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**Tourism and Culture in Delhi: A Historical Perspective**

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**Abstract:**

Delhi is a favourite tourist destination and has been attracting many tourists from across the world for a long time for its historical and cultural significance. The paper “Tourism and Culture in Delhi: A Historical Perspective” concisely chalks the history of Delhi to understand how the city developed from the pre-Mughal era to its present state when tourists and immigrants flock to the city from all corners. The paper explores the cultural heritage of the city and critically manifests its historical development.

**Keywords:**

**Culture, Delhi, Heritage, History, Tourism, Umara.**

From time immemorial human beings all over the world love to explore different places. Over time this activity took an organised shape and came to be known as tourism. Tourism is to attract a wide range of foreign and domestic visitors. Many activities are done to make the stay of the visitors a little longer. Silberberg says, “Tourism is a tool of economic development that achieves economic growth through attracting visitors from outside a host community, who are motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle heritage offerings of a community.” (Silberberg, 1995) During the past few years, throughout the world, tourism has received greater attention. Cultural tourism includes various events like festivals, music, village and witnessing rural life etc. In India, its potentials remain almost neglected for quite long. In a way, tourism helps in creating awareness among the mass which requires local participation. For tourism purposes, India has long been projected as a cultural destination.

Many foreign tourists are attracted to India to view and familiarise themselves with its cultural heritage. Indian tourists also visit different areas of this country in search of diverse cultural

experiences. This process creates two-way interaction where both the guest and the host understand and interact culturally.

India is a land of an ancient civilisation. Here we find diverse races and cultures. During the last 5,000 years of civilisation on earth, we see the Indian culture is getting enriched by diverse influences and impacts. Delhi has remained the hub of various socio-cultural activities and historical happenings. Delhi has been a cultural destination as far as the world tourism scenario is concerned. Its history and related byproducts attract a significant number of people. Delhi offers many such things which are of the interest of tourists. The feel of its culture is one of them. This way, Delhi's culture has flourished into a rich plurality of cultural traditions.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., we come across a reliable tradition that speaks of the founding of Dhillika (Delhi) by Tomar Rajput Kings (Gazetteer of Rural Delhi, Delhi Administration, Delhi, 1987, v). With the downfall of the Tomars, Dhillika became the capital of Chahman or Chauhans in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Delhi was ruled by Qutub-ud-din Aibak. To commemorate his victory, he built a grand mosque and a victory tower here. Many temples in the vicinity provided raw-material for these constructions (Gazetteer of Rural Delhi, Delhi Administration, Delhi, 1987.vi).

Muhammed bin Tughlak shifted the capital to Devagiri but had to return to Delhi. After the downfall of the Delhi Sultanat, Humayun restored Delhi's glory by setting the Capital at Din-i-Panah, which is now known as the Purana Qila or the Old Fort. Delhi could not retain its essential place during Akbar's reign (Gazetteer of Rural Delhi, Delhi Administration, Delhi, 1987.vi). However, during Shahjahan's rule, Delhi regained its celebrated place. The sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1739 brought untold misery to the people of Delhi.

In 1803 British forces defeated the Marathas. This was the beginning of British domination in Delhi. The British ruled India from Calcutta till 1911. In the year 1912, Delhi became the capital of India once again. Transfer of capital had mixed impacts on Delhi. It brought employment opportunities and the market for its products. This also initiated a process of cultural influences. S. Moinul Haq, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Indian Chronicler, thought Delhi was extensively known for its remarkable aadimyat (humanity) and its polished urbanity (Haq, 5). Delhi's culture was mainly confined within its walls. "The culture of the time was obstinately, narrow-mindedly urban, seeking protection within the city walls against a surrounding barbarism. The desire to be closer to the natural world did not take a man outside the city because it was believed that nature fulfilled itself in the gardens... and the breezes' of the city (Gupta, 5).

Bernier, who visited Delhi soon after it was rebuilt in 1638, was surprised by the extent to which the economic and social and political life revolved around the emperor, the court and the *umara* (noblemen). There were numerous *karkhanas* for craftsmen under the patronage of the aristocracy. Mir Taqi Mir, one of Delhi's great poets, thought, "The city was aesthetically pleasing. The streets of Delhi are not mere streets. They are like an album of a painter" (Sadiq, 100).

Delhi was a city where there was a camaraderie between the Hindus and the Muslims. They together organised festivals like *Basant Panchami* and the *Phoolwalon ki sair* and organised *mushairas*. The spirit of the age has been described as having been "characterised by three addictions: mysticism in Islam, to a frenetic gaiety, and the salons of the courtesans, all explained as being a form of escape from the political insecurity of that time" (Gupta, 3)

After the revolt of 1857, Delhi witnessed a considerable increase in the population in the western suburbs, which was much more significant than within the walls. After 1858, Delhi gradually started resuming its old appearance. The civil authority took control, and trading activities started again. In the 1860s, many of the fairs and melas were revived, and the town went happy for the *Pankho ka Mela* and the *Phulwalon ki Sair*. This had become a proverb for ostentation abroad and abstinence at home, '*munhchikna aur pet khali* (shining face but empty stomach). Delhi of this time was but a shadow of its former glory. Whatever had provided it with a special place and dignity among the cities of India had gone. Its linkages with its imperial past were violently turned away, leaving Delhi only an empty shell of monuments and ruins. Many high-class families migrated to Hyderabad. Many others who were interested in the possibility of learning from the Western civilisation gone into silence. "The pageantry of Delhi was gone, and there was left only the musings of old men. For a generation, Delhi was a city in spirit desolate without energy and without hope" (Spear, 50). The British had crushed the Delhites hard.

The recovery of Delhi was visible in the growth of trade and the revival of its handicrafts. A Guide Book in 1866 recommended to European tourists some jewellers and a shawl merchant along with two Muslim painters of miniatures (Gupta, 41). Noted poet Mirza Ghalib observed in 1858 that "the British allowed some artists to settle in Delhi. They started buying their products cheaply (Gupta, 41). The craft that gave a livelihood to a larger number of people than formerly was the manufacture of *ghota*, gold and silver thread, and *kinari* and *salmasitara*. Small entrepreneurs and big merchants made money from Tarkashi workshops (Gupta, 41). J Matheson, however, commented, "Chandni Chowk, the regent street of North-West India (the) array of tinsel and ornaments far outshone and outnumbered the products of sober usefulness" (Matheson, 41).

There was a steady increase in the number of people engaged in crafts. It was sometimes felt that increase in manufacturing was at the expense of quality. Another noticeable fact was that the tendency of leading castes was more towards trade than towards craftsmanship.

Ghalib wrote in 1869 that in Delhi, only the *Sahukars* were the rich people. Many of them were Hindus, but some Muslims trade in cloth and oil and also many Europeans were engaged in wholesale trade. But Delhi continued to assimilate and adapt to various cultural trends. Such is the case with the language too. With the advent of many streams, Delhi was once again having a booming business. Chandni Chawk did not symbolise prosperity, but it also represented the cosmopolitan spirit. It was a synonym for continuity.

The political decision of 1911 to again shift the capital to Delhi led to a significant morphological change. The need to link the temporary capital with the new Imperial capital to the road from Sabzi Mandi through Sadar Bazaar to Pnachkuin became very important. These developments brought the Jat and other rural communities closer to the city and its influence. There was an influx of many Punjabis who transform world cities into residential areas. They competed to fulfil their political and religious attitude.

The Arya-Sanatan rivalry, a conflict between generations and provincial groups, was less linked with political issues than Muslim factionalism. The loyalist and nationalist Hindus were not as clearly distinguished from each other as loyalists and nationalist Muslims. Though the communities were, by no means, becoming polarised into monolithic groups, the sense of community in the city was becoming eroded as a result of its expansion and the ending of its isolation from the rest of the country (Gupta, 153).

Thus, Delhi's isolation was coming to an end politically and ethnically (with the increasing number of Punjabis and Bengalis migrating to the city). From this time onwards, Delhi started increasingly belonging to India even though many Delhites considered themselves a different breed.

In the 1920s, the British built their capital. It had striking features. It relates the great monuments of the early times like the Old Fort and the Jama Masjid to the British capital city. There were expansive vistas that connected the prominent landmarks of the old and the new city of Delhi. The Kingsway connected the Viceroy House to the Purana Qila (Old Fort), which passed through the Imperial Arc (the India Gate). Many private mansions were added to the city's spirit was somehow not present in the stereotype of the authorities. In a way, the British tried to blend the details of Indian craftsmanship harmoniously into their architecture. In this growing city, there

sprang up a remarkably diverse society. The main proportion of it consisted of officials, but other elements were proving their presence felt. Indian and English officials amalgamate in friendly interaction, and this element presented a picture of cosmopolitan touch. "Their meetings at glitter and bustle to the scene and insecurity to the roads ...Men from all parts of India and of all communities" (Spear, 53).

India became independent in 1947 but had to witness partition on religious grounds. This forced many people to migrate to Delhi, and many left the city as well. Mainly the Punjabi refugees took shelter in Delhi. They played an important role in the transformation of Delhi after the independence. They were displaced from Pakistan and made Delhi their new home. They generated new life to make Delhi more energetic and more spirited. At the same time, despite the outward migration, many people from the Muslim community remained in Delhi.

Many people who belong to various regions and cultures started coming to Delhi in large numbers during the post-independence period. The presence of such a mixture of cultural diversities led to the cultural enrichment of Delhi. Coupled with its historical monuments and ruins, this prepares a tempting recipe to attract many tourists from India and abroad. As time passes, the forces of cultural richness are not only stabilising but getting stronger and stronger day by day.

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