

Socio-Economic Impact of Spiritual and Religious Tourism in India

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Abstract

This paper analyses the Spirituality and Religious practice and its relation with tourism in the Indian society. Spiritual and religious tourism is not a new concept it has been existed in society since dawn of civilization. It is one of the earliest forms of common tourism. People had travelled for religious practice and different kind of other religious motivations. There are many examples in history that shows Saints (Sadhus) and sometimes kings also move from place to place in the search of spirituality. Since ancient times India has been the center for religious, cultural and spiritual activities because it has several beliefs, strong foundation of ancient culture, various religion and their own religious practice and spiritual beliefs. In Hindu religion there is over Three million Gods, Goddess and many religious places where every Hindu wants to visit once in their life. Religion is not only about religious beliefs but it also focused on rituals, ceremonies, philosophies, manner, ethics etc. It teaches every Indian the way of life. There is a famous concept of "Tirth Yatra" for Hindus and "Haj Yatra" for Muslims which motivates Indians for religious and spiritual tourism more. So, there are many concepts in Indian society which directly connected to religious tourism. According to Tourism Industry in India, 60% of travel packages were made for religious purpose. This data shows the importance of religious tourism in Indian economy. That is why this paper is an attempt to know the socio-economic impact of spiritual and religious tourism in Indian society.

Keywords: Religion, Rituals, Spirituality, Tourism, Motivation

Introduction

Tourism industry has become one of the most important and leading service industries globally in the past few decades. It is a tool of development for both developed and developing countries. Tourism is the largest service industry in India with a contribution of 6.23% to the national GDP and providing 8.78% of the

total employment, along with it tourism is a cultural phenomenon as well. It impacts culture and society and is shaped by culture and society as well. There is a deep influence of tourists and tourism on the host community. The word 'tourist' introduced in 1292 A.D. It has come from the word 'tour' a derivation of Latin word 'tornus' which is the meaning of a tool for describing a circle or a wheel. One of the earliest definitions of tourism is given by the league of nation in 1937 'tourism covers all social activity of those who travel for a period of 24 hours and more other than away from their own country'. As per United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 'Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes'. Tourism studies becomes a part of to study from sociological perspective in 1960s and 1970s. There are many reasons in Indian society which motivates for travelling and during tourism activity society gets affected as well; it means all the activities of tourism happen in social sphere only. Discussing about the religious dimension, it is important to know what is religion. According to Durkheim (1912:47) "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things that is to say, things set apart and forbidden-beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adore to them". The person, who have religious motivation and their purpose of visit is to participate in a ritual, religious event, praying and perform any religious practices is called religious tourism (Jackowski & Smith, 1992-93). Spirituality can be defined as the complete philosophy of human life and it teaches the correct way of living and thinking. A spiritual man is one who is detached from the effect of karma (success or failure). When discussing the 'spiritual' dimension of tourism, it is a possible direction to understand how people

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seek meaning and purpose of life. So, in India religion and spirituality are the major motivations of travelling. There are many ancient religious sites which are flourishing religious and spiritual tourism in country as they are visited by both international and domestic tourist. Mainly domestic tourism is the backbone of Indian tourism and over 60% of domestic visits are directly indirectly related to religious and spiritual tourism (Shinde, 2014).

The Origin of Religious and Spiritual Tourism: Indian Context

Tourism existed since the beginning of time when the primitive man set out, often traversing great distances, in search of a game that provided the food and clothing necessary for his survival. Transportation of that time was poor but along with land, water routes were used for travelling. In western countries tourism defines as a pleasure activity but in India beginning of tourism were religious activity or education purpose, war etc. Religion and spirituality are historically related with tourism it considered as pilgrimage tourism which is oldest form of Indian tourism. Religiousness is the base of Indian culture and cornerstone of vales tradition and practices of daily life. Tourism played a vital role in civilization. India is a centre of two ancient civilizations of the world called the Indus valley civilization and the Aryan civilization in the early days. It was possibly Tirthyatras which prompted the Indus valley civilization to great bath in Mohanjodaro. Since Rigvedic times, many evidences of tourism are found. Our earliest literary sources are Veda, the Rigveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda and the Atharvaveda. The Atharvaveda first time divided the whole country in to five parts which are Central part, Eastern part, Southern part, Western part, and Northern part. Ancient literature provides knowledge about tirthas and important trade centres they also give names of places, their routes, and their importance. Tourism played an important role in the development of Buddhism and Ravidassian. The Buddhist literature describes trade journey and accommodation facilities. The Mahaparinirvana sutra depict that Buddhist followers and monks travelled to Sarnath, Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar for paid homage to stupa. The evolution of tourism in India has taken thousand years to reach present level. Every city or place of India has their own story, which communicates relevant information in terms of its history.

These historical monuments and religious story, religious beliefs motivate Indians to travel. It has been part and parcel from generation to generation.

Research Design

The term 'design' means drawing an outline or planning or arranging details. It is a process of making decisions before the situation arises in which the decision must be carried out. The design of this research is descriptive in nature. The method of data collection is mainly based on secondary data.

Social Impact of Religious and Spiritual Tourism

Tourism can upgrade the life of host community through better local infrastructure and provide job opportunity, health care, education resources and increase income levels (Zaei, 2013). Religious tourism attracts tourist more than other tourist motivation. It is major phenomenon which promotes tourism in Indian society. Tourism attracts regional investment, better commercial opportunity and supports other industries to grow within a destination area. Religious and spiritual tourism can help in reduction of poverty, especially in less developed countries because even unskilled labourers can find jobs. As religious or spiritual tourist visit to perform many religious activities they buy holy things like flower, garland, prasad etc. Local people can provide these things and they can earn profit. There is no need of any special kind of skill to sell these things. Religious tourism has been a catalyst for socio-economic growth, and it is providing uninterrupted provision of service (Budha & Bahadur, 2018). Sociocultural value of religious and spiritual tourism works an identity of communities in locals; they protect their religious environment and spirituality awareness about their culture and religion. They respect and have faith in their religious practices. Along with all these positive impacts booming tourism industry also brings negative influences on developing countries and it puts negative sociocultural impact on host community. Increasing the practice of religious and spirituality on place can be reason of superstition and people can be involved in many crimes in the wrap of blind faith in religion. Sometimes when people meet each other they talk about their religious activity or religious

practices and share their spiritual knowledge by exchange of thought and beliefs and it can be cause of acculturation. So, cultural and traditional values of that society may be wrecked by the process of acculturation (Kabote, 2015), which can put impact on community identity and changes behaviour, relationships, collective conventional lifestyles, ceremonies, and morality.

Economic Impact of Religious and Spiritual Tourism

Tourism has been identified as a tool of development with multiple effect it has the potential to generate foreign exchange, good source of income, employment and revenue for locals. Religious tourism has opened various source of earning and several new business options for locals. Karar (2010) noted that religious tourism generates revenue in a way as no other kind of tourism does. Economic impact of religious tourism is same as other form of tourism such as job creation, population growth and development of infrastructure. Pilgrimage centres provide more opportunities to sell local religious crafts and other creative things for host society. There are many programs organized by Indian government to enhance religious tourism and to deal with significant issues faced by Indian religious sites such as overcrowding and crowd management. There are many existing religious tourism projects like Swadesh Darshan Scheme, PRASHAD Scheme etc. Swadesh Darshan scheme is introduced by govt. to develop 15 themed routes in India at different regional and national scale. The themed routes like Buddhist circuit, Krishna Circuit, Spiritual Circuit and Ramayana Circuit will help to manage religious tourism and will have substantial impact on the country's tourism statistics. Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) scheme introduced to define and to establish sacred visitor site, it focuses on the concept of high tourism return and sustainability to improve the experience of religious tourism. PRASHAD scheme initiated to define sacred visitor sites under this scheme 13 cities: Ajmer, Amritsar, Amravati, Dwarka, Gaya, Kamakhya, Kancheepuram, Kedarnath, Mathura, Patna, Puri, Varanasi and Velankanni have been focused with the collaboration of Northeast India project, will help to enhance religious tourism potential. The Indian government has realised the economic importance of religious and spiritual tourism and has been continuously

planning innovative schemes to boost this industry. So, major economic impact of religious tourism and spiritual tourism will be job creation, individual economic independence, infrastructure development, and maintenance of religious sites, improve standard of living, changes in land values and ownership, labour force displacement and other changes in the political and economic systems.

Conclusion

Tourism in India and for other developing country play vital role for economy and Indian tourism is growing rapidly (Dellink, 2017). People from all over the world move towards India for Ayurveda, Yoga, and meditation in Rishikesh, Uttaranchal and other states of India from centuries (Kumar, 2017). Previous researcher reported that religious and spiritual tourism could bring large number of visitors, it improves the local infrastructure and economy and many more impact on social spare as well. Religious journey is among the famous short trips and such opportunity should play important role for individual society and other aspect of society such as economic, social, cultural, etc. However, the negative impact of religious and spiritual tourism should be considered seriously because overcrowding can be growth of undesirable activity social dualism, demonstration effect, cultural commodification, acculturation, superstition, changes in land values and ownership, labour force displacement and other changes in the social and economic systems. Govt. should enforce proper guidelines for crowd management, infrastructure maintenance, and proper cleaning and sanitation of religious and spiritual sites. So, the contribution of religious and spiritual tourism is the most significant but some positive and negative impact were given and some fresh insights for further study is provided by this paper.

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