



## OPPORTUNITY AND THREATS FACED ON RELIGIOUS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

### Tourism

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### ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the academic literature related to religious tourism and what are prospects of its development in India. Since ancient times, travelling for fervor and religious devotion purposes have been present in humanity. In this way, religious tourism starts from the moment people begin a journey due to a question of belief. It begins with a religious manifestation—the pilgrimage—where the pilgrim is considered a tourist of religious motivation.

The primary purpose of the paper is to find what the opportunity are and threats faced for the development of Religious Tourism Sector in India. Study is based on academic literature related to pilgrimage tourism in India.

Tourism in India begins with pilgrimage destination from ages, domestic travelers prefer religious and sacred places to visit. It is very important to provide restless experience and develop the sector.

### KEYWORDS

Religious Tourism, India, Development

#### INTRODUCTION:

Pilgrimage Tourism can be defined as travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the products they induce, like art, culture, traditions and architecture. Being one of the most ancient civilizations of the world, India has been in contact with almost all the major religions of this destinations of the four regions, and despite being dominated by Hinduism in the present context, religions like Islam, Buddhism and Christianity have also influenced a sizeable portion of the population, apart from niche religions like Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Judaism that grew as an offshoot to the major religious schools of thought.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To study the concepts of Religious Tourism and its Problems.
- Identify the major challenges of religious tourism in today's tourism place.
- The development and its perspectives of religious tourism are accompanied to another.

#### METHODOLOGY:

The study is purely based on secondary data collected from different sources such as Books, Journals, Research Papers and other print media.

#### PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM:

There are two distinct aspects to Religious Tourism in India; one, the faith of the domestic tourist, who has a spiritual attachment to the deity/destination in line with their religious beliefs; the other is the 'foreign' tourist, someone belonging to a different religion, region or country, for whom the destination and the religious practices have the dimension of 'novelty', a spiritual experience different from their own, despite the ethical values being delivered remaining the same. From the domestic market's perspective, there is a fine line dividing business and belief. Many temples, mosques, churches, gurudwaras and other major religious centres, in today's socio-economic structures, are tangible assets in terms of infrastructure and the workforce they employ, thereby implying that the institution has to monetize itself in order to be able to meet its everyday survival in societal environments. Based upon the nature of the product, intensity and region of travel, Religious Tourism is divided into the following major categories: Cohen's modes of tourism.

Experiential	A quest for authenticity beyond the spatiality and temporality of everyday life
Existential	A journey to an external and elective spiritual site beyond the mainstream of a traveler's native experience
Diversory	An escape from the ordinary
Recreational	Entertainment centre travel that emphasizes the restorative capacity of travel-secular

Experimental	Travel intended to be out of the ordinary, unique and "alternative"
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Source: Cohen (1979).

**Pilgrimages:** A pilgrimage is a journey or search of moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person's beliefs and faith, although sometimes it can be a metaphorical journey into someone's own beliefs. Many religions attach spiritual importance to particular places: the place of birth or death of founders or saints, or to the place of their "calling" or spiritual awakening, or of their connection (visual or verbal) with the divine, to locations where miracles were performed or witnessed, or locations where a deity is said to live or be "housed", or any site that is seen to have special spiritual powers. Such sites may be commemorated with shrines or temples that devotees are encouraged to visit for their own spiritual benefit: to be healed or have questions answered or to achieve some other spiritual benefit. A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim.

- Missionary travel:** A missionary travel is a member of a religious group journey into an area to proselytize and/or perform ministries of service, such as education, literacy, social justice, health care, and economic development. The term is most commonly used for Christian missions but can be used for any creed or ideology.
- Leisure (fellowship) vacations:** Religious tourism, also commonly referred to as faith tourism, is a form of tourism, whereby people of faith travel individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary, or leisure (fellowship) purposes. North American religious tourists comprise an estimated \$10 billion of this industry. Religious tourism comprises many facets of the travel industry including Pilgrimages Missionary travel
- Faith-based cruising:** A faith-based cruise is a voyage through the high seas. Of the major religions of the world, the Christian faith takes the icing on the cake for organizing the highest number of faith-based cruises. Coming a respectable second is the new age movement, whose leadership hosts seminars in exquisite islands across the globe. Crusades, conventions and rallies:
- Retreats:** These trips enabled their participants to discover the great sites of India in their spiritual dimension or led them to live the intensity of the great pilgrimages and Hindu festivals. Many participants have trusted us to travel in India/Nepal alone, with family or with friends. You will also discover the Indian sub-continent in all its glory on a customized trip or join one of our scheduled tours.
- Religious tourist attractions:** they are the festivals, Programmed, events, Places, cultural habitat and activities, shrines, arts and architecture style, buildings and so on.

#### RELIGIOUS LIFE & RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN INDIA:

In defining what religious travel is, it is good to understand what

religion is. Religion is described briefly by Richards as: "a system of beliefs in a higher being that are held with great faith and commitment. There is a universal belief in a higher being in all religions." According to Ketola religion can be understood as a divided set of viewpoints that include supernatural beliefs and answers related to them that give answers to the basic questions of human existence. These definitions leave atheism outside of the classifications of religions. (Ketola, 2008, 19, Richards, 2007, 216.) The religions can be divided into ten historic traditions that are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, western esoterica, the modern religions, Sikhism, Taoism and Neopaganism (Ketola, 2008, 22).

### ISSUES BEING FACED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM:

Tourism acts as a crucial enabler in facilitating the development of basic infrastructural facilities, generates income for the local community as well as the government, balances regional development strategies through 'umbrella' effect, and fosters peace and socio-cultural harmony. However, tourism development in any region needs to be regulated to prevent negative impacts. Major problems include:

**1) Infringement of Carrying Capacity:** Most religious centres in the country, major or minor, suffer from short but intense seasons that alter the dynamics of the region for the rest of the year. The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand is one such example. Lasting from May till about November, it puts a serious pressure upon the transport infrastructure of the Garhwal region, which coupled with the monsoons and a lot of road construction still under progress imply landslides, meaning frequent roadblocks, accidents and loss of life.

**2) Waste Management:** In part, a derivative of the problem of carrying capacity, the waste management problem has aggravated as science and technology grew to usher us into the 'era of plastic'.

**3) Air Pollution:** The sheer volume of travel in this niche makes the figures mind-boggling. While trains still manage to absorb a majority of the travel volume, quite a substantial number of major religious tourism sites in India are still only accessible by road or foot, or a combination of the two (take the case of hilly regions).

**4) Monetizing Religion:** In the race for developing as many niches as possible, there is often the issue of religion being 'monetized', as the host community gets increasingly driven by the 'profit motive'.

**5) Lack of scrutiny of religious trusts:** There is a need to put forward regulations which govern the financial status and regulation of religious trusts as it looks to allay global concerns about money laundering and terrorist financing activities. Such a law will also pave the way to make public names of organizations that claim tax exemption to ensure greater transparency. This is especially crucial in a scenario when some of India's religious trusts are among the richest in the world. Some point roadmap to pave the way for the development of Religious Tourism sector in the country:

India has an abundance of religious centres running across the country. Therefore, it is not necessary to create either core or supporting products. What is needed is to develop/explore is just the ancillary products, however, the task is difficult keeping in mind the variety of issues and scenarios that every other destination will require to be dealt with. As Religious tourism in India can provide a unique experience to the keen observer of faith and culture, it is imperative that the product is developed professionally rather than the haphazard manner in which the sector has been growing. But for this to be fruitful, the seeds will have to be sown and the saplings will have to be nurtured. The sector has immense potential for development due to the availability of religious tourism sites all over the country. The identification of core deficiencies, the requirement of facilitating products and subsequently overcoming the issues are essential for paving the way for the development of this niche sector of India in a way so that it can become a major attraction for inbound tourists.

The following some point roadmap can pave the way for initiation of a progressive phase in the development of religious tourism in the country:

**1. Developing Religious Tourism Circuits through a Hub and Spoke Model:** One of the first steps in this aspect is to create nodes near religious centres, where there is already a basic infrastructure

present and plan day trips from there. For example, Chennai in South India can be a node for excursions to Madurai, Thanjavur, Trichnapalli and Pondicherry. Madurai is the home of the exquisite Meenakshi Temple, which is regarded as the holiest temple in India by many people. As the influx of crowd is already sizeable infamous spots, a hub and spoke model will ensure tourist spread to all the nearby attractions.

**2. Providing the tourists with a holistic tourism experience:** Attracting the tourist segments that are not attracted to religious sites, needs a holistic package around the religious spots. Tourists may not find it worthwhile to come all the way just for a pilgrimage. An innovative mechanism to streamline this development can be to market a religious tourism destination as an alternative tourism destination. For example, Rishikesh is marketed as both a religious and an adventure tourism destination.

**3. Marketing religious tourism destinations need special training as quite a major part of the visitors are attracted to these destinations due to reasons like studying old culture, the evolution of practices and research.** Only blind faith may not be the attraction of these sites. These are also an enabler towards attracting the non-religious strata of the population. The innovation, in this case, can be blending the ritualistic part of the religious tours with informative, cultural and philosophical inputs. Traditional dances, music and theatre-related to the religious shrine will have to be built into the itinerary. Discourses on the essence of the religious beliefs, workshops on yoga and ayurvedic practices can add immense value to religious tourism.

### 4. Developing integrated infrastructure for religious tourism development:

In part, a derivative of the problem of carrying capacity, the waste management problem has aggravated as science and technology grew to usher us into the 'era of plastic'. The sheer volume of travel in this niche makes the figures mind-boggling. While trains still manage to absorb a majority of the travel volume, quite a substantial number of major religious tourism sites in India are still only accessible by road or foot, or a combination of the two (take the case of hilly regions). In the race for developing as many niches as possible, there is often the issue of religion being 'monetized', as the host community gets increasingly driven by the 'profit motive'. There is a need to put forward regulations which govern the financial status and regulation of religious trusts as it looks to allay global concerns about money laundering and terrorist financing activities. Such a law will also pave the way to make public names of organizations that claim tax exemption to ensure greater transparency. This is especially crucial in a scenario when some of India's religious trusts are among the richest in the world. The current debate ranges around the fact that the monetary earnings from religious tourism are not enough to offset its socio-environmental impacts. However, it has to be kept in mind that the effects of tourism activity work in multiple planes, from directly affecting the local economy to influencing decisions at the policy framing level.

### RELIGIOUS TOURISTS FACING PROBLEMS:

In some religious tourism is becoming big business in Pakistan, and the federal and local governments are doing more to promote it. As Shahid Rashid, Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Tourism said "Tourism has become a major income source for places of worship" A report shows that Pakistan hosts about 1 million foreign visitors yearly in the prospect of religious tourism. The largest number of tourists comes from the United Kingdom, and many of those are Sikh Yatrees. But besides this, there are several problems that Pakistan faces in fetching the religious tourists from all over the world, many of them are related to a weak travel and tourism framework, low branding and marketing effectiveness and less priority given to the travel and tourism industry by the government, Pakistan has been ranked 103 of 124 countries around the globe. There are many other problems that religious tourists face in Pakistan such as: Security is the major problem that influences the religious tourism in Pakistan. The main problem in the tourism sector is the lack of facilities that cannot meet the international standards. Poor tourism infrastructure is also a big issue. Rising inflation is another factor reducing tourism here. Natural disasters have an impact in declining tourism in Pakistan. Many other problems are here that Pakistan faces. Pakistan is a country that is facing its worst conditions ever regarding its tourism industry. First, it was the great tragedy of 9/11 that breaks the tourism industry, and then in 2005, a dreadful earthquake collapsed the total tourism infrastructure, these tragedies also affect religious tourism. Although

Pakistan faces many problems in the travel and tourism industry still one cannot ignore that Pakistan was ranked 40th for its airline services and 39th for ground transport. What is needed is a focus on solving the problems and providing facilities to religious tourists. This will not only attract more religious tourists but also would play a role model in the world.

#### CONCLUSION:

Religious tourism is a day to day developing at the same time some issues are affecting the changing the enthusiastic researchers recognized early that religious sites are desperately in need of income streams for maintenance and development in a purely structural and physical sense. The development of sites is traditionally the responsibility of the worshipper working in a lay role alongside the ministry team in the faith. Therefore, audience development in a sacred sense has long been seen as critical to the healthy religious site; this is not a new phenomenon or new practice. What is apparent is that religious sites are attractive to a wider audience as part of individuals' need to belong, to associate, to consider worship, to grow as spiritual and sentient beings and to maintain evidence for all as sites that are central, relatively stable, protected physically (except in times of strife and disruption) and evidence of shared values and beliefs.

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