



Slum Tourism as an Economic Activity, is it Ethical?: A Theoretical Review

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ABSTRACT

Slum tourism is a growth industry with more and more wealthy travellers opting to visit the poorest parts of the world. . The dictionary meaning of slum tourism is: "Poverty tourism or poorism, also known as township tourism or slumming, is a type of tourism, in which tourists travel to less-developed places to observe people living in poverty." According to slum tour operators, tourists use this as an opportunity to learn about real slum life. The concept of slum tourism began in poor sections of London in 1884, and spread to Manhattan at around the same time. Later, in 1992, a guided tour of a slum in Rio de Janeiro was initiated. Now, the concept has found popularity in Buenos Aires, New Delhi, Mumbai, Nairobi and Johannesburg. Slum tourism is promoted by travel companies as a means to reduce poverty and enable local people to participate more effectively in the process. It is also aimed at improving the local economy of a developing county. Slum tourism like any other form of tourism operated in an unorganized manner generates employment, income and thus contributes towards economic development of the economy. However, this activity is a delicate issue and requires a cautious and watchful implementation. The involvement of the Government and various NGO's may help to implement Slum tourism judiciously. In the process the commercial tour operators may be kept outside initially.

Introduction

Slum tourism is a growth industry with more and more wealthy travellers opting to visit the poorest parts of the world. What is it that is prompting slum tourism? Is it a new trend? What impact does slum tourism have on the people who opt for this kind of 'holiday'? Do they become better people as a result and does the experience prompt a call to action for social change? (ScienceDaily2010). With the success of Oscar award winning film Slum dog Millionaire, the slum Tourism is on the rise (Christine, 2009)

The definition of a slum or squatter settlement varies greatly from country to country, however they all have several things in common. Slums are considered to be a residential area in an urban geographic area that is inhabited by the extremely poor who have no tenured land of their own. These people end up squatting on vacant land, which is either private or public land. For the poor, urban areas have always provided a means of improving quality of life, as well as being in close proximity to better jobs and incomes. Deteriorating conditions for those who live a rural lifestyle and the promise of a better life have prompted millions of rural inhabitants to migrate to cities.

It's quite amazing to see the shanties amidst the skyscrapers. In India a new tourism venture is emerging, some call it 'Slum Tourism' while a section put it as a 'Poor-ism' for enthusiastic tourists. Whatever, the term may be used, tourists are showing keen interest in roaming through the fetid alleys of the fly infested slum areas to learn about the real India. The dictionary meaning of slum tourism is: "Poverty tourism or poorism, also known as township tourism or slumming, is a type of tourism, in which tourists travel to less-developed places to observe people living in poverty." According to slum tour operators, tourists use this as an opportunity to learn about real slum life.

A study by the University of Pennsylvania in 2010 - A Trip into the Controversy: A Study of Slum Tourism Travel Motivations - revealed that most tourists who visited slums said they wanted to see lives other than their own, and wanted to be far

away from city life as possible. Others felt it to be a matter of pride to have visited slums, entities that they had read about in novels or watched in movies.

It is estimated that more than 1 billion people around the world live in slums. By 2030, the world's slum populations could rise to 2 billion if no action is taken. The markets in their slums sell sour milk, tainted chicken, and spoiled meat. Most have never tasted fresh water and many suffer from starvation and the ravages of diseases, such as AIDS and malaria. According to Dr. Tibajuka of UNCHS (The United Nations Human Settlements Programme), slum-dwellers not only live in misery, but their plight often goes unnoticed as the traditional focus tends to be on the rural poor living in developing countries (Carrie, 2009)

Objectives and methodology

The above topic is an emerging economic and social issue. Not much has been researched on the topic. The present article will try to cover up the theoretical aspect of the topic vis a vis with the experience of India's largest slum- Dharavi and the world's famous tourist destination- Goa. Thus the study will provide a sufficient platform and the boost to take off the detailed and scientific research on the topic.

The article is based on the secondary and qualitative data mostly available on line. The data being qualitative and descriptive, no statistical tools are used. Thus the views expressed are subjective in nature and will differ from scholar to scholar.

Origin

The concept of slum tourism began in poor sections of London in 1884, and spread to Manhattan at around the same time. Later, in 1992, a guided tour of a slum in Rio de Janeiro was initiated. Now, the concept has found popularity in Buenos Aires, New Delhi, Mumbai, Nairobi and Johannesburg.

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local economy of a developing county.

The most popular venues of slum tourism are:

- The black townships in South Africa
- Slums in Mumbai, India
- Favelas in Rio
- Natives in Bolivia or villages in Cambodia
- Orangi Town, Pakistan

Slum Tourism: Mumbai experience

The Indian megacity of Mumbai has an estimated population of about 14 million. Of those, only about 35% live in 'regular' permanent housing. The other 65% live in informal settlements, which for more than a third of those people means squatting on sidewalks and under bridges. The rest -- nearly 6 million people -- occupy settlements on private and public open lands, some of which are more than 50 years old. Dharavi is one of the most famous, but unlike all others and despite its common depiction as a "slum", it is actually a successful work-cum-residential settlement. (Prakass M Apte.)

In India, slum tourism is popular in Mumbai's Dharavi, which is Asia's largest slum settlement. Dharavi covers 530 acres with a population of 1,000,000. Most of its residents are potters, plastic and metal recyclers, tailors, and washer men. The residents of Dharavi own goods worth \$500 million, indicating that the poor here are not lazy or helpless, but rather working hard to improve their living conditions. Most of the people in Dharavi are from Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujrat and Tamil Nadu.

Located in the heart of Mumbai, Dharavi has a population of more than 600,000 people residing in 100,000 makeshift homes, and one of the world's highest population densities at more than 12,000 persons per acre. It is just across from the Bandra- Kurla Complex -- a fast developing commercial center that has overtaken Nariman Point, the current downtown of Mumbai -- and is also located close to Mumbai's domestic and international airports. Despite its plastic and tin structures and lack of infrastructure, Dharavi is a unique, vibrant, and thriving 'cottage' industry complex, the only one of its kind in the world. This is in fact the kind of self-sufficient, self-sustaining 'village' community that Mahatma Gandhi -- the Father of the Nation -- dreamt of and wrote about in his books on India's path to development.

Dharavi pulsates with intense economic activity. Its population has achieved a unique informal "self-help" urban development over the years without any external aid. It is a humming economic engine. The residents, though bereft of housing amenities, have been able to lift themselves out of poverty by establishing thousands of successful businesses. A study by Center for Environmental Planning & Technology indicates that Dharavi currently has close to 5,000 industrial units, producing textiles, pottery and leather, and performing services like recycling, printing, and steel fabrication.

Dharavi tours are catching on. Many small time tour operators tie up with hotels and organize a bus drive for them through the narrow lanes of Dharavi or some time on foot. Tourists are picked up from their hotels in a private bus and taken to Dharavi. The tour costs vary from Rs 300 to Rs 600. Visitors are taken to residential areas, shown small-scale industries such as recycling, pottery, soap making, leather tanning, among others.

There are 10,000, small-scale industries operating in Dharavi, and USD 665 million, which is the annual turnover Dharavi's residents are estimated to generate (Santhosh Ramdoss, 2009)

Slum Tourism: Goan Experience

Goa is a small state on the West coast of India and is steeped in culture. Boasting beautiful beaches and idyllic scenery, Goa is a popular holiday destination for both tourists from overseas and Indians alike. Goa has a strong influence of Portu-

guese and this is still evident in the historical city of Margao. The Portuguese moved into India in the 16th century and the state remained theirs for 450 years before India reclaimed it.

With temperatures reaching highs of 35 degrees throughout sunny seasons and lows of 20 degrees during winter, Goa has a desirable climate. Monsoon season starts in early June and provides a much needed break from the blistering heat felt throughout the year. The beautiful beaches, Churches, Temples, and other places of tourist importance attracts Foreign as well as the domestic tourist in the state. Goa has rich land which is perfect for growing fruit, vegetables and rice. Coconuts, cashews and rice are India's main exports.

In contrast to the beauty and culture of Goa, are the slums. The slums are home to a population of the poorer members of society. With little income, Indians living in the slums have little or no access to education, healthcare and security. Daily hardships in slum life include finding food to feed a family, fighting infection caused by poor sanitation, alcoholism, abuse and fending off the alleged corrupt police officers. However, it has been seen that such type of slums are only dwelling places without any economic activities. The tourist who visits Goa are not very keen in visiting such places as their main interest coming down to Goa is to rest on serene beaches or else visit the places of tourist importance.

Is it a boon or bane?

One must note that, such type of tourist spots are becoming an organized but well developed economic zone along with the formally developed areas of the city. The tourists are made aware about their hardships, their living conditions and above all their self sufficient and well sustained lively hood. They own and manage many small scale business units which contribute to a large extent in the economic development of the country. Some generous slum tour operator contributes their share of profit for the upliftment of the displaced families especially the children. Indeed this is a good gesture from the side of tour operator. Even the visiting tourist also donates in cash or kind and sometimes adopts the families. The slum tourism also promotes the hidden export of the country.

However, there is other side of the story also. Tourists do spend money, but rarely on the communities do they visit. Most money is spent on airline tickets, resorts, restaurants, and hotels, and very little trickles down to impoverished communities. Such type of tours also hurt the sentiments of those who live in the slums. The concept of slum tourism is criticized as an attack on the privacy and dignity of the poor. It is not only considered an unethical way of raising funds and showcasing poverty, but also results in mental trauma for the slum dwellers, specially the women and children.

Conclusion

Slum tourism is a globalizing trend and a controversial form of tourism. Impoverished urban areas have always enticed the popular imagination, considered to be places of 'otherness', 'moral decay', 'deviant liberty' or 'authenticity'. The morally controversial practice of slum tourism has raised much attention and opinionated debates in the media for several years.

Eric Weiner in his article "Slumming It: Can Slum Tourism Be Done Right?" put forth four arguments for the promotion of sound and ethical Slum tourism such as touring only small groups, no photography allowed, money being funneled back to the slums, and respectful marketing. Thus as long as it is ethical, it should not have any problems.

No doubt, Slum tourism like any other form of tourism operated in an unorganized manner generates employment, income and thus contributes towards economic development of the economy. Keeping its advantageous nature in mind, the Government can develop a model code of conduct to organize it in a descent and morally desirable manner. Various NGO's, community leaders from the slums, local political leaders can be the partners in the promotion of such type of activities in-

stead of tour operators from organized sectors. This will serve various purposes such as: they know their own communities better than anyone else, they will be in a better position to narrate the situation, the place, the people and their living condi-

tions to the visiting tourists, income generated through such type of activities can be ploughed back for the development of their own area.

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