

Folk Art, Craft and Traditions as a Cultural Bridge to Tourism in AP and Telangana

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Abstract:

Tourism has been emerging as an economic, productive sector around the world. Tourism means visiting a new place, a new country. Tourism is not just directly viewing a place's multiple aspects of historicity, structures, people's lifestyle, culture and arts but also garnering that place's knowledge.

Key Words:

Cultural tourism, Role of Folk Culture, Festival and Fairs, Development of Tourism

Introduction:

Tourism world over erases the distances between regions and countries and builds a cultural bridge. That is not all. It helps directly and indirectly in the growth of many industries in those countries and aids their economic development. Hospitality industries such as hotels, handloom textiles, handicrafts and transport are helped by this sector. Greater patronage of historical places, adventure, wildlife destinations and cultural and folk arts through tourism has opened up new avenues of employment and created more jobs.

Tourism brought many changes after the Second World War. There were greater exchanges between nations, more travel by tourists, more economic relations and business transactions. Due to the new industrial and technological policies, tourism branched out into Ecotourism, Medical Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Adventure Tourism and Rural Tourism. As there was greater attention towards the tourism sector, there is a new interest among tourists to learn about the culture, lifestyle and performance arts of a nation.

It is evident that Indian culture has a special recognition worldwide. Indian culture and lifestyle are different. There are many ancient structures and art forms that attract the tourists. The states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have been attracting even more tourists with their Telugu regional art forms and diverse cultures. The folk arts and folk cultures here have found themselves a special place on the cover story of tourism.

Telugu folk arts remind us of the bond between their ancient existence and nature. It is not just folk arts but tribal art forms and cultures also won special recognition. Though tribes are restricted only to certain geographical areas, a study of cultural tourism would be incomplete without knowing tribal arts and culture. Koya, Dhimsa, Gussadi Gond, Madhuri, Lambadi and other tribal dances, Sammakka Sarakka fair, Nagoba fair and other forms of worship of tribal deities are the symbols of ancient tribal culture.

Culture:

Culture is the comprehensive lifestyle of a human community. It is the passing on of people's behavior, values, customs, traditions through expression or imitation is culture. Noted researcher Geert Hofstede defined culture as

"the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another".

Folk Culture:

Folk culture is that which is followed and expressed as a community. Janapadam is a place where people live. Someone who lives there is a Jaanapada. The word Jaanapada is born out of the word Janapada (group) which is defined as 'Jaanena Sadyate Jaanapada ha!' People who live in hamlets and villages are Jaanapadas or folks. Any aspect or custom that is

accepted and followed and is expressed, that expression becomes folk culture. It could be caste, language, occupation or arts. Folk culture thus encompasses the lifestyle, traditions, customs, food habits, attire, dressing, crafts, occupations, agriculture, performing arts etc.

Many researchers who studied folk culture in the 18th and 19th centuries described it as an ancient culture. They brought to light the many conventions and art forms of folk people and gifted them to this generation.

The uniqueness of folk culture:

Folk culture is related to the performing arts and traditions of a people living in a particular state or region. Folk art forms comprise of folk dance, folk music, folk instruments, folk drama and story features. Similarly, folk culture has handicrafts, sculpture, building construction, tools, statues, fairs, festivals, events, worship of village deities, belief systems, folk medicine, cuisine, food etc.

These are the many aspects that mirror rural culture. The lifestyle that is born out of this culture has enthralled tourists from around the country and around the world and brought the folk arts an international recognition.

The role of folk culture in Cultural Tourism:

Rural arts have been playing a major role in regional, national and international tourist market. As tourism has become widespread, people are getting close to rural arts, enhancing their value. Fairs and festivals, special theme events and exhibitions have been contributing their mite to the development of the tourism sector. Anything, natural or manmade, attains importance when it is part of a folk culture. These rural arts become part of the larger culture and retail their uniqueness even as they bring demand to rural tourism. They help in bringing international recognition to their culture by imparting the folk knowledge. They have been attracting tourists by preserving their identity with little expense. This is how the folk culture, that is passed on from generation to generation, has been contributing to the development of the tourism sector. Arts entertain and enthrall and educate tourists about their traditions and rituals. Handicrafts, handlooms, sculpture, special cuisine are part of this

endeavour.

Since the 12th Century till date many foreign travelers have witnessed Telugu culture and arts and took the narrative of these arts to the world audience through their writings. Abdul Razak, who came as an ambassador of the Persian Emperor in 1443 CE, Niccolò Da Conti of Italy, Duarte Barbosa and Domingo Paes who visited the Telugu states and researcher Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf studied and wrote about Telugu folk culture were instrumental in bringing a global recognition to the Telugu folk culture.

Folk Culture Classification and Elucidation:

Folk researchers have defined the various explanatory aspects of folk culture as Folk Science. It is further classified into Oral folk science, Folk customs, Folk material culture and Folk performing arts. The various folk traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation have not only enriched the regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana but also have paved the way for strengthening and spreading the folk culture far and wide. The many folk traditions now in existence can actually traced back to more than 2500 years and have remained as a historic and cultural legacy for the Telugus. Kings and emperors belonging to dynasties such as Shatavahana, Ikshvaku, Vishnu Kandin, Chalukya, Chola, Kakatiya, Vijayanagara, Qutb Shahi and Asaf Jahi as well as rural people at each point in time contributed to the process of enriching the folk art.

Places of special tourist interest:

As Buddhism thrived from 500 BC to 500 AD, for about 1000 years, many Buddhist sites have found fame as tourist destinations. Amaravathi, Nagarjunakonda, Bhattiprolu, Chandavaram, Dhoolikatta, Jaggayyapeta, Pavurala Konda, Rama Teertham. Shankaram, Saalihundam, Totlakonda are among the most popular Buddhist destinations.

Telangana:

Warangal Thousand Pillar Temple, Bhadrakali temple, Ramappa temple, Alampur temple, Pakala lake, Sammakka Sarakka, Hyderabad village deities, Charminar, Golconda, Qutbshahi Tombs, Salarjung Museum, Medak Church, Tank Bund, Bhongir Fort and others are the well known places in Telangana.

Andhra Pradesh:

Tirupathi, Sri Kalahasti, Chandragiri Fort, Simhachalam, Appikonda, Borra Caves, Annavaram, Kanakadurga temple, Mangalagiri, Amaravathi, Undavalli and Rajapuram Caves, Kondapalli Fort, Kuchipudi, Bhattiprolu and others are among the most visited tourist places.

Festivals and Fairs:

Fairs, festivals and rituals are part of Telugu people's lives in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. They mirror the folk culture of these areas. Tourists find festivals such as Dasara, Ganesh Chaturthi, Ugadi, Srirama Navami, Deepaavali, Maha Shivaratri, Ramzan, Bakrid, Christmas, Aashadha rituals and the month- long Hyderabad Bonalu very fascinating. Sammakka Sarakka Jatra that takes places once every two years in Telangana is a wonderful tribal platform and is said to remind national and international tourists of the mighty Kumbh Mela.

The tribal festivals are showcases for the belief systems, traditions, rituals of rural people. Sankranti Festival in the Andhra region is a veritable feast for eyes as colourful Rangolis dot the courtyards and streets and also display the wonderful attire of Telugu women. Cockfights attract international tourists as much as they entertain domestic tourists. The many performances of folk arts on innumerable platforms in Hyderabad are also a great show for foreign tourists.

Handlooms and Handicrafts:

Handlooms and Handicrafts are among the most ancient of crafts. The textiles and artifacts have been alluring tourists for long. Telugu craftsmen and artisans have the kind of talent which made them weave a saree so ephemeral that it could fit into a matchbox. The folk traditions are so great that they endure the diversity of faiths and languages and cultures. Gadwal, Pochampalli, Narayanapeta, Venkatagiri, Dharmavaram and other handlooms have our great folk traditions in their every weave and weft. Pochampalli sarees are known to have been popular since as far back as the 18th century. The Pochampalli handlooms have even won Unesco recognition as rich heritage of our country. This recognition made our country occupy a pride of place in the world tourist map.

Kondapalli toys, Nirmal paintings, Hyderabad's pearls and bangles, Siddipet, Cherial Hebrew kalamkari wonders, Nimmala Kunta, Dichpalli, Madhavapatnam puppets, Gollapalli, Bobbili, Nuzvid music instruments, Pembarti, Perumallapalli, Dhavaleswaram handicrafts. Eluru, Warangal carpets, zaris and cottons, Lac artifacts, grass mats, Durgi, Allagadda sculptures – the range of crafts that cater to the tourists are innumerable.

Folk music and Instrumental music-based dances:

Folk music is an ancient art form. Music which found inception in the primeval times came flowing down eras through the folk channels. Music is an integral part of the life of rural people. Instrumental music is of three kinds. 1. String (wind) instruments. 2. Metal instruments. 3. Leather instruments. Villagers make these instruments on their own. Flute, Komma, Conch, Ekanatham.

Tanpura are the string/wind instruments. Talaalu (cymbals), Jeganta (bells), Tappetagullu, Chidatalu, Gajjelu (Ankle bells), Kinnera are the metal instruments. Dappu, Nagara, Maddela, Dhakkee, Dundubhi, Oggu Dolu are the percussion instruments made out of leather.

In performing arts, some instruments are used by a solo performer whereas some others are group instruments.

The Dappu dance, Oggu dance, Urumula dance, Chakka Bhajana, Kolata dance, Guravayyalu, Tappeta Gullu are among the prominent of the dance forms.

Dappu Dance:

Dappu is the oldest among the leather percussion instruments. In Telugu regions, it is those who belong to the Madiga caste who play the drum. Sixteen or more number of artiste in even numbers dance while playing the Dappu.

'Jagankas' is the rhythm in which the dance begins and then move around in circles, changing the tempo and

beat variously. The artistes also perform acrobatics such as movements with both feet, sit ups, jumps and climbing on each other's shoulders and these have always been features of attraction for foreign tourists especially.

Guravayyas:

The Guravayya dance is performed by those belonging to the Kuruma caste. They wear bearskin over their head, hold a Damaruk in their right hand and a flute in their left hand. They dance to songs on Lord Shiva.

Oggu dance:

The dance that is performed with the help of the Oggu instrument is called Oggu dance. Oggu is a drum, that is in a small, circular shape and is played by dancers who make a circular formation. As the Oggu drum makes a lot of noise, it easily attracts spectators. Oggu dance is performed by 10 or more artistes. An art form that belongs to Telangana, Oggu dance is performed by artistes from the Kuruma caste. They use the instrument to narrate popular stories of Mallanna and Beerappa. This dance form attained importance ever since the separate Telangana movement started. After the emergence of the new state, the dance form found a place on national and international platforms.

Kolatam:

The dancers hold small sticks called Kolas which have bells tied to them at one end and dance in a circle. This art form is called Kolatam. The dancers move away into pairs and hit the sticks with each other and dance to the opening rhythm of '*tayyaku taddimi tha*'. They dance around weaving grass together in interesting forms. The main weave is the Jada weave, where the dancers braid the grass together even as they are dancing. This art form has been referred to as Danda Nartanam and Danda Lasyam since old times and is now a must item in most tourist dance festivals.

Tappetagullu:

Tappetagullu is a dance mainly performed in the Srikakulam region. The artistes hold the rhythm instrument Tappetagullu against their chest and play it to a rhythm as they dance in circles. Their costumes are colourful and attractive. They wear red shorts that are lined with bells and ankle bells. Interesting movements and crisp steps make the dance form very mesmerising. Tappetagullu won accolades on international platforms.

Koyyabommalaata, Asadi dance, Kavadi dance, Puli veshalu (tiger costume), Keelu Gurrum, Maragaallu, Urumu dance, Chakka Bhajana, Buttabommalaata, Gangireddylata, Kaatipapalu, Burra Katha, Pagati Veshalu, Runja Vaayidyam, Patam Katha are the many other spectacular drama forms with folklore and they continue to enthral audiences from across the world.

Women's dances:

The various phases and facets of a woman's life are expressed through art in the folk traditions. Songs that are associated with agriculture such as harvest songs, sowing songs, weeding songs, the pounding and sieving songs and related to many occasions such as lullabies, weddings songs are myriad but only some of them are performed as a dance. Batukamma, Boddemma, Gobbi dance, women's Kolatam, women's Tappetagullu are some of the more prominent performing forms.

Batukamma:

There is a grand tradition of celebrating Batukkama in Telangana. The festival begins nine days before Dasara on Mahalaya Amavasya. It is a festival of women. It is a festival of flowers. Women arrange flowers in rainbow colours in

a circular design on a plate and worship it as a symbol of mother nature. Many kinds of colourful flowers such as Tangedu, Marigolds, Ponna, Chrysanthemum etc are collected and are arranged in a delicate and beautiful pattern. This arrangement, called the Batukamma, is made by every woman in the community and the whole collection is placed in the centre and women dance around it. It is indeed a pretty sight to behold.

Okkesi Puvvesi Chandamama....one flower I put on the Batukamma...Batukamma Batukamma Uyaallo.... the lilting song is sung by the women as they clap and cavort around the flower arrangement. Batukkamma is not just a women's festival, it is also a striking symbol of Telangana culture and attracts tourists. And it is not just in India but also at various venues in the US, Australia and European countries that expatriate Telanganaites celebrate with joy and verve. This shows how deep and wide the roots of folk culture spread.

Gobbi Dance:

Gobemma is a small lump made out of clay or cowdung. It is decorated with flowers and vermilion and is considered a holy symbol. On the Bhogi day, the day before Sankranti, a Gobemma is made and women perform the Gobbi Gauri Puja. Once again the Gobemmas, worshipped and decorated with flowers and vegetables and fruits, are placed in the centre and women dance around it. "Gobbillo...Gobbiyallo..." is the opening bar of the song, usually.

"Subbi Gobemma please give me pleasure Give me a lotus-like brother

Give me a chrysanthemum-like sister..."

and women dance around to this song. Gobbi dance is another performance that brings the fragrance of the Telugu folk culture to tourists with an avid interest in Indian culture.

Folk Dramas**Chindu Yakshaganam:**

Chindu Yakshaganam is one of the most authentic folk art forms, which is a spectacular combination of music, rhythm, costume and effects. It is based on Abhinaya, expression of emotions. Chindu means a

step. The artistes take rhythmic steps as they narrate the tales of Yellamma and Jambavanta. It is a musical drama format.

“Takataalelle lelelelo lelletalelle malelle lo”

is the opening line for the Chindu dance to begin.

Research shows that Chindu Yakshaganam is an ancient art form. Poet Palkuriki Somanatha (1160-1240 AD) in his epic poem Panditaradhya Charitra mentions Chindu along with native drama and dance forms and the details of music and costume. This shows that Chindu Yakshaganalu attained great fame as early as 12th century. There is historical evidence to indicate that Chindu Yakshaganam was performed in pilgrim centres, main streets of towns and cities and in various festivals and fairs. It went beyond the boundaries of the state and Chindu Yellamma, the most noted among the artistes, performed in Russia and garnered great fame.

Tolubommalaata (Puppet Show):

Puppet shows are said to have been in practice from the time civilisation has been evolving. It is an art that found patronage and has continued to thrive across centuries. The process of the show itself is very interesting to watch. A white cloth is tied across two sticks and a beam of light is transmitted on to the screen. And the puppets are manoeuvred behind the screen so that their coloured outlines are visible to the audience.

Stories from Ramayana, Mahabharat and Maha Bhagavatam are then narrated by the Yakshagana artistes. Music, dialogue and voices are added to the narrative. Kethigadu and Bangarakka are popular comic characters that are remembered forever in these shows. Puppet shows have attained popularity since 16th century. Puppet show travelled to Myanmar, Persia, Turkey, North Africa, France and many other countries and built a cultural tourism bridge with those countries.

Not only Puppet Shows but even puppet toys have been very popular with tourists across the world. The multitude of designs in puppets has become a piece of interest for interior designers and internationally, Indian puppets are found to be quirky and colourful additions to eclectic interiors. The puppets made by rural folk in cottage industries find a pride of place in international craft exhibitions.

Veedhi Bhagavatam or street theatre, Toorpu Bhagavatam, Chirutala Ramayanam are the other drama forms based on folk art traditions and folklore.

Village Deities:

Folk traditions find a spiritual avenue when people celebrate fairs and festivals, Melas and Pushakarams. Jatras often become centres of religious fervour and spiritual practice. Even as they are within the fold of this country's ethos, folk festivals veer away from the conventional forms of worship and find their own expression of religiosity through their traditions, rituals and customs. And, in the process, become a cause for awe among the international community which already looks at India with deep respect.

Sammakka Saralamma Jatara:

Sammakka Saralamma Jatra is held once in two years at Medaram in Warangal district of Telangana. It is a festival that celebrates the self-respect of Adivasis, the tribal people. It has set a record as the second largest fair ever in South Asia. Popularly known as the Telangana Kumbh Mela, Sammakka Saralamma Jatara attracts tribal people from Chattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, non-tribals and even foreigners from across the world. Devotees submit turmeric, kumkum, and jiggery that is called as gold by kilograms to the deities. The State Government had declared the Medaram Jatara as a State festival in 1996. Medaram has been declared a tourist destination by national and international tourist agencies.

Gangamma Jatara:

Gangamma Jatara is a massive event that is held in Tirupathi, Punganur and Palamaneru of Chittoor district of Rayalaseema region in Andhra Pradesh. This fair happens for seven days but those who follow the conservative Sishtha tradition do not participate in this festival. It is essentially a festival of the suppressed and the lower castes.

Village deity Gangamma is decorated, taken out in a procession with the deity carried on the head and then finally immersed in water. What makes the festival really colourful are the vibrant Ganga dances that accompany the procession. Devotees dress up in fancy attire and repay the deity for the gifts they received.

Nagoba Jatara:

Nagoba Jatara happens in Keshlapur of Adilabad district in Telangana. Every year it is held on the new moon day of Pushya month and is organized by the Gond tribe. The centerpiece of the festival is the worship of Nagoba (Sri Sheik) deity. Tribal people from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and other states converge here and demonstrate their own exclusive traditions and customs.

Hyderabad Bonalu:

It is a quaint and touching tradition to serve village deities with a feast. The Bonalu festival is essentially a time for feeding the deity with Bonalu (a distorted form of Bhojanaalu meaning meals). Every year, in the month of Ashadha, Bonalu is held for a whole month with pomp and fervor in Hyderabad and Secunderabad twin cities. The festival starts with the worship of Devi Jagadambika in the historical Golconda fort. The festival then moves to the Secunderabad Ujjaini Mahankali, then to the Lal Darwaza Simha Vahini Devi.

The Bonalu festival adds colour and a spirit of giving across the twin cities and people, irrespective of their faith, participate with joy in the festival. Elsewhere also, village deities of those respective areas such as Yellamma, Maisamma, Pochamma, Poleramma are worshipped in conventional methods are served with food, liquor, fruits and other sweets. The carrying of frescoes called as Ghataalu and the antics of Poturajus are a fascinating sight as much for those who witness them every year as they are for strangers. Bonalu festival is more than a hundred years old and attracts tourists every year and highlights the importance of folk culture integral to our tourism.

Kotappakonda Jatara:

This festival on the day of Maha Shivaratri at Kotappakonda in Guntur district happens as per the traditional Shishta sampradaya but, for all appearances, it is a mammoth affair such as the Kumbha Mela. The speciality of the Kotappakonda festival are the tall frescoes, called Prabhalu. It is a fierce competition between various groups on who displays the bigger Prabhalu.

Garagalu, Tappeta Gullu, Pagati Veshalu and street plays also take place on the occasion. Kotappakonda Jatara is a showcase of magnificent folk tradition of the region.

Folk Medicine:

India is one of the most famous centres for folk medicine along with Thailand and Singapore. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are home for a variety of herbs and medicinal plants with amazing medicinal properties. Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha medicine and other forms of traditional medicine has created huge avenues of Medical Tourism in these areas. With home remedies adding to the efficacy of the alternative systems of medicine, folk medicine has come to be an extremely efficient and popular system, attracting people from all over.

Srisailam, Chittoor, Adilabad and other places are treasure troves of medicinal herbs. Cuisine:

It may not be an exaggeration to say that Telugu cuisine is one of the most famous around the world and has become a popular menu for many a community in the country and outside. Traditional recipes are not just tasty but are also curiously designed to suit every palate using ingredients from the local areas. While Telugus are known to be food lovers, rural folk excel themselves in providing natural recipes to stimulate taste buds.

Moreover, there is an astounding range of cuisine, related to every possible occasion such as festivals and rites of passage in the family. Ariselu, Bobbatlu, Bhakshyaalu, Paramaannam, Garijalu, Sunni Undalu, Pootha Rekulu, Mango jelly, Chakkera Pongali, Sweet Boondi, Boondi laddu, milk Kova are some of the utterly delicious sweets of the Telugu lands. And then there are savouries and spices. Garelu, Jantikalalu, Chakkilalu, Telangana Sakinaalu, Murukulu, Boondi are some of the varieties that tickle the palate of even those who are not foodies. And pickles and powders such as Gongura, Mango and gram powders are the trademark of Telugu cuisine.

The non-vegetarian platter has no less. Chepala pulusu, Chepala Koora, Kodi Koora, Gongura Chicken, Pulasa Chepala Koora, Talakaya Koora, Boti, Pattarga Gosht, Mutton etc are the delicacies of the Andhra region while Hyderabad Biryani is a name familiar to people across the world. Telugu food finds a joyous and proud place in national and international food festivals too. There is no doubt that Telugu cuisine is one of the main reasons for the success of our tourism industry.

Conclusion:

The development of Cultural Tourism is leading to a revival of vanishing occupations and handicrafts. Rural people are able to hone their traditional skills, understand the business aspects of their occupation and are able to promote their products into international markets. Those artistes who have been dependent on their art and have been sustaining their traditional arts are able to find a national and global platform and are able to pave ways for their self-sustenance. The many skills, processes and techniques of art and craft of then rural people are being revived and handicrafts and textiles are getting exported outside the State and to other nations. If Cultural Tourism is strengthened, folk culture will be transmitted across communities and carried forward as a wonderful legacy for generations to come.

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