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Lessons from Thailand (1)

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Most Indian visitors to Thailand, both men and women, who find their long repressed sensual longings damn fulfilled at an affordable cost and more so with no body out there to do any physical or moral policing over their orgies, get back to their home just to depict a shady picture of this South East Asian country, as if it is a land of nothing else than that of unfettered sex-trade, scenic marvels, cheap garments and strange cuisines. However, to the jaundiced eyes, says a proverb, everything around looks yellowish. So is aptly the case with our mainstream Indian visitors. But ironically, they never miss to whisper before their inner circle of friends and confidants about the wide variety of carnal pleasures, which they might have experienced bellyful during their trip to Thailand at no great cost to their purse and at no possible risk to their social and moral reputation. Nay, they entice the potential tourists, just as a travel agency does, to visit this Asian land at the earliest. This is how the number of Indian tourists to Thailand is growing by leaps and bounds every day. Wherever you look around in Thailand, be it massage parlors and gems showroom of Bangkok, or live-sex show and night discos of Pattaya beach, a massive crowd of excited Indians becoming a part of each such event will first of all greet your curious notice. And the Government officials and travel agencies of Thailand, who have an impeccable grasp of psychology and priorities of Indian tourists, arrange their hospitalities so neatly as to unfailingly charm them to their fill. However, the sad result of all this is the increasing flow of massive Indian money day in and day out into Thailand, and God knows how much of it is white or legal.

This is in nutshell the sweet-n-sour feel of this author who chanced to visit Thailand, especially its urban metropolis Bangkok, beach city Pattaya and also Damnua Saduk, a rural area in the outskirts of Bangkok famous for floating market, during 27th Sept to 1st Oct last, as a part of the tourist team comprising the family members of my youngest sister. On the whole what hurt me most was not only the double-speak character of the co-tourists from India as described above, but also their blindness to and silence on the positive features of Thailand's culture, society and governance. For instance, though every Indian tourist would in the heart of their hearts relish the never waning hospitable smile of Thai men and women, they won't utter a word of appreciation about it back home before any other Indian. During our 5-day stay, spread in different parts of Thailand, we didn't come across power cut or load-shedding anywhere even for a second, though there occurred intermittently heavy downpours under the impact of

earthquake-cum-tsunami in the Pacific. Uninterrupted power supply, come what may- Is it not a human marvel to talk about, especially on the part of the Indians who undergo daily the power problems of every sort even in the fairest weather? Another wholesome feature of Thai environ that should surprise an Indian is the near absence of mosquito menace, be it in Bangkok metropolis or in coastal strip of Pattaya, given the obvious geo-climatic similarity between the two countries. Next, it was blindingly obvious to every Indian tourist that notwithstanding a great measure of freedom allowed for drinking, massaging and all that which goes with it, there occurred not a single problem of law and order, not to talk of any atrocity or violence, a fact quite unimaginable in any part of India. But our Indian tourists won't like to probe, why just the opposite happens in India? Then again, any outsider visiting Thailand willy-nilly comes across its reigning multi-religious and multi-ethnic socio-cultural ethos doing its salutary job in every sphere of Thai life. Besides Buddhists who constitute about 95% of Thailand population, there are Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and others who have been living there as minorities since long ago. However, there is no recorded incident of ethnic or communal violence ever taking place in the long history of Thailand. Neither is there any restriction on persons of one religion to enter into the shrines of another religion, a fact completely atypical of Puri's Jagannath Temple, where the entry of non-Hindus is forbidden. Wonderfully enough, the King of Thailand Rama-IX belongs to minority Hindus, while its State is Buddhist. Thus, in a formal sense, Thailand is not only a monarchy but also a theocracy. But the practice of democracy and secularism is so much embedded into country's day-to-day ground reality that its people never think of importing any model of democracy or secularism from any other country just for the label's sake. However, seldom do the Indian tourists bother to enquire, why is India despite its proclaimed commitment to both democracy and secularism still unsure of the working of these two ideals at ground level?

The accompanying Oriya write-up 'Lessons from Thailand (1)' (<http://www.box.net/shared/424mfr5rrf>) is the first of the series of Thailand travelogues, which seek to address to the mainstream Indian tourists, who are ever tantalized by Thailand for obvious reasons, but in the hypocritical habit of lying about it after enjoying it to the brim.

Chitta Behera, dated 5th Oct. 2009