

RESOLUTIONS of International Congress on Culture Travel and Tourism in the Valedictory Session held at Jnana-Pravaha, Varanasi on April 11, 1999

The resolutions adopted emerged from the papers presented and the discussions that took place during the course of the Congress. As the Congress was held at Varanasi and the tours, in the course of the Congress, brought into focus the situation prevailing in the city, the focus tended to be on that place. But the Resolutions apply to all places which require similar attention wherever they may be located.

The resolutions adopted were:

Banaras *Ghāṭas* as Heritage Site;

The *Ghāṭas* of Banaras are a unique inheritance the like of which exists nowhere else in the world, even in India. But these are fast being eroded due to the incapacity of the owners to maintain them and the encroachment of money-spinning contractors who are pulling them down to build ugly structures that function as cheap hotels. Commercial hoardings that have no connection with the place, pollute the minds of those who come in search of the mental elevation it is capable of inspiring. If urgent steps are not taken to preserve the *Ghāṭas* they will become non-existent within a span of some four to five years.

It was, therefore, resolved that with the help of the World

Leisure and Recreation Association (WLRA), which has an observer status with the UNESCO, an attempt should be made to have the Banaras Ghāṭas declared a World Heritage site.

Dr. T.J. Kamphorst, of Netherlands, a representative of WLRA who was present at the Congress, assured that WLRA would provide necessary services of experts free of cost.

Involvement of Locals in ensuring basic cleanliness.

The awareness of the local residents needs to be raised for the purposes of ensuring that filth, especially from pilgrim centres, is removed. A committee of local residents who could actively propagate the benefits of a clean environment and help to maintain it should be created with the participation of NGOs.

Restricting of pollutants in the form of Hoardings , Detergents, etc.

Pollutants such as hoardings and detergents should not be allowed anywhere near the section of rivers and waters that are seen to be hallowed for one reason or other. The paint on the boats bearing signs of some well-known soft drink manufacturers is being allowed by the boatmen in exchange for the painting of their boats. This could be avoided if the government or other agencies provided them with the facility of paint free of cost.

Revival of the Role of Priests in maintaining a clean Environment in the Area.

The old tradition at certain places of local priests called *Paṇḍās* or *Maulavīs* who maintained the sanctity of religious places by enforcing given norms of behaviour and cleanliness

could be revived by creating a body of trained and licensed priests/personnel who refrain from extortionist practices.

It was resolved that this be done by an officially recognised body that can monitor the activities of these priests.

Banning of motorised vehicles in certain areas having heritage significance.

It was resolved that concerned authorities be approached to declare certain parts, particularly narrow lanes in heritage areas, in Kashi and similar places, out of bounds for motorised vehicles.

This would not only ease congestion, enabling people to walk in comfort, but also would help towards maintaining the sanctity and dignity of the place. Owners of motorised vehicles could be provided facilities for parking them outside the area so delineated. Cycle rickshaws should be better organised so that specific stands are delineated for them, from where people can hire them.

Motorised launches should also not be allowed to ply in certain waters that are considered sacred or fall within heritage areas. Governmental support and strictures would be required for carrying out this plan.

It was also resolved that the help of NGOs for planning the area to be thus demarcated and for monitoring the proposed arrangements be enlisted.

Tourist Facilities to be in Consonance with the Character of the Place.

Keeping in view the interest financial institutions are

evinced in promoting tourism infrastructure, it was resolved that they involve experts on culture for different areas while considering major tourism projects. They could maintain an area wise list of such experts.

Experts from other parts of the world could also be consulted in order to gain from the example of those countries.

Explanation of Symbolic Expression for the Benefit of Visitors.

The help of archaeologists, museologists and scholars should be garnered to explain the symbols through which India expresses itself. A number of artifacts which look mysterious and unexplainable have a wealth of meaning behind them. Understanding them in their proper perspective would make the visit of outsiders purposeful and enriching.

It was resolved that certain NGOs and governmental organisations take up the task of helping to create a chain of institutions spread all over the country for training good guides and prepare easily available literature. The knowledge of retired personnel could also be tapped for this purpose. The assistance of institutions such as Small Industries Development Bank of India should be sought for this purpose.

Utilisation of Youth for Guiding Services.

There is a large body of NSS students (who number 15 lakhs) in India. The services of these students can be utilised for providing good and efficient guidance to tourists and for helping to maintain monuments and other places.

The students would earn a small stipend, learn something

about their heritage (as they would have to be given some training before they take up these assignments) and develop a sense of self respect and pride. We can also learn from the experience of other countries by finding out and even getting their services in training those involved.

Home Stay Facilities for Tourists.

To enable foreign and Indian visitors to experience a place fully without necessarily spending large sums of money, it is necessary to have well-developed home stay arrangements. A number of elderly people and women who, for various reasons are unable to go out of their homes to work but want to do something, can be trained for the purpose. This would enable visitors to interact with locals and know their life style while being guided by them regarding how to get about around the town without being taken for a ride.

It was resolved that NGOs take up the task of enlisting and training such persons with the help of concerned governmental bodies.

Need for networking.

Networking between NGOs themselves and with governmental organisations is essential for the implementation of the above resolutions... Large networking of interested and knowledgeable individuals should be created with the idea of enlarging the body of knowledge and skills and of the people involved in carrying out the various activities .

The idea behind some of the resolutions was to find out how the examples of others can be utilised to better the situation

here as also, perhaps, to set examples for others (as participants came from different parts of the world) who may be seeking similar solutions.

It was recognised that while the blame is placed on 'tourists' – foreign and Indian – for polluting the sites, it cannot always be done without the collaboration, conscious or unconscious, of the local inhabitants. There is a need to sensitise the local authorities and residents with regard to the heritage they are heirs to, and to help them with methods of preserving the same.

It was also clear that while the blame is laid on tourists it is the greed of land developers, contractors as well as local inhabitants that leads to encroachment on sites.

These resolutions apply to the whole of India as also to tourism in other countries, particularly those which have a cultural heritage that still calls for preservation. The strategies adopted for the implementation of these objectives may differ from country to country but the fundamental objectives remain the same.