

Art and craft of a tour that could be

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India celebrated 'World Tourism Day' on September 27, 2007. International tourists were garlanded and welcomed at Agra. Tourism in India in the recent past is acquiring various hues - spiritual tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism etc. Yet another angle of tourism that India has perhaps not explored till date is "IP tourism" or tourism related to geographical indications, a form of intellectual property (IP).

IP tourism is nothing new to Europe. For instance, guided tours called Scotch whisky trails are conducted in Scotland tracing the history of Scotch whisky. In France, you can pay and visit the Champagne vineyards and cellars and wind up your visit with a session of Champagne tasting. And in Switzerland you could do a similar thing with cheese and chocolate factories and end your visit with a session called 'dégustation' where you can taste cheese / chocolate. Such tours are a major money spinner for the locals as they earn from supporting industries such as lodging, food, conveyance, souvenirs etc. to the tourists.

So why should India consider developing IP tourism? There is a commercial and legal answer to it.

Viewed from a commercial angle, India has numerous geographical indications for products ranging from tea and spices to handicrafts and textiles with nearly 30 registrations with the Indian geographical indications registry. While a geographical indication is region specific, current commercial practices bring the artisans and craftsmen to cities from where their crafts are exported by private players for huge profits to foreign markets where Indian crafts, arts and textiles are regarded exotic. Instead, if facilities for organized tourism are created around these industries in their respective regions, wherein tourists could be taken for paid visits by a trained guide to see the manufacture or making of these crafts and if a story is weaved around the history and background of the craft with an opportunity to purchase the craft, not only will money be pumped into the community, the craft will also become popular. Besides, the artisans get to earn by staying in the comfort of home zone where creativity would be presumably higher. As for tourists, it would be an opportunity to experience and learn about the highly diverse Indian culture.

From a legal angle, moving the art and the artisan out of their homes could ultimately be the death knell of a geographical indication. One of the essential aspects of a geographical indication is that the public associates the product with the region. When produced outside the geographical region, it loses this essential aspect and gradually passes into the public domain. Some of the most famous geographical indications (e.g.,

Champagne, Scotch whisky, Harris Tweed) have been protected by enacting legislation to prevent expansion of the production area and to confine production to such limited area. Hence, looked at from a legal angle, if migratory practices of artisans are prevented and production is confined to the region, the geographical indication would become stronger and the public would perceive the product to be better associated with the region.

In the case of agricultural products, it is much easier to limit the production area to the respective regions of origin, whereas for a handicraft/ textile product, the human element could be easily shifted out of the region. The temptations to move out are strong because as things stand today, better income lies in cities and not in villages. Hence, unless structures that would bring in economic benefits comparable to those derived from cities are created within the region, artisans cannot be blamed for migrating out of their respective regions. Besides developing the brand equity in the craft, it would also contribute to the overall economic development of the region from the inflow of tourists.

It is time for us to realize the economic potential of the many geographical indications India has and take creative steps to promote them as tools of economic development of not only the craft/ art, but also the region and its people. Registration is the first step, but mere registration is not enough. Sustainable mechanisms and structures strong enough to resist the temptation of migration would have to be created to ensure income flow into the region and the community for the reasons aforesaid. Tourism is one such mechanism which could enrich many of our villages that create special and unique crafts and if that is achieved, perhaps the world will see India as Gandhi saw it – in its villages. Vibrant with arts, crafts, life and economic self sufficiency.

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