

Steering the Tourist Gaze: Travel Brochures as Cultural Mediators between France and India

Deepanwita Srivastava

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi



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Résumé : Dans la plupart des cas de la recherche interculturelle, la création de l'espace pour les dialogues est intimement liée à ses représentations visuelles et linguistiques. Paradoxalement, au cours de la rencontre et de la négociation entre les groupes et les cultures, ces deux facteurs sont souvent perçus comme sources principales des malentendus et de la création des stéréotypes.

Dans le contexte du tourisme international, les brochures de voyages ont exercé une forte influence sur la création de l'image de la destination pour les touristes étrangers. Nous témoignons un mélange intéressant émanant des « Images de la Destination » et la « Langue du Visiteur » et les brochures se transforment en « guides silencieux » qui aident le voyageur à savourer « la culture de l'autre ». D'ici s'épanouit un récit séduisant, mais qui garde à la fois sa place comme médiateur très puissant entre les deux cultures.

A la suite de la campagne « Incredible India », lancée par le gouvernement indien, mon article présente une étude critique de quelques brochures touristiques sur l'Inde, rédigées en français et visées aux touristes français contemporains. A travers une étude critique de la présentation visuelle et de l'usage de la langue, cette contribution essaie d'en dégager le jeu des signes et des messages latents et de réfléchir sur la complexité de la représentation des identités dans une époque de la globalisation et de l'économie de marché.

Mots-clés : touriste, traduction, images, dialogue, représentation, économie de marché

Summary: In most cases of cross-cultural research, a crucial factor in creating space for dialogues is linked to visual and linguistic representations. Paradoxically, these have also remained core sources of misinterpretations and cultural stereotyping between two groups/ cultures at various stages of encounter and negotiation.

In international tourism, travel brochures have since the beginning wielded considerable influence in creating a "destination image" of the host country for the tourist/ consumer. This makes them, in a way, "silent guides", helping the outsider to sink into the culture of "the other". An intriguing combination emerges, with "Visuals of the Destination" and "Language of the Visitor" creating a narrative that entices, operating ultimately as a powerful mediator between two cultures.

In the wake of the immensely successful "Incredible India" campaign, my article studies some select tourist brochures prepared in French, aimed at showcasing India as a destination for contemporary

French tourists. I have analysed two aspects of these brochures and studied how, in the process, they have tried manipulating and steering the “tourist gaze” through visuals as well as language use and translation. It is, in a way, an effort to reflect upon the complexity of the representation of identities in an era of globalisation and market economy.

Keywords: tourist, translation, images, dialogue, representation, market-economy

In most cases of cross-cultural research, a crucial factor in creating space for dialogues comes through in its cultural and linguistic representations. Paradoxically, this has also been a core source of communication gaps or misinterpretations between two groups/cultures at various stages of encounter, exchange and negotiation.

In international tourism, travel brochures have since the beginning wielded considerable influence in creating a “destination image” of the host country. Despite the arrival of the Internet, they continue to do the same and are still considered one of the most widely used and convenient sources of information to the average tourist around the world.

As part of marketing strategies, visuals and the language of texts fulfill the responsibility of bridging distances and forging dialogues. This makes tourist brochures “silent guides”, or “chaperones”, letting the outsider sink into the world of “the other”. Images steer the “gaze” and language becomes the tool to entice, transforming itself into a powerful cultural mediator between the host and guest cultures.

In the wake of the immensely successful “Incredible India” campaign, launched by the Indian government at the beginning of the present century, this paper studies some select French-language brochures that have attempted to showcase India as a destination to the contemporary French tourist.

A number of inferences have been drawn from a field study carried out between 2007 and 2009 in both India and France,¹ involving nearly 200 respondents and covering “Potential/ Prospective”, “First-Time” and “Repeat” French tourists to India.

The first part of the present paper studies the images and visual representations in the brochures and the dialogue process thereby generated; in the next, we take a look at the language factor and the impact of text in shaping the tourist mind and the interrelations between the two cultures.

In the process, the paper also attempts to assess the degree of transformation of the New Age French tourist to India into a traveller in his own rights.

The conceptual framework is heavily inspired by the theory of “Tourist Gaze”² propounded by John Urry, who first discussed the phenomenon of “commodification of places” and destinations being transformed into “objects of consumption”.³

Given the fact that France has more often been the “Object of Gaze” for people across the globe, studying the same country as a tourist generator and as the “Gazer” seems challenging and a kind of “reversal of discourse”. At the same time, it is well justified,

given the booming French visitor statistics during the past decade. For France, India as a destination has climbed up the rankings quietly and steadily, the former having hovered among the top five tourist-generating markets for the country.⁴

At this juncture, it becomes important to discuss what pertinence the present subject has within this forum, which is essentially centred on “English-speaking and French-speaking spaces”.

Is India part of either of these worlds?

From the perspective of linguistic heritage and the regional abundance of vernaculars (spanning nearly 28 recognised languages and over 1500 dialects), it is certainly difficult to make such an assertion. However, one can hardly ignore the colonial legacy and impact of the English language here. As an official language of the country, along with Hindi, English is increasingly being used in India in the larger spaces around organised sectors for major communication purposes. Post globalisation, industries such as tourism, especially, have thrived, with English as the lingua-franca for both inter- and intra-sectoral management, where translated versions of most promotional literature for international tourists play a decisive role. In promoting the desired image of 21st-century India, these often become strategic tools of cultural exchange.

For countries with a colonial past, certain impressions that are the product of cultural stereotyping get perpetuated. Images arrested in a certain time-frame continue to be replicated and reinforced through promotional literature, becoming recurring themes in the language of the brochure. For India, too, most of the images used to date are by-products of an earlier “Colonial (British) Gaze”.

Against the background of these factors, and in terms of the present context, we interpret and perceive India as part of the “English-speaking Space”.

Early French representations of India

It would be interesting to take a brief look at early representations of India in French travel narratives and the impressions of some important French travellers to the country.

Long before tourism acquired its present-day dimensions, when the “tourist” was still a “traveller”, India was an object of intense interest, a “terra incognita” inspiring boundless awe and curiosity across borders. French travel accounts of Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries unleashed a period of extraordinary demand in France for information on what was perceived as “L’Orient Mystérieux”.

Elaborate volumes of travel memoirs, journal entries, postcards and letters, and a massive repository of information on cross-cultural encounters was accumulated, paving the way for a more sensitive interpretation of cultural diversity. In a different episode of history, the French were unsuccessful in protecting their interests in India and were ultimately confined to Pondicherry and Chandernagar. Yet, this ushered in from the 17th century an era of Indo-French interaction that has to date passed through several phases of collaborations.

Aside from the famous accounts of India found in the works of Jules Verne, perhaps the most popular French travelogue of the 17th century was that of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier,⁵ whose reflections on India had been reprinted twenty-one times by the mid-18th century. *“India as seen through Tavernier’s eyes, revealed to Europeans a diverse continent - one that was politically, religiously, and socially varied”* (Dirks, 2002). Similar works by Bernier⁶ and Pyrard de Laval⁷ were in ways precursors to later travel writings, laying the foundations for future research in French Indology.

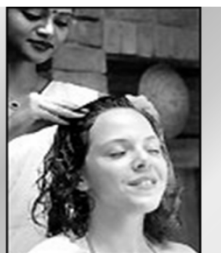
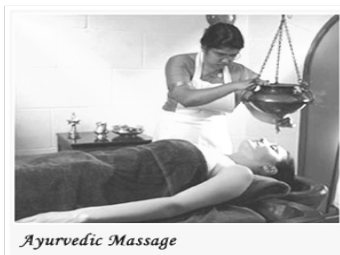
Despite the nature of tourism having undergone a revolutionary change in the 21st century, it would not be entirely wrong to see such travel narratives as “intellectual ancestors” of present-day promotional literature and “FAM tours”.⁸

Visual Representations

In destination promotion literature, social facts are often designed as “exterior” to spaces of the guest or host culture. This third space, the “interstitial reality”, assumes the power to ultimately “steer” and “shape” the destination image. In its own way, this influences the attitudes and pre-purchase decisions of tourists whose “collective gaze” leads to establishing a symbolic cadre where he/ she gazes at places, people, lifestyles, artifacts and the proverbial “sun, sand and sea” (Saraniemi, 2011: 133-43). This “gaze” is ultimately structured around *“culturally specific notions of what is extraordinary and therefore worth viewing”* (Urry, 1990).

Regarding the brochures selected for study, most of them show varied images with abundant usage of colours in each visual. The blues of the rivers and seas in Goa or Kerala, or the clear skies forming the perfect backdrop to the forts, the bright reds showcasing the “Thayyam” dance forms of Kerala, or the multiple hues of the famed Kathakali mask - the fundamental idea encrypted in the visual mosaic of the brochures seems to reaffirm a latent notion of “Unity in Diversity”, whether it be through different colours, different scenic products or different themes.

A large number of brochures on Kerala (the southern state that has consistently attracted one of the highest percentages of French inbound tourists to India since 2006) have pictures based on the wellness techniques/ Ayurvedic treatments offered. The images show the tourist/s lying down or sitting in a relaxed mood, eyes shut, with an overall expression of smiling contentment. The attentiveness and warmth of those providing the services are clearly visible on the face of the masseur/ masseuse shown, who is completely involved in imparting the traditional therapies.



Figures 1 and 2: “Quand la vie devient fatigante, pensez au Kerala: Une Cure de Médecine Ayurvédique au Kerala”, Kerala Tourism, www.keratatourism.com.

It is in fact a stark reversal of roles, where the tourist (normally the one who “gazes” with eyes open) swaps places with the host, temporarily shutting out the visual perception of the destination, and replacing it with deeper sensations of relaxation of body and mind. In nearly all the pictures on this theme, it is, paradoxically, the “gaze” of the service provider/ therapist/ masseur/ masseuse that comes to symbolise the impeccability of hospitality on offer.

In some brochures, there is a strong presence of young children in traditional attire, adding an implicit credibility to messages conveyed. However, this seemingly harmless portrayal of children led to an interesting situation that I would like to present here.

While talking to some French tourists in India, and in France too, I repeatedly faced a rather strange question. This was related to child marriages in Rajasthan and the associated customs of “Sati”.⁹ The question was seemingly prompted by images in travel brochures of little girls and boys dressed in wedding finery posing as “bride and groom”, with the little boy even mounting a horse and getting ready for the wedding ceremony.

We found that in some Rajasthan-related brochures, there were indeed pictures of little children in similar poses. These were included at random to add to the visual glitz and provoke interest in the wedding customs of the state; as well as, ultimately, to attempt to market the destination for wedding tourism. The result was something that did achieve the intended goal of arousing interest in the destination, but for reasons that were completely unintended, as well as, to an extent, unforeseen.

The French tourists talked about their experience of seeing small palm-prints on the walls of Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The explanation offered by the guide there had insinuated that Sati involved child brides too and that the custom still existed.

In the truest sense, this was history coming alive through texts and visuals, but in a discourse that convoluted truth to the worst degree and sowed seeds of bitter destination impressions. What astounded me was the impact these images seemed to have on the French tourists (considered as widely read and well informed about the destinations), for whom pages from History seemed to provide the proverbial Truth, whereas contemporary reality hardly bore any resemblance!

In fact, believing the fictitious version seemed to them a step closer to “a clandestine peep into the real thing”, and, perhaps, a guarantee of “value for money” in terms of the investment incurred in the “consumption of experience”.

Culture was thus reduced to a pawn and assessed on exchange value.

Urry remarks, “*places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is anticipation [...] of intense pleasures [...] Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze*” (1990: 3).

If not handled sensitively, this commoditisation of cultural representations could seriously impact the tourism industry, the people and heritage exploited for profit motive.

A near-opposite case is demonstrated in yet another brochure, “Visages de l’Inde”,¹⁰ from travel giant Terre Entière.

The theme of their India tour, aptly entitled “Visages de l’Inde”, is printed in bold letters on the cover, with the main title announcing the whole project as being in partnership with the Musée Guimet (a specialist in Asian art and culture studies). The front cover also states that two French scholars, Amina Okada, an expert on Indian history and culture, and Max-Jean Zins, specialising in contemporary Indian society and politics, are to accompany the tour group. The back flap of the brochure shows pictures of the two scholars, with a short introduction on each.

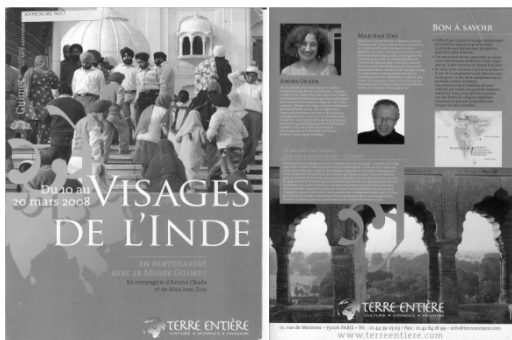


Figure 3: Front cover and back flap of “Visages de l’Inde”

An interesting feature is the simultaneous discourses/ talks on relevant aspects of India to be given every 1-2 days by the accompanying scholars. Since the whole trip is shown to be in collaboration with the Musée Guimet, participants are assumed to be from a common intellectual profile, one that would appreciate these lectures as “add-ons” to their India tour.

To a certain extent, the brochure seems to be “subletting” the task of “steering the tourist gaze” to these two scholars, introduced in the brochure as “experts” in the field.

This appears to be a concerted effort to present a well-documented interpretation of the destination India, its peoples and its culture. At the same time, however, it could well be bordering on the verge of what we might perceive as “robbing the tourist of the autonomy of interpretation”. The destination changes its status from “an object to be consumed” to that of “an object to be lectured on”. Clearly, a mutual dialogue which could have ensued between the tourist and the host has been replaced by the “experts’” voice.

An encounter with a group of tourists from Corsica (mainly from the 60+ age-group) brought forth another crucial aspect in understanding the French tourists’ perception of India. They were all repeat visitors and mentioned that tourist brochures for India needed to be “audio-visual”, since ordinary print did no justice to the “Real India” they had encountered!

Visuals were usurped by the smells, sounds and tactile versions of interactions, which evoked something far surpassing expression through images and text in the brochures.

This second level of transition in their perception of “The India Experience” was linked to an inner awakening, “l’éveil de l’âme”, a kind of “spiritual catharsis”. More often than not, it displayed a deeply felt calm and peace, where respondents spoke with eyes closed. In such situations, it was, ironically, a “shutting down of the gaze” that established a dialogue, one clearly bereft of any visual manipulation. A number of basic themes, such as “spirituality”, “rituals”, “nature” and the unmissable spirit of

“collective conscience”¹¹ are reinforced by images of devotees praying en masse in a temple or a mosque, in a church or on the ghats of the Ganges or of traditional puja under a tree. The aura of the superpower up there, and the implicit catharsis through this belief, seems utterly novel to the “ever-reasoning, rationalist” French and the numerous “non-croyants” who visit this land of religious multiplicity.

In our own research, also, there were variations in responses regarding the “image” of India - unfolding a certain progression in dialogue between the two cultures. Critical evaluation of responses from pre-visit, post-visit and repeat-visit French tourists shows versions ranging from the more conceptual and “reported” to those, mostly from the last category, based on “sensory perception”. The visual, aural and olfactory senses seem to have devoured an unprecedented experience and it is perhaps this headiness that has made the French tourists into “repeat visitors”.

An important question put to many tourists (both first-timers as well as repeat visitors) was “to define India in one word”. The most common responses are shown below:



Figure 4: From D. Srivastava, 2009

A salient point here is that the pre-visit set of images/ words is largely conceptual, and also visual to some extent, since “colours” have traditionally been part of anything Indian showcased and the Ganges has been a recurrent theme in many films, philosophies, or images that have found their way into coffee-table books across the world.

The post-/ repeat-visit expressions veer more towards a synchronic/ sensual expression, where images, smell and sound dominate afterthoughts. The simultaneous inclusion of “mobile phones” and “poverty” reflects images of contrasting but parallel lifestyles seamlessly morphed in the same visual frame.

We spoke at length to a group of businesswomen from Paris and Lyon. These were high-end customers staying in elite, five-star accommodations and frequently escorted by tour guides. The comments made by one of the women about the Indian situation once again reflect the trajectory of the French tourists’ gaze.

She remarked, “L’Inde m’a appris l’art de perception sélective ... je vois ce que je veux voir et parfois, les yeux fermés... ”.

The rampant misery of one particular section of the population as opposed to the dramatically opulent lifestyle of another, coinciding with the images in the brochures, seemed to have magnified the anomaly for the French tourists. Steeped in socialist tradition, these often caused them to take back impressions of a certain unfairness in the whole system. As Burke states, “a way of seeing is always a way of not seeing” (Burke, 1935).

A community-based step in creating dialogues

Brochures undoubtedly impact the tourist gaze strongly. However, there is an interesting initiative towards forging relations between France and India through tourism that deserves mention here.

Organized by the relatively unknown Jan Kala Sahitya Manch Sanstha (JKSMS) in Samode, Rajasthan, in association with the Caravane Théâtre Association of France, the Indo-French Clown Theatre Workshop involves French tourists dressed as clowns parading through the Indian village promoting alternative ways of communication (Clown-Community Interaction). During their week-long stay, they experience the life, culture and cuisine of a typical rural Indian village, generating a livelihood for service providers. The interactive spirit creates novel methods of expression, incorporating new channels of dialogue and even touching upon relevant social issues such as health, sanitation and hygiene.¹²



Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8: The Indo-French Clown Theatre Workshop

In tourist encounters, it is through face-to-face contact between two groups during the actual visit that the dynamics of mutual interrelations develop. Here, it was a kind of FAM tour, but with a difference in the sense that;

- a) The workshop participants began their contact with the local group with an entertainment package they brought along.
- b) They entertained as a moving band of performers, made up of French tourists/ artists, plus a certain number of local participants too. This imparted a “participatory” spirit to the whole tour.
- c) Often, the local population loses its voice amongst tour promoters and tourists, leading to ill-will between locals, tourists and service providers. But here, being part of the performances themselves, the locals established a one-to-one rapport with ease.
- d) Participation by the local host community indirectly made them conscious and proud of their own heritage, and helped them to appreciate the value of the art and architecture of their village. Through participation was created an ethos of “responsible promotion” of the circuit.
- e) French tourists, who were in limited numbers, moved around the entire village dressed as clowns and performed, thereby becoming “objects of the hosts’ gaze”.

This stopped it from being a “tourist gaze” only; rather, it became a “conscious mutual gaze”. In return for the entertainment they provided, the French tourists/ artists were offered free hospitality in the homes of locals, where they experienced rural life in India.

This was a reciprocal rapport, where interaction preceded tourism and not vice-versa. The resultant discourse was thus truly a case of a tripartite dialogue involving all players that:

- a) used promotional literature in English (posters and brochures),
- b) was performed by French as well as local actors/ clowns, and
- c) was enacted/ seen/ gazed upon by both - Hindi as well as local dialect speakers.

These “Live Brochures” followed a somewhat alternative but very successful and sustainable route to the promotion of tourism, in the process fostering interaction between both cultures without any apparent profit motive.

Language use

“Depuis les stations de montagne enneigées de l’Himalaya, aux plages dorées de la péninsule sud, L’Inde en toute saisons, vous offre la possibilité de diversifier vos vacances...”¹³

This part of our paper studies the veritable heart of cross-cultural communication challenges, posed by the destination’s representation in the **language of the host**, in the present case, it being French.

To understand the specific discourse adopted, we take up two basic aspects of language use:

- a) Most common phrases used to describe India, and
- b) Verbs used to communicate with the tourist.

Also crucial is tracking the extent of “translatability”, since often, to lend a spirit of “authenticity”, terms are allowed to remain in the source language/ culture. In the following section, we analyse these aspects from the selected brochures.

I. Phrases and terms used to describe India

MOST COMMON FRENCH TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE INDIA

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Un kaléidoscope des humeurs | • Précieux patrimoine |
| • Une myriade de couleurs | • Coloré et mystique |
| • Sacré et éternel | • Grande variété d’artisanat |
| • Fantaisie exotique | • Apparence mystique |
| • Culture millénaire | • Plages merveilleuses |
| • Le mystère et la beauté | • Passé culturel très riche |
| • Majestueuse splendeur | • Expérience inoubliable |
| • Immensité géographique | • Multiples visages |
| • Pays en pleine mutation | • Esprit de découverte |

Figure 9: Most common French terms used to describe India

As Figure 9 shows, the terms used create a visual poetry, drawing out images that seem as vivid as they do ephemeral - “mystique”, “immensité”, “splendeur”, “éternel”.

Their use evokes the power of the spirit against a magical vastness that makes India a “destination of destinations”. “Majestueuse”, “exotique”, “millénaire” and “sacré” denote a “higher than the world syndrome”, dramatically embossed against the Himalayas (majestueuse splendeur), art and architecture (grande variété d’artisanat, délicieusement sculpté), and (sacré et éternel) images of rituals on the famed Ghats of Varanasi (Srivastava, 2009).

The basic lexicon amplifies the notion of beauty transcending time and space; in the same breath, the “Mystic” and the “Unexplained” become major themes generating the requisite curiosity crucial to destination marketing.

“Un kaléidoscope des humeurs”, “Grande variété d’artisanat”, “Multiples visages”, “Une myriade de couleurs”: kaleidoscope/ variety/ multiple/ myriad - all are synonymous with and denote the huge choice before the tourist, a veritable smorgasbord of products that captures the composite character of the Indian culture. The term “un kaléidoscope des humeurs” is seen as aptly translating the concept of “navarasas”, intrinsic to the Indian way of expression.

Quite often, translation becomes a strategic issue between socio-cultural entities on the one hand and textual practices on the other. Thus, only when the language used is sensitive to the supra-cultural framework, as well as to the exigencies of text and discourse, can an honest translation of destination promotion be produced.

In the selected texts here, despite the main language being French, there are a certain number of terms and phrases that have been retained in the native language - Hindi, Sanskrit or other regional vernaculars. Examples include “*mehndi*”, “*dhakis*”, “*dum pukht*”, “*yoga/ ayurveda*”, “*yatras*”, “*moksh*” and “*nirvana*”, and many others related to Indian wellness techniques, cuisines or cultural practices. The presence of these terms in French-language brochures aimed at the French public could be seen to serve multiple purposes:

- a) By leaving a number of native terms as they are, an attempt to stick to the “authentic” is seen, whereby translation is treated as being almost synonymous with “artificial” and therefore “not the real Indian”.
- b) The “apparent untranslatability” of the native terms into French shows subtle shades of pride in a cultural uniqueness, which supposedly finds an equivalent in no other language but its own.
- c) The presence of some of the terms in their native form leaves “une marge de manœuvre/ découverte” for the tourist, who feels motivated to discover and experience that “unique concept”, which comes packaged in an exotic sounding word too!

II. Verbs used

The usage of verbs in tourist brochures is one of the prime indicators of the attitude of the host culture and the kind of hospitality to be expected. In most of the brochures selected, the “imperative voice” is dominant, where the host:

tells / commands / offers options / suggests / persuades / tempts/ motivates / encourages / beckons.

The tourist is exhorted:

“Venez” / “voyez” / “découvrez” / “apercevez” / “sentez” / “soulagez” / stimulez” / “touchez” / “entendez” / “purifiez” / “suivez” / “retracez” / cherchez

all that India has on offer.

The choice and range of verbs are indicative of an implicit “uplifting of the soul” that the host gently coaxes the tourist into. Most of the verbs emit a similar ethos to that conveyed by the visual content of the brochures.

Building on its tradition of spiritualism, India has modelled a large part of its promotional strategies around this theme; whether ashram stays, yoga and meditation, or even the Buddhist circuit - *“Sur les pas de Bouddha”*.¹⁴

In fact, getting the potential French tourist in a particular frame of mind, that too through the medium of tourist brochures, is, paradoxically, a roundabout strategy of hard-core marketing of an idea (spiritualism) that is essentially antithetical to the consumerist culture!

In his discussions on the language of tourism, Dann describes it as a discourse that *“places its participants - both host and guests within a familiar set of words and symbols creating larger meanings”* (Dann, 1996). The gap between the enacted image and the actual “other” encountered during the travel experience ultimately generates the “core memory of the place”.

Next, we present two particular brochures that deserve mention for their unique approach to forging rapport with French tourists.

i) “L’Inde à cœur ouvert” - Chal India, Poonam Chawla, Paris¹⁵

This brochure demonstrates a unique style of India promotion - the only one to offer guide services *in France for India*. The guide is a lady who identifies herself as Poonam Chawla, an ex-professional guide for the Ministry of Tourism, India. The front cover of the brochure has her picture - smiling, with arms spread out in a welcoming gesture. On the lower left side read the words, “l’Inde à cœur ouvert”.

The brochure offers four categories of services:

1. Guided visits to the Indian quarters in Paris, around the Gare du Nord
2. Guide services in India, with the holiday duration and region specified by the client
3. Cookery courses in Paris, specialising in Indian cuisine
4. Visits to India and to the temples of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma during special festivals.

The attempt is probably to “create a little India inside France” - an osmosis of cultural spaces within a larger whole.

During our visit to Paris, we noticed that the area around the Gare du Nord had numerous shops and restaurants run by Indians (mostly immigrants from Pondicherry - an ex-French colony in the south of India). By offering a guided tour of these areas, it seemed like a

“FAM tour” with a difference - one that was within the guest country but guided by a native Indian!

The concept is intelligent and aims to inculcate interest in visiting India at a later time. Taking place in the home country of the client, it is certainly less time-consuming, lighter on the budget, and gives a hands-on feeling of being in India without physically having set foot there.

On the back flap of the brochure are pictures of two books of poems (in English and in French),¹⁶ written by Poonam Chawla. “[...] *en vous plongeant dans les deux recueil de poèmes dans lesquels, tantôt en anglais, tantôt en français, l’auteur nous livre, avec une émotion rare et particulière, ses sentiments sur les coutumes de la vie et de l’âme indienne...*”

Knowing the average French person, it is obvious that inclusion of these details undoubtedly raises the credibility of her narrations and her views on India.

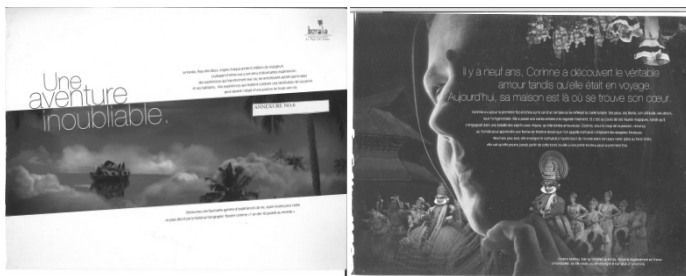
Equally interesting is the line of discourse she adopts in the brochure. It is a one-to-one dialogue, in the first person, with structures like “venez avec moi”, “traversez avec moi”, “richesses de mon pays”. Such dialogue-like discourse creates a dual level of acceptance for the guide - as an Indian first, and then as someone who knows France and French well enough to write poetry in it.

ii) “Une aventure inoubliable” - Kerala Tourism¹⁷

Another brochure from Kerala Tourism merits mention for adopting an innovative line of dialogue and destination marketing. The title, “Une Aventure Inoubliable”, announces directly the spirit of the trip, the two words “aventure” and “inoubliable” replacing what in most cases would typically be the name of the destination.

Inside the brochure, each page presents the story of earlier tourists and their experiences/ impressions of Kerala. For example, “*L’histoire de John Foreman and Nicola Pudding*” - a little story about their wedding in typical Indian tradition among the chanting of mantras and other related rituals. Also included is the special honeymoon cruise on a Kerala boat.

Subsequent pages have “*L’Histoire de Serefa Malamati*”, showing her recovery from joint and muscular pains after the massage therapies she followed at Kerala; or “*L’Histoire de Corinne Mathou*”, who became a student and then a teacher of “Kathakali”. In similar fashion, three or four more equally personal experiences have been sequenced in the brochure, making it into a “story of stories”.



Figures 10 and 11: “Une aventure inoubliable”, Kerala Tourism

What is admirable here is the apparent absence of the host's voice from the entire discourse. It is through the voices of earlier travellers (not necessarily French) that the credibility of the destination is conveyed to the potential/ prospective tourist.

Uniquely subtle in style and displaying an understated spirit of focussed promotion, this brochure stands out among the many others we have looked at in our analysis.

To conclude

Discussing dialogues within tourist encounters between societies of the West and the East (especially within Asian societies criss-crossed by unique sets of traditions and customs), it is crucial to remember that all manifest reality derives a certain legitimacy from deeper-rooted social structures and institutions.

Thus, instead of simply reading the extrinsic messages heaped one upon the other in different promotional texts, a greater emphasis should perhaps be placed on potential intrinsic messages.

Very often marketing professionals have claimed to uphold the free will of the consumer to exercise options. They claim to represent existing realities, and regard consumers as having the liberty to accept or reject those messages depending upon their own preferences.

In the above context, it is interesting to read the tagline of one of the leading travel agencies in France, which says, "*Ne pensez plus... On pense pour vous...*".

Amidst mounting consumerism and the definitional quick-sands of market-dominated principles, the basic issue of autonomy of the tourist itself becomes mired in conflicting interpretations. Does the communication network actually grant more autonomy to the tourist-consumer? Are promotional strategies fair to a culture's representation and the heritage of its people by putting them up for exhibition? Do such cross-cultural encounters respond effectively to balancing the democratic deficit between the host and guest cultures?

We have attempted to seek answers to some of these questions and discussed some pivotal "points of contact" underlining dialogue between France and India.

Contemporary forces of globalisation have strongly influenced both cultures, whereby they find themselves at a definitive crossroads of modernity and tradition. What is needed now, perhaps, is a deeper appreciation of cultural relativity and its power to impact the commercial exchange of lifestyles that are often as nebulous as they are frozen.

Only such an understanding as this will foster the creation of a genuine Dialogue and the Discovery of alternative ways of perception and acceptance of the "Other" and of the "Self".

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Notes

¹ See D. Srivastava, 2009; the data collected formed part of a study conducted in France and India and sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR), N. Delhi for doctoral research in the field of Indo French Tourism.

² See J. Urry, 1990.

³ See J. Urry, 1995.

⁴ Ministry of Tourism, Government of India Statistics: 2000; 2001; 2005; 2006.

⁵ J.-B. Tavernier (2000) *Travels in India 1 & 2*, 2nd edition, translated by V. Ball, edited by William Crooke. Delhi, Low Price Publications.

⁶ François Bernier (1981) *Voyages dans les États du Grand Moghol*, Paris, Fayard.

⁷ Pyrard de Laval (1998) *Voyages de Pyrard de Laval aux Indes orientales (1601-1611)*, Paris, Chandeigne.

⁸ Familiarisation Tours (Fam Tours) are those where journalists, tour operators or travel experts experience a destination first-hand for effective marketing of a tourism product.

⁹ According to this custom, prevalent in certain parts of India, the bride immolates herself at the funeral pyre of her dead husband. During British rule, with the active support of Indian social reformers like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the custom was abolished by the Act of 1829.

¹⁰ Brochure produced by Terre Entière: Culture-Voyages-Passion; 10, Rue de Mézières, Paris.

¹¹ "Collective consciousness was a term coined by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) to refer to the shared beliefs and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society"; *Collins Dictionary of Sociology* (1991) New York, HarperCollins.

¹² Photos and details provided with due permission of, and through discussion with, Jean-Pierre Besnard, Founder, Caravane Théâtre Association (the Clown Theatre Workshop), creator of the blog lesaventuresdezippo.com. and website parcourireslemonde.com. As per the latest discussions, the next workshop is scheduled for the autumn of 2012 in Rajasthan.

¹³ "Voyages aux Parfums d'Épices", Incredible India campaign, India Tourism, 13, Boulevard Haussman, Paris.

¹⁴ "Le Circuit Bouddhiste", Incredible India: Special Interest Tours, Ministère du Tourisme; Le Gouvernement de l'Inde, 2006.

¹⁵ www.chalindia.com.

¹⁶ Poonam Chawla, "Chal India", www.chalindia.com.

¹⁷ "Une aventure inoubliable - Kerala, le pays des dieux", Kerala Tourism, www.keralatourism.org.