

Tourism and Transition: An Understanding of Authenticity and Commodification of Culture in Context of Ladakh (India)

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Introduction

Brief Historical Background of the Development of Tourism in Ladakh

With the growing interest among the western tourists to visit Himalayan Mountain, Ladakh is also not an exception which is one of the most preserved Himalayan Buddhist culture. Also the mountain terrain of the Himalayas is just the right spot for adventurous activities ranging from mountaineering, to rafting to trekking to snow skating etc. Ladakh in the Himalaya provides innumerable such opportunities for adventurous tourists. Adventurous tourists, especially from Europe visit the region in the summer months. In fact, Ladakh is one of the most popular destinations in India for adventurous tourists. This is where tourism industry makes its mark prominently.

Ladakh lies in between Karakoram and Himalayan ranges have historical importance as a gateway for the trade with central Asia. The development of tourism in Ladakh can be attributed to following historical events. These are the Tibet uprising in 1951, such trade has virtually disappeared and Ladakh has assumed a strategic significance as a buffer area between India and China. The India-China war of 1962 which also resulted in a sizable military presence in the region. Due to the lack of inhabitants which had resulted in an important loss of territory in the war.

It was finally in 1974, that Government of India decided to open up different parts of Ladakh to rest of the world. Though Ladakh was never been an isolated place in the past. It was in between 1948 to 1974 that Ladakh kept geographically and politically isolated from rest of the world. Nevertheless, it has its own advantages of keeping military maneuvers along the Indo-Pakistan cease-fire line and the Chinese frontier secret, a motive still invoked today to justify the maintenance of strict military control over the North of the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh route and the road from Leh to East.

Government's principal incentive for this opening up the region was to promote a strategy of increase internal migration aimed at augmenting the civilian population in the area. The main vision of the central government is to keep young Ladakhis at home and also try to provide the spark for permanent migration from overpopulated regions in Ladakh. From Kashmiri point of view, those people who are professionally engaged in tourism perceived it as a great economic opportunity, as the people in Ladakh are quite unfamiliar with this profession. When the new 'virgin' Land of Ladakh was thrown open to international Tourism. Initially, Merchants from Kashmir seemed quite appealing, but they soon realized that the business was formed among the great entrepreneurial families in Srinagar.

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