mass tourism, diversity of tourism, social-cultural impacts, issues of western tourists, aspects of state and private efforts, host-guest relatedness, impacts like changes in value systems, ethics, conduct, collective and creative expressions etc. (Robinson, 1972; Jafari, 1974; French, 1977; Smith, ed., 1978; Davis, 1978; Britton, 1979; Cheek & Burch, 1980b; Lea, 1988; Harrison, ed., 1992; Jenkins, 1982b, 1994; Singh, Theuns, & Go, eds., 1989; Ghimire, ed., 2001; Kunwar, 2002; Gladstone, 2005; Egmond, 2007). The present focus is on diversity of traditions and changes of the local cultural scenario related to internal tourism among the urban Bengalis, especially of Kolkata. In the face of the contemporary holistic need of understanding the motivations and impacts for both tourists and locals concerning the impacts of tourism (Stronza, 2001), the present study has its limitations in giving more emphasis on tourists and the active and reflective aspect of their tourist behaviour in a locality. Yet, on the other hand, it resonates with another contemporary current of exploring the behaviour of tourists taking up a "middle role", which focuses on the creative and experience-seeking activities of tourists (Selstad, 2007) from within their culture.

Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta) is a post-colonial metropolis, the previous capital (before 1947) of colonial British India, presently the capital of the province of West Bengal in India. By the colonial period it became the most privileged urban centre of modern contacts and communication with the other parts of the country and abroad. The province, according to the latest census, is home to over 22 million Indians, whose mother tongue is Bengali (Population Census, 2001). The urban Bengalis of India became known for their regular tours and travels since the early colonial period (Sen, 2005). The local terms for the 'modern' tour (*bhraman*), much common among the Bengalis, may be enlisted as "*change e jaoa*" (meaning, going for a change), "*baire byarate jaoa / ghurte jaoa*" (meaning going/ wondering for the purpose of a tour outside), "*haoa badal*" (meaning, altering the climate), "*bidesh bhraman*" / "*bidesh jatra*" / "*bidesh safar*" (meaning, tour to other countries), "*bilet jaoa/ bilet jatra*" (meaning, tour in western countries). Different contexts of tours are both intensively and extensively present in the traditional Bengali literature, especially in the pre-colonial and postcolonial "modern classic" literature (*sahitya* and *Kabya*).

Finally, the following two principal grounds of interest of the present study emerged. Firstly, this tourist identity of the urban middle-class Bengalis (*sohure madhyabitta baangaali*), who are the most regular in domestic tourism among the different sections and communities of the Indians, deserves significant anthropological attention for conjoining their local and effective cultural representations of tourism in use (e.g. epics and folk tales, classical and popular literature including travelogues, films, newspapers, other media, etc.) and their contemporary attitudes, preferences and practices. Secondly, culturally and methodologically some relevant slants of study from insider position of the anthropological researchers, though avoiding any direct auto-ethnography, were taken up to make better justice to the concerned multi-faceted reality of the internal tourism. The approach adopted in this study does not claim to be hugely intensive and sufficiently analytical regarding the rich inventory of the facts available to the researchers, but being the member-participants of the culture, the authors endeavour to give a gross and authentic overview of the context under study.

The methodology: some specific considerations

As the insiders of the culture at large and residents of Kolkata, the present authors have extensive experience about the urban middle-income (*madhyabitta*) residents - the service holders, medium and small businessmen - who undergo more or less common cycle of local social living, similar motivations, common yearly pattern of holidays and more or less similar consumption patterns as tourists. The identification and understanding of these people (*madhyabitta*) are very much culture-specific and substantively valid inside the culture of the local urban Bengalis.

The specific plan of exploration the issue took two years. Only a part of it, especially the context of interviews of the one hundred selected families was used principally to obtain the data on the preferences of the criteria for tours. These contemporary criteria of preferences for domestic tours of the urban Bengalis and other narration of information about some significant aspects of culture associated with the travels and tours were collected by semi-structured interviews. The families, living for at least three decades, were selected purposively from the older northern localities of Kolkata, namely Shovabazar, Shyambazar and Bagbazar, where even the newly settled Bengali families are supposed to get sufficient exposure to the traditional residents. Most of the older inhabitants of Kolkata live in the northern, early settled part of the city. These localities are also known for the families and/or lineages, who have been residing there for over a hundred years. Their way of life has some determinate roles in the continuity and change of the operative network of beliefs and practices of everyday life, social relations, available urban amenities and organisation of the local neighbourhoods. The newly settled residents started populating these northern localities of Kolkata during two principal periods, the first just before and after independence of India from late 1940s to early 1950s and the next during early 1970s. Therefore, such newly settled Bengali families identify themselves as the residents of the 'older' (*purono*) and more 'traditional' (*banedi*) part of Kolkata metropolis.

One hundred families willing to participate in this research were selected. However, in each family one adult male member was found to be in charge of managing/executing the tour. This man-centrism is either for his considerable exposure to tours or the cultural consideration of envisaging man as more responsible for outdoor duties. Thus, one male member was selected as the key informant for communicating the current preference of criteria for choosing a destination. Culturally, the men are independent in joining/organising tours with both the relatives and friends. In all those patrilineal families, the 'responsible' male members, not necessarily the heads of the families were found to be able to provide the best possible 'valid' details of the tours. Every informant, in front of other members of the family including the women and other participants of the tours, attempted to represent information, choices and opinions on behalf of the other members of his family and friends along with his own. Therefore, the data from the informants were more of inter-subjective than subjective nature.

The lack of awareness among the people about the 'trendy' classification and interpretation of contemporary tourism helped to obtain a fresh exploration and classification of the local experiences. In a period nearing a long span of local festival holiday (called "*Durgotsav*" "*Sarodotsav*") in October, the field interactions with the interviewees were initiated. During this period, remaining in a leisurely mood and in habit of planning for the tour, the interviewees were given a preferred context of the interaction for elaborating the desired experiences and focusing on the plans for future. The familiarity of the linguistic, local identities and the novelty of purpose were conducive to the fieldwork. The local residents' gathering and gossiping (locally called "*adda*") in locally selected corners of the street were also attended for similar purpose. Such a popular issue,

especially their present preferences of tours, was accepted relatively seriously. The researchers could also opt for going beyond the scheduled interviews in cases where informants expressed a desire for extended communication. The unstructured interviews became effective in collecting in-depth narration and shared ideas about the issues.

At first the researchers initiated the exchange of the experiences of the domestic tours made so far by the individual family members and the friends present in the setting of interview. It was followed by an unstructured discussion about the contexts of earliest ideas of and interests in tours obtained from the descriptions of other tourists, literature, media and films. Then, the researchers used the unstructured interviews in order to explore and get at the 'construct' of the diversity of preferences and the present criteria behind the preferences and the decisions of tours. The authors endeavoured to classify the tours on the basis of the criteria of currently preferred destination based on the narrations of the informants. Such preferences were told to vary in cases and from time to time. The informants, on their own, identified their desirable criteria for different aspects of tours. Among them the consensus was found in identifying [1] the traditional (as old as any old participants may remember the past of the culture), [2] recent (according to the period of the emergence) and [3] the mixed criteria (as adjustment and combination of the two). The authors had to revisit the families, in some cases several times, in order to explain the need of consensus and to interview them regarding the agreed statement of the criteria. The criteria could be more sharpened on further interviewing, but the methodological understanding would be the same as the informants and the participant observers themselves jointly constructed them. After that, the informants were said to set their own preferential order. The first choice of the informants was taken into consideration for representing their current account of viable criteria for preferring a tour at present (see the tables in the section: The present perceptions of preferred "otherness"). The present account is supposed to begin with the literary narratives in the culture about "tours".

The culture of literary narratives: An overview of the foci from within

Almost all the informants in the present study know the epics, some writings of colonial period and every 'modern' author of either travelogue or on aspects of travel or even of fictional narrative on tours. The following discussion attempts to chronologically account for the focal articulation of all the principal writings with regard to travels and tours, especially of colonial, 'post-colonial' and 'modern' periods. The account also traces out the shifts of narratives in focussing on the local constructs of exploration (*anusandhan*), adventures (*abhijan*) and resulting preferences (*pachhanda*) for diversity (*baichitra*), exoticness (*aparichay*) and identification (*sadrisya*) in 'otherness'. They also reveal the attachments to the types of nature (*prakriti*), society (*samaj*), culture (*sanaskar*), history/time (*itihash/ samay*), land (*desh*), etc. The local constructs of reality also tried to represent self (sometimes gendered) as refreshed and with an ambivalent shift of focal attachments to certain concepts of tours and types of destination changing over time and space. The corresponding contents of the writings could not be discussed in details here, though the cultural preferences for the diverse types of 'natural' and other settings have already been introduced. The purpose of the discussion was to mention the principal perceptions of preferred destinations, purposes and the related trends of tours projected in those writings and appreciated by the readers. The narratives of the epics and "modern" popular writings are found to form the backdrop of cultural representation and a vista of understanding tourism, that is differentially distributed over the book-loving (*parua / pustak-premi*) and tour-loving (*bhraman-premi*) urban Bengalis. The focal understanding of the literary representation to be discussed below is titled in order

to allude to the perceptions of the experiences in relation to preferred destinations, purposes, etc. supported by some authentic readings by the authors as the insiders to the culture. The short discussions on each focal understanding, especially of 'modern writing' with prominent examples of the authors and works, would characterise the types of literary representations.

THE EARLY FICTIONS

The role of the narratives, beginning from the early stage of life, may nicely be understood, if the references of the narration of some of the elderly informants may be incorporated. One middle aged graduate informant gave a nice portrayal about his early exposure of folktales and tales from the epics of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*. Later, some other informants felt similar enthusiasm in recollecting the wonder about the exotic places and phenomena mentioned in those literature and tales along with the childhood fantasy of exploring them in person. Almost all the informants were more emphatic on the epics as more important in this regard than the fairy tales, because the mix of reality and fiction made the virtual reality of epic more tangible than it emerges from the fairy tales. In both the epics, the episodes of the exile (mainly in *Ramayan*), absconding (mainly in *Mahabharat*), the adventures and sojourning of the "positive" characters (*bhaalo choritro*) are said to provide the cultural motivation for exploring the "exotic". They appear certainly indicative of imaginative interests in "otherness" of the self-identifiable "ideal" characters (i.e. Rama's lineage in *Ramayan* and Pandabas in *Mahabharat*) of the epics. If the mythical resource of epic, writings of ancient poet like Kalidas, folktales and religious texts (like *Gita*, *Purans*, *Mangal Kabyas* and *Panchalis*) are either too much fictional and more supportive to the interests in traditional pilgrimage, the "modern" interests in tourism are obviously derived from the mass media, "modern" literature and films.

THE 'MODERN' LITERATURE ON THE COLONIAL PERIOD

There are now some growing attempts to rethink the pre-independent scenario of tours of the Bengalis and their portrayal of the experienced otherness in both domestic tours and travelling abroad. They are partially reported from the interviewees, but authentically collected from the comments of the scholars doing works on it.

Men's adventurous discovery of 'exotic' and women's 'independent' portrayal

In the issue dated February 17, 2006 of the popular newspaper, The Telegraph (Calcutta, India) Arnab Bhattacharya reviews Simonti Sen's book, "Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives (1870-1910)" and concludes:

The writings of 19th-century Bengali travellers like Trailokyanath Mukherjee, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Girish Chandra Basu, Shibnath Shastri, Rabindranath Tagore, Krisnabhabini Das et al. shows that a different sense of historicity with a reworked binary of 'self' and 'other' inform their writings. Sen contends that these narratives come through as more introspective, detached, assertive and judgmental than the pre-colonial travelogues.

The relevant writers and their contributions of this phase (principally focussing on their travelogues / *bhromon-kahini*) are briefly summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

'MODERN' TRAVELOGUES ON PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Writers	Works/Contributions
Bholanath Chunder	This well reputed poet, traveller and travelogue writer is remembered, among else, for his <i>Travels of a Hindoo</i> (1860) describing his experience of diverse otherness in India from Calcutta (Erstwhile) to Punjab
Ishwar Chandra Gupta	This well-know newspaper editor and writer was known for the serial of travel accounts published in the newspaper <i>Sambad Prabhaka</i> , about his journey by a river to different mangrove forested parts of East Bengal and to the sea of Bay of Bengal around about 1850.
Ramnath Biswas	As a local celebrity and a writer who travelled the globe by bicycle in 1930s, his serial writing on the exotic experiences of travel was hugely popular.
Rai Bahadur Jaladhar Sen	This well-reputed journalist was remembered well for <i>Prabas Chitra</i> (1899) and <i>Himalaya</i> (1900), travelogues about "foreign land" and the mountainous region in India.

In another collection, on the Early Travel Writings by Women (titled as *Pather Katha: Shatabdir Sandhikshane Bagamahilar Bhraman*) edited by Abhijit Sen and Ujjal Ray, women like Swarnakumari Devi (1855-1932), Prasannamoyee Devi (1855-1939) and her daughter Priyambada (1870-1936), Nistarini Devi or Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) and some locally famous writers of their times are explained as to be those writers, who wrote about their travels, where the road became a metaphor and a distillation of experience. The writings may be seen as immediate reflections of what they saw, heard and felt through their perceptions as women.

THE POPULAR AND 'INDEPENDENT' CONTINUITY OF 'MODERN' LITERATURE

As expected in the context of the study, the urban Bengali informants uttered the names of Rabindranath Tagore, N.L. and Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay, as the two great Bengali authors introducing "exotic" in a manner of exploring the wonders of travelling across land (*desh*), society (*samaj*), culture (*sanaskar*), history/time (*itihash/ samay*) and nature (*prakriti*) in most of the cases that continued in all the succeeding writers till present. The present authors would prefer to set aside not to commit injustice to the inescapably elaborate and multidimensional discussions on Rabindranth's portrayal of internal tours and of the tours abroad in the present span of paper. The following discussion mentions the focal understanding of the successive writings of other authors supported by some essentially relevant data.

Privileging diversely open 'otherness' of nature/life/exotic over bounded society

This focal understanding may uniquely be attributed to Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay (1894-1950), a great novelist and very popular writer of all times of Bengal. His writings related to travel include *Pather Panchali*, *Aparajita*, *Meghamallar*, *Mauriphul*, *Yatrabadal*, *Chander Pahad*, *Kinnardal*, *Aranyak*, *Adarsha Hindu Hotel*, *Maraner Danka Baje*, *Smrtir Rekha*, *Hiramanik Jvale*, *Utkarna*, *Hey Aranya Katha Kao* and *Ichhamati*. They were was focused on wonders (*bismay*) of exploration, romance, imagination, nostalgia, preference for nature (*prakriti*) over society (*samaj*) and a whole range of emotions of a travelling self in terms of Bengali cultural signification.

Articulation of euphoric journeys in 'otherness' of history, societies and nature

Parivrajaka, a much-esteemed term is connotative of saintly traveller, who goes on travelling. The term is an interpretative one and deeply rooted in local traditions of

India. Rahul Sankrityayan was a modern and iconic embodiment of that tradition. As being multidimensional scholar and creative writer he could reach deep into the life and history of the space— whether it be to Ladakh, Kinnaur, Kashmir, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Iran, China, or the erstwhile Soviet Union; or to Vedantic spirituality, Buddhist philosophy and Marxist politics. *Volga theke Ganga* (translated from Hindi, *Volga se Ganga*), a collection of twenty pieces of fictionalised history, traces the various streams - from the 6000 BC Volga of the Indo-Europeans to the 1942 salad-bowl Gangetic plain - that made the subcontinent what it is today. Unlike that commoner western counterpart of searching for the "exotic", he paved his own way of belonging to his own Indian imaginary visions of space and time. For Sankrityayan, knowledge was lived experience, always to be part of his own milieu, thus to impart an autobiographical authenticity to all the accounts of experiences of tours.

The search for diversity and adventure in nature

The accounts of writers on nature such as Jim Corbett and Salim Ali had great impacts on the Bengali readers to arouse their interests in explorations and adventures. Jim Corbett was known to be an adventurer, forest lover, a great conservationist of Indian forestry and a thrilling writer of adventurous, courageous and thrilling tales of encounters with man-eating tigers in the foothills of the Himalayas (i.e. *The Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1946); *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayang* (1948); *Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (1954))

The search for diverse human 'otherness' in adventurous tours

As an extension of the earlier trend, these extensive writings, in terms of numbers, topics covered and locations, celebrate the diverse 'otherness' of adventurous tours in terms of human interaction. Among the more prominent ones is Prabodh Kumar Sanyal, a great novelist who published his travelogues from 1940s to 1960s. He has travelled six times all over India, and also Himalayas, Nepal, other places in Asia, Europe, North Pole, the Americas and Russia and engaged with associations of Himalayan tourists and adventurers. Very popular was also Sanku Maharaj, a writer of more than twenty significantly popular travelogues on the Himalayas, historical places, pilgrim centres in India and abroad, which were published over a rather long period of thirty years - from mid 1960s to mid 1990s. For nearly twenty years, from early 1970s and throughout 1980s, more than twelve very popular travelogues of Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay, focusing on mountains and forests of Himalayas, plains, river valleys, forests and cities enchanted readers' imagination. Another prolific travelogue writer focusing on travel experiences in different natural settings is Amarendranath Chakraborty. Over 1990s and in early 2000s he has published five works on travel to Himalaya and Indian deserts, while Abuadhut, also a popular contemporary travel writer, focused on inaccessible mountains and places of Himalaya.

The social/ cultural understanding of diverse 'otherness' of anything connected to travel

The prolific writers of fictions, travelogues and other essays, mentioned below are considered as ardent travellers and emphatic on the significance of tours as inseparable aspect of social life and relations. However, in certain contrast to the earlier genre, they turn the direction of narration of diverse 'otherness' to that of any 'otherness' in terms of social-cultural perspectives across time and space. Principle representatives of this stream of literature are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

THE MAJOR CULTURE-CENTRED WRITINGS ON DIVERSE 'OTHERNESS' CONNECTED TO TRAVEL

Writers	Works / Contributions
Samaresh Basu	From 1950s to 1980s, he has published 87 novels and 200 short stories. Of those, 20 travel-based novels focused principally on "otherness" in the diversity of cultural articulations
Syed Muztaba Ali	Known as an advanced educator and novelist, active in the period from 1940s to 1970s. The most popular of his travelogues are <i>Deshe-Bideshe</i> on different cultures and <i>Jale-Danay</i> on travels by different water routes and land routes.
Subhashh Mukhopadhyay	This very popular, multifaceted Bengali poet, writer of novels, essays, travelogues, memoirs, children's literature and poetry translations for a long period from 1940s to late 1980s, is also well remembered for his principal travelogues in social contexts: ' <i>dakbanglar diary</i> ', ' <i>jakhan jekhaane</i> ' ' <i>khama nei</i> '
Annadashankar Ray	Principal travelogue in social-cultural context: <i>Pathe Prabase</i>
Bimal Dey	<i>Sudurer Piyasi</i> , travelogue exploring distant societies
Binaykrishna Ghosh (Jajabar)	<i>Jajabar Omnibus</i> , a huge collection of his travelogues on different space
Sunil Gangopadhyay	This prolific writers (published over 200 titles), with a few very popular ones on different contexts of tours: <i>Chhabir Deshe</i> , <i>Kabitar Deshe</i> , <i>Aranyer Din-Raatri</i>
Moitreyi Debi	<i>Achenaa Cheen</i> , the experience on China

The tastes of 'otherness' only amidst exotic natural settings

Finally, this group represents an extension of the last genre, only redirecting its focus to nature and to journey. The strongest representative of this group of travel writing is the contemporary writer Buddhadeb Guha, a novelist known for his love for forests and the most beautiful renditions of travel from 1970s till present with his more than fifteen significant writings on travel. Often, the central theme of his travelogues includes romance, ups and downs of social relations, and mysterious relations with the exotic 'otherness' as exciting happening only in natural settings. Others include Subodh Kumar Chakravarti (*Ramyani bikshya* on vision and pleasure of travel), Atulchandra Gupta (*Nodi-Pothe* on journey by river), Nabaneeta Dev Sen (*Truck-Bahone McMahan-e* and *Deshantor* with travel as the central theme) and Tarapada Roy (*Neel Digonte Tokhon Magic* on the pleasure of travel).

Therefore, the local popular literary narratives have already acquired a long history of shifting imagination, tastes, understanding and modes of enjoying the preferred destinations of tour. Parallel to the literature, the films and other media use similar construct of local preferences either in context of fictional narratives related to tours in films or of promoting tourism by itself, principally as a commodity, to higher popularity as it is done by other media, state and private initiatives.

The films and the trends of popularity of tourism

The urban Bengalis are able to appreciate the diverse perspectives to tour and travel as represented in the literature. In distinction to such appreciation of the diversity, the contemporary internal tourists only talk about their practices of tourism in terms of types of preferred destinations. Their varied understanding of literature and films on tours seem to remain subsumed in the perception of destination. Therefore, the authors in the endeavour to relate the literary and film representations of tours with the practices of contemporary domestic tourists of Kolkata selected the contexts of the preferred destinations and related contexts of perceptions as common terrain in literature, film, other media and initiatives of the state complementarily.

The "modern" Bengali feature films, especially of international acclaim and/or of sincere attitude to local traditions, include the transformations of some of the above-mentioned travelogues and travel-related fictions into films. The different contexts of diverse 'otherness' and adventures in tours are seen to keep social subjects at the centre of the narratives of the films, thus favouring the inter-subjective perspective of narration (i.e. the social/ cultural understanding of diverse 'otherness' of anything by selves in a culture).

Of the preferred destinations (a) in mountains and its associated pilgrimage, (b) sea, (c) the forests, (d) the hills, (e) the riverside, (f) the seasonal pilgrim centres, (g) the historical places, (h) the explorations of other exotic and the unknown may be conceived of the gross foci of the films associated to tours and travels. In almost all such films, tours became one context among many and in some cases it became the backdrop of the interplay of different contexts, including the exploration of the culturally preferred exotic place and related human experiences. Apart from Satyajit Ray's *Sonar Kella* and Mrinal Sen's *Bhuban Som* and Bikash Roy's *Morutirtha Hinglaj* the fascinating backdrops of desert are almost absent in other such popular films. The culturally significant examples of representing the experiences of preferred exotic and reinvention of self in relation to socio-symbolic include the movies presented briefly in Table 3.

Table 3

THE SIGNIFICANT BENGALI MOVIES RELATED TO INTERNAL TOURISM

Movie (title)	Concerned focus
<i>Marutirtho Hinglaj</i>	Adventure of the Bengali tourists during a difficultly accessible and exotic religious place in desert
<i>Bigolito Karunana Janhobi Jamuna</i>	Bengali tourists travelling to the mountainous origin of a river
<i>Amrito Kumbher Sandhane</i>	Tour of a Bengali writer in a great religious festival and gathering of pilgrims
<i>Nirjan Saikate</i>	The experience and revelation of social relations of the Bengalis as tourists in the popular sea beach
<i>Sonar Kella</i>	The adventurous exploration of the thrilling historical/ archaeological past in desert of Rajasthan
<i>Bhuban Som</i>	The nature of solitude of a "modern" Bengali beaurocrat narrated in context of exotic social relationship at a remote corner of an Indian desert
<i>Aranyer Dinratri</i>	The inevitably critical revelations of the selves as urban, educated, modern tourists in a remote forest, away from their regular business
<i>Nil Nirjane</i>	The Bengali tourists finding out space for revealing and refreshing their relationships in a short tour in a tourist spot
<i>Abaar Aranye</i>	The "radical" and contemporarily critical portrayal of the event of revisiting some remote forest by some urban, educated, modern tourists
<i>Tushar Tirtho Amarnath</i>	The experiences concerning tours of the pilgrims to a religious complex in Himalayas

It is also necessary to singe out the more recent movie *Agantuk* of Satyajit Ray, for its significant contribution to the contemporary understanding of tourism. It was not based on tourism as such, but the protagonist of the film, being an anthropological traveller, provides a thick commentary of experience of tours as a successful challenge to the dominant ethnocentric philosophies of "modern" life. In a word, the Bengali films might be useful and popular resource of understanding the representation of touristic experience of the urban Bengalis linked to other broader contexts of society.

The initiatives of mass media and state

In addition to the films and the literature, the agencies of mass media and state have developed their own initiatives in responding to the demand of infrastructure of tourism. Among many Bengali magazines catering to the travel market needs there are several (*Bhraman, Safar, Tathya Kendra, Sananda, Saptahik Bartaman*) that publish travel articles on regular basis. *Discover India*, a monthly India travel magazine, *Tourism India*, an online Indian tourism related magazine, *Express Travel and Tourism, Holiday Travel, Travel Observer, Travel Mail, Travel Review, Tourism and Outlook Traveller and Calcuttaweb.com* have also become known to the cyber-connecting urban residents. There are ample websites and links to governmental and non-government agencies promoting tourism. Almost all the local daily newspapers have the section dedicated to travel with articles and advertising. At present, in the urban context of Kolkata, nineteen major clubs and association have been working meticulously to promote training and generate interest in trekking, mountaineering and exploration based tourism.

In the issue dated, 16th - 31st August 2002 of *Express Travel and Tourism*, the former state tourism minister Dinesh Chandra Dakua lamented that though about 40 per cent of all tourists in India were from West Bengal, they rarely travelled within the state. Bearing this in mind, West Bengal government is endeavouring to reverse this trend with a campaign to change the state from a 'guest state' to a 'host state'. The minister further added stating,

Thousands of tourists visit Bengal especially during the Ganga Sagar Mela, but most leave without visiting the tourist spots in their own state. So, we are going to persuade Bengali tourists to reserve at least one vacation in a year for their home state.

The above are indicative of the high frequency of Bengali tourists and their attitudes toward domestic tourism. Though it was the Sixth five-year plan (from 1980-85), which started to consider tourism as something useful for social integration and economic development, only after 1980, especially in 1982, the national policy on tourism was announced. In 1988 the National Committee on Tourism was set up for sustainable growth in tourism. Yet it took almost ten more years to draft a new tourism policy in tune with the economic policies of the Government. Recently, by the middle of the present decade, The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has identified India as one of the foremost global growth centres in near future. Therefore, the contemporary tourism policy of the national government is relatively more concerned with the international industrial value than domestic tourism.

The perceptions, criteria of preference and trends of tours in practice

PREFERRED DESTINATIONS OF "OTHER" LOCALITIES AND OTHER ASPECTS OF TOUR SINCE COLONIAL PERIOD

Before a few decades of popularity and acceptance of the package and conducted tours, domestic tours were almost completely based on the individual efforts of the tourists to plan and to reach the preferred destination. On the other hand, most of the informants were found uncertain about the scenario of internal tourism during colonial period.

Only a few knowledgeable informants could allude to *Dak Bungalows*, the comfortable buildings for the purpose of shelters at different remote corners of the country during the colonial period. Apart from the British officials and merrymakers, the anglicised Bengali elites, *babus* found them suitable for living during travels. In addition many elderly informants, who loved tours as relaxation during leisure especially during "Puja" Holiday (i.e. "durgotsav") narrated their awareness about the spots that were the most convenient and common. The Bengalis were then referred to as the travellers of the "west" in many novels and writings. "West" (*Paschim*), for some reasons, always meant North India in addition to the west of West Bengal – the vast Gangetic plains and the

hills beyond. Chotanagpur became a region of "change" in the Bengali mind. Added to it were the mountains to the north of west Bengal, especially Darjeeling, or the smaller, slightly lower hill stations of Kalimpong and Kurseong. A clear view of the Himalayan peaks of Kanchanjunga and Mount Everest became the attraction for the tourists. Apart from the stray popularity of certain northeastern spots like Shillong, places of Assam etc. the regular places of "change" included Ranchi, Ghatsila, Mihijam, Hajaribaag, Jamtara, Karmatar, Madhupur, Simultala, Giridih, Jhanjha, Deoghat, Jassidihi etc. The affluent people, including a broader section of the middle classes, started to have their houses in such spots because of their preference for spending longer holidays there. The other touring Bengalis have to seek lodging in such houses for their temporary tours. Rajgirh in Bihar district, Benaras and Allahabad in the district of Uttar Pradesh were another such popular places for the Bengali tourists. In the later two places of Uttar Pradesh one might find the permanent residence of many Bengali families, who migrated much earlier for different reasons. For several historical reasons the religious centre of Puri in Orissa became popular for the wild seaside. It is really difficult to judge any difference between the purpose of religion and that of enjoying seaside. Similar to Puri in Orissa, Digha in West Bengal is another popular sea-side location, but unlike Puri, Digha is meant for shorter tour and is sometimes seen to be populated by the tourists aimed at other entertainments, based on relatively 'secret' seeking of pleasure individually or in close groups of friends. All such traditions of having "change" either in the "west" (*paschim*) or in some other distant places had been a ritualised quest for and refreshment in terms of preferred "otherness".

THE PRESENT PERCEPTIONS OF PREFERRED "OTHERNESS": DESTINATIONS, PERIODS, PURPOSES AND MODES

Besides the above previously very popular destinations, the preferred spots and routes of tours are now spread all over India. They are numerous and increasing in number simultaneously with the advancement of the culture of tourism.

All the urban Bengali informants derive some of the categories of "domestic tours", based on certain traditional and recent criteria of making any decision of a tour. The combination and interdependence of the principal criteria function in making decision of any tour, though the number of criteria involved in any decision may vary in cases. The most usual longer (of one week or more) tours happen at the end of January, at the middle of May (principally to the colder, mountainous places), in the middle of August, on the festival occasion on any of the month of September, October, November and at the end of December. The holidays of the service-holders and vacations of the school-going children become the determining factors of the selection of the time. The businessmen and those working adults heading the offices of any organization are in trouble to settle the time for longer tours.

The package and tour programmes involving rapid shift of places cost higher. For a tour of taking rest at any place with optional excursions to nearby places are reported to cost less. Local rented lodges with self-catering facilities are, naturally, cheaper than taking meals in hotels and restaurants, though the availabilities of such opportunities are getting scarce due to the increasing commercialisation of tourism. The short tour of the weekend or for a few more days appears more acceptable to the regular tourists. The spots within the province of West Bengal and its outskirts remain dense with local tourists during shorter holidays.

In case of the final decision regarding the trip and destination, though the choice of the female spouse in a family-oriented tour gets more attention, the males are said to

arrange them and adapt them according to different aspects of convenience. The informants themselves preferred the criteria of the present choice. The criteria are said either traditional or recent or mixed ones. The present priorities of the informants from among the criteria of all the seven classes were taken into account. The top priorities are put forward for representing the contemporary trends of preferences. The basis of self-classified tourists of Kolkata turned out to be the effect of their inter-subjectively or culturally mediated perceptions of the coalition between their preferences and material experiences and considerations of the aspects of tours. Finally, beginning from the unstructured interviews about such perceptions the authors could reach the agreed constructs of the informants about following criteria of their preferences for deciding tours in practice: (1) mode of arranging tour, (2) purpose, (3) nature of movement, (4) social composition of accompaniments, (5) setting of destination and (6) resources of satisfaction and convenience. They might be more altered and expanded, if more participation and introspection would be given to such co-construction of criteria and categories.

The traditional arrangement of a tour according to their own plan of the tourists in order to enjoy more freedom during the tours is still more preferred among the people, with 59 per cent of informants reporting the preference for self-arranged tours. The emphasis on the choice of package tours is principally to avoid the problems of arranging the needed infrastructure. Among the package tours those offered by the provincial governments and already established private entrepreneurs are given more preference, though the traditional, self-arranged tours are still more preferred than package tours.

Table 4
THE PURPOSE OF TOUR

Purpose [traditional/recent/mixed]	Frequency / percentage
• Enjoying time in some previously and/ or newly preferred destinations [traditional]	20
• Any practicable combination of some of other purposes [mixed]	19
• Seeing more popular destinations in shorter period of time [mixed]	19
• Some religious purposes [traditional]	18
• Taking rest from the regular business of life [traditional]	10
• Enjoyment or exploration of the exotic or yet unseen [traditional]	6
• Tour of a newly married couple [traditional]	2
• Knowledge [traditional]	2
• Seeking only pleasure and relaxation (solely with drinking and secret sexual gratification) [mixed]	2
• Wandering [traditional]	1
• Adventure [traditional]	1
Total	100

The commonly conceived purpose of 'taking rest from the regular business of life' as an exclusive one numerically stands in the fifth position. The need of 'seeing more popular destinations in shorter period of time' and 'enjoying time in some previously and/ or newly preferred destinations' represents one of the reasons for the rise of popularity for package tourism. These two purposes comprise 39% of the tourists under study. The closer purposes of 'knowledge', 'adventure', 'enjoyment or exploration of the exotic or yet unseen' represent 9% of the tourists; similarly it is difficult to differentiate certain cases of 'some religious purposes' and 'seeing more popular destinations in shorter period of time'. Such overlaps are evident in 'practicable combination of some of other purposes' (constituting 19%) as certain combination of the rest. The infrequent purpose

of 'seeking only pleasure and relaxation' could be the result of negative social sanction and sometimes promoted by commodification of "privacy" for some urban Bengalis. The exclusively traditional purposes represent 60% as against the rest, the mixed ones.

Table 5
THE NATURE OF TOUR ACCORDING TO MOBILITY

Movement [traditional/recent/mixed]	Frequency / percentage
• Tour including several destinations [mixed]	46
• Side-trips to nearby attractions if possible [traditional]	24
• Almost no side-trips to other spots [traditional]	20
• Trips to other attractions/destinations from a central place [traditional]	10
Total	100

The last three categories, 'side-trips to nearby attractions if possible', 'almost no side-trips to other spots', 'trips to other attractions/destinations from a central place' are more traditionally known among the tourists (64 %). The rise of package and conducted tours made the plan of shifting tours more viable and popular. However, there are some families, who prefer to arrange the shifting tour on their own, not by means of package tour.

Table 6
TOURS BY THE TRAVEL PARTY

Composition [traditional/recent/mixed]	Frequency / percentage
• Family [traditional]	41
• Friendly families [mixed]	33
• Family and relative/s [traditional]	8
• Family, relative/s and friend/s [mixed]	7
• Family and friend/s [traditional]	6
• Only friends [mixed]	3
• Single [traditional]	2
Total	100

In terms of travel party, the traditional travel patterns prevail among the informants. The most common is travel with 'family' or with 'family and relatives' 'family, relatives and friends' (55%). However, travelling with other families or in mixed groups of family, relatives or friends is also very frequent. It is found convenient especially, according to the informants, for sharing the expenditure of travel and lodging facilities. A few older married and widowed informants prefer singular journey and to get the accompaniments of friends (5 %). Apart from such cases, the family becomes the essential constituents of the group for tours. Any previous positive experience of accepting certain individual relative/s and/or friend/s as the member of the group adds to the locus of family. The homogeneity of attitudes within the group is explained as another principal factor for selecting friendly families, which function as the mutual support to the families on journey.

Table 7

PREFERRED TYPES OF DESTINATIONS

Destination [traditional/recent/mixed]	Frequency/ percentage
• Mountains and/ or hills [traditional]	28
• Sea beach [traditional]	20
• Setting of religious significance [traditional]	18
• The combination of some of the above [mixed]	11
• Pleasing natural setting [traditional]	8
• Forests and jungles [mixed]	4
• Countryside [traditional]	3
• The interesting urban setting [traditional]	3
• Place of luxury and other pleasurable recreations [recent]	2
• Popular historical places [traditional]	1
• Desert areas [traditional]	1
• Places of fairs and festivals [traditional]	1
Total	100

As an exclusive interest the mountainous and/ or hilly place as an exclusive attraction is dominant among the informants (28%), though sea-side comes next in number of many tourists. Actually, apart from 'interesting urban setting', 'setting of religious significance', 'places of fairs and festivals', 'place of luxury and other pleasurable recreations' (24%) almost all others expressed the traditional preference for any natural setting. The preference for certain popular tourist spots, like Puri (a combination of wild sea, religious place, urban amenities, marketing), Goa (sea-beach, nice natural setting, urban amenities etc.) etc. made some informant selecting the combination of few criteria as their present priority of the tour. The tours to the places, significant for the religious cause are more popular among the elder informants (19%).

Table 8

FACTORS CONSIDERED IN SELECTING THE DESTINATION

Preferred resources [traditional/recent/mixed]	Frequency/ percentage
• The combination of some of other factors [mixed]	69
• Lack of local political and /or natural disturbance in / near the destinations [recent]	10
• Suitable accommodation [mixed]	7
• Suitable local conducted tour in the destined place [mixed]	6
• Suitable marketing [mixed]	4
• Suitable conveyance [mixed]	3
• Suitable quality of drinking local water [traditional]	1
• Suitable food [traditional]	0
• Suitable chances for additional recreations [recent]	0
Total	100

The combination of the factors of available convenience/satisfaction in a tour is most popular among the tourists (69%). The contemporary rise of political violence and/ or disturbance in certain popular tourist areas in India like Kashmir, Uttaranchal, parts of Jharkhand etc. has conspicuous impacts on the decision of the tourists, even to make its absence as an exclusive factor. 'Suitable conveyance', 'suitable food' and 'suitable quality of drinking local water' as individually exclusive factors do not appear very important determinant, but they are of course important in the combinations.

The availability of local conducted tour, conveyance and accommodation exclusively become important to those (16%), who prefer self-arranged tours.

Conclusion

With respect to the relationship between the authors and the field, the paper could be an auto-ethnography of personal narratives, but for the authors an authentic overview seemed to be a better initiation to a rich field, which has so far remained unattended by the anthropologists. In relation to the contemporary scenario of the criteria of becoming tourists the study attempts to explore the representation of culture of the traditional internal tourism in Bengali literature, films and media. The institutions of the producing literature, media coverage, films and their popularity function as the wider backdrop of impacts and motivations of the tours, which are principally seen as resource of enjoying 'otherness' and exotic. The early proliferation of creative and romantic representations of 'otherness' in literature and films on tour and travels is remarkable before the very recent expansion of advertising reductionism by state and other agencies of tourism, which is seen as an industry. The diversity of consensus-based criteria suggests the active roles and potentials of the traditions of the people in adapting to the changing scenario of tourism. Business-cum-industrial infrastructure is gaining popularity, though the traditionally preferred criteria seek adjustments with the commodity value of tour. The inter-subjective understanding of preferences developed by the backdrop does not function independent of the material considerations for the preferences of tours.

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Submitted: 07/12/2006

Accepted: 11/27/2007