

Religious Tourism: A Key to Strengthening India's Influence with special Reference to Varanasi and Mathura

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Abstract:

It is evident that tourism is the most important and powerful segment to strengthen the economy of any country. It is one of the fastest growing Industries. It not only gives pleasure and leisure but also responsible to give million dollar business to any country. Now people wants to live peaceful life and want to keep their life free from stress. As a reason of which people are becoming religious and getting inclined towards religious tourism. In the last few years in India we have observed rapid advancements in the area of religious tourism. Various sites have become important religious tourism destinations in attracting tourists not only from India but also from all across the globe. India is a country which is known for its rich cultural heritage. Here, we found unity in diversity, lot of people with different religion, cast, creed and languages lives together which makes the country strong in terms of its religiousness and spirituality. This paper is an attempt to find out how tourism is a contributor to make the country India a delicate power and makes it strong. Here, we examined the three dimensions or indicators of the growth and development namely, economic, environment, and social-cultural issues caused by tourism in India. This research study used secondary data analysis at various tourism sites in India. The findings reveal that India is well recognized as a potential tourism.

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Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to contribute to the existing literature of religious tourism and more specifically, find out how religious tourism sites and attractions which contributes the economy of the country.

In late 2000's the travel industry endured a major financial turn, and in 2008 and till the end of 2009 it began improving and now it has turned into a new shape and has become a significant contributor in the economy of almost every nation. The travel industry can be of different types, it varies from people to people depending upon their respective needs. For example some people travel for recreation, some for medical treatment, some for work, and some with the family etc. As soon as the needs of the people changes their interest began

expanding to kinds of the travel. It gives direction to grow to the travel industry.

According to World travel and the travel industry council, development of outside travelers has expanded up to 7.63 billion in India. The development pace of the travel industry in India is around 13.4 % against 7-8% development in comparison to other parts of the world. Similarly, the development of foreign visitors has also expanded in the country came upto 7.46 million which is better than earlier years. Outside trade profit from the travel industry have additionally expanded as far as US dollar got appreciated around 7.6% in comparison to earlier 5.8%. With new plan presented by the legislature of India for Visa on appearance for very nearly 43 nations has prompted a development of the travel industry by 1,213.8 %.

Travel to strict spots has been there from the antiquated occasions. Every religious community have separate place for worship, such as, Gurudwara among Sikh, Masjid among Muslims, & temples among Hindus. It has been perceived that a relation exists between the journeys and the travel industry. Then again journey the travel industry is additionally recognized as a particular sort of the travel industry. It is considered as perhaps the most established sort of the travel industry .As the footfall of the pilgrims is increasing day by day, in that case the pilgrimage destinations have to capitalize on their basics to give good services and facilities to them relate to their stay, food, accommodation, darshan facility etc. For example, Vaishnodevi temple has a separate board which we call as Shrine board which look after the food, darshan and accommodation facilities for their pilgrims.

The study explores the potential of religious tourism in India and discusses its potential contribution in economic and socio-cultural dimensions. Religious tourism in India has long historical background with traces of Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam. Due to cultural and religious diversity of the country religious tourism is developing with a fast pace in the country. This paper seeks to examine the potential of tourism in the growth and development of the country India.

There are many reasons for religious tourism by people at sacred sites and temples. One of the interesting reasons is to travel, experiencing and seeing foreign lands and for acquiring spiritual growth in life.

Most of the people want to move and explore fresh sights and inspirational places, among which a few destination have sacred meaning where history is associated in a positive manner.

Under the company of sanctified people at these spaces taking bath in the holy rivers purify the mind and soul. Such type of experiences purify us and give us deeper understanding for being spiritual and motivates us to be spiritual.

If anyone stays in such spiritual places even for short duration of time this is able to give an

everlasting sense, experience and thought which will inspire them for many years to come, maybe it cannot be forgettable for throughout the lives. Such opportunity may not come very often, or it may even come after many lifetimes. So if such opportunities come than we have to take them seriously and take full advantage of it. We know that spiritual journey is a very long journey, sometimes it requires many life's to achieve self actualization. Pilgrimage is a holy and religious journey. It is a process which cannot be taken casually, it allow a person to experience, see, and encounter the delightful things and introduces to the Divine self. It is only possible in the company and association with the holy people at the holy land.

At the land of lord Shiva people move as because lord Shiva is the main motivator for the people regarding their act of behaving and how they can get the acme of success in their life without hurting the other people in this universe.

Literature Review

Tourism is the fastest growing industry of the world (Ninemeier & Perdue, 2005; Cooper & Hall, 2008) .It is the main part of Service sector (Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008; Kay, 2003; Koc, 2004). To improve, maintain and sustain its existing status, tourism industry is very much dependent on visitors and tourists.

According to Papatheodorou (2006), choice of destination is always important feature in tourism literature and in addition to this there are other factors which influence decisions related to travel and tourism. These factors are linkedwith finance, previous experiences, culture, travel motivations, etc., to name a few (Ankomah, Crompton & Baker, 1996).

Cooper and Hall (2008) in his study find out that,there are many factors and motivators on which tourism depends.Tourist's area unit subject also depends upon the behaviour, before, after and during the travel. This behaviour and action is the direct results of contact between personal and environmental variables on anever-ending basis.

Here importance is given to the power of individuals and things on either side or also the reaction in keeping with this influence.

Travel behaviour is also drawn because the manner tourists behave in keeping with their attitudes towards an explicit product and their response by creating use of the merchandise (March & Woodside, 2005; St. George, 2004).

Richards argues, most of the religious sites today have been "turned into tourist attractions" and attract growing number of visitors (Richards 2007, p.220). For the purpose of this paper, we classify religious attractions into different categories. Following Nolan & Nolan (1992) and Shackley (2003) we distinguish between:

- **Pilgrimage shrines**-These are the sites having strong religious meaning. These are mainly visited by pilgrims but also visited by non-pilgrims some times.
- **Man-made religious sites**- These sites attract tourists that were originally constructed for religious purposes but over time became tourist attractions. These are constructed to attract tourists from their inception, such as religious theme parks, museums etc.
- **Places where the religious festivals are held**- These sites serve as tourism attractions for pilgrims, as well as for tourists because of the festive events.

It has now become a new fashion to practice to know and follow the distant religions and spiritual practices. Especially in western country like US Yoga studies are implanted as a separate branch of study which is able to bring peace and happiness in their life. It is not surprising that some of these people again interested in going to the place of their new beliefs and, therefore, are involved in "Spiritual Tourism. Not surprisingly India has become the most popular destination for this purpose.

Visits in India take travelers to the next level in their life. India includes many spots and destination of spiritual and religious importance. To name few

'Golden Temple (Amritsar); 'Varanasi' or 'Kashi', 'Mathura' & 'Vrindavan' (Uttar Pradesh) (which are the area of our study); 'Somnath' & 'Dwarka' (Gujarat); 'Darga Khwaja Saheb' (Ajmer); 'Haridwar' & 'Rishikesh', 'Gangotri' (Uttarakhand); 'Rameshwaram' (Tamil Nadu); Jagannath Puri (Orissa); Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh); also, Bodh Gaya (Bihar) etc. Now let us focus on the area of our study that is Mathura and Vrindavan.

Religious Tourism Attractions in Mathura

Situated on the banks of the Holy Yamuna River in the territory of Uttar Pradesh, Mathura is popular for being the origination of Lord Krishna. Mathura is at the focal point of Vraj, Braj or Brij-Bhoomi, alluded to as Shri Krishna Janma-Bhoomi which truly signifies 'Ruler Krishna's origination.' It is only an hour's drive from Agra. The whole district is spotted with amazing sanctuaries, devoted to various parts of Lord Krishna's life. The city, with its rich history and culture, is a journey spot for Hindus. A portion of the renowned sanctuaries of Mathura are Shri Krishna Janmsthan Temple, Dwarikadhish Ji Temple, Vishram Ghat, Bhuteshwar Temple and so forth. Master Krishna cherished milk and spread, and from now on Mathura is known for its milk-based items, particularly the "Peda", delicate milk sweet that's crisp and melts in your mouth. Handiworks and a wide assortment of knickknacks that are identified with the narrative of Lord Krishna and his youth Lilas are likewise well-known here. The city becomes animated during the various celebrations that are praised consistently. Different spots of enthusiasm for Mathura are the Mathura Museum, Govardhan Hill, and Kans Qila.

Religious Tourism Attractions in Varanasi

This antiquated city is the true otherworldly capital of India, holding incredible religious hugeness for Hindus and Buddhists, as well as pretty much anybody looking for that snapshot of celestial intercession. From sadhus to explorers and globe-jogging hikers, a wide range of individuals slide on this city—otherwise called Kashi and accepted to

have been made by Lord Shiva himself—looking for an otherworldly arousing. You can encounter it, regardless of whether for a short lived minute, at these spots:

- **Kashi Vishwanath Temple**—The sanctuary committed to Lord Shiva is one of the holiest, and furthermore the most established, spots of journey for Hindus. At the core of the sanctum sanctorum lies a brilliant dark Jyotirlinga of Shiva, one of the twelve found in various places of worship crosswise over India. The Jyotirlingas are viewed as an image of the interminable light of which Lord Shiva is a source. Seeing the Jyotirlinga exemplified in a gold edge, compared with the flimsy dividers that stand declaration to a very long time of history, can summon a feeling of profound delight, your own convictions in any case.
- **Ganga Aarti on Dashashwamedh Ghat**—Seeing the amazing Ganga aarti in a watercraft moored close to the Dashashwamedh Ghat is a commendable stupendous finale to your profound stay. As the sun sets over the Ganga, the lowly of the city blurs away from plain sight and a break wins before the ghat emits with the brightness of several tinkering metal lights, songs of ringers, cymbals and psalms. The 45-minute custom abandons you overflowed with a bizarre feeling of quiet, as though your extremely being has been scrubbed by the experience.
- **Panchakroshi Yatra**—Varanasi is one of the most religious and holy city which has a special place among Hindu community. Not only among Hindus has, it had a very special place for the spiritual and religious tourism in all across the globe. Apart and along with other places of religious importance, Panchkoshi Yatra also excites and attracts the tourists from not only from India but also from all across the globe.

Role of Spiritual tourism in Uttar Pradesh

People from across the world now come to India for meditation and spirituality in Kashi, Mathura, Varanasi, and Allahabad which are situated in Uttar Pradesh. In fact India it is rapidly emerging as a health and spiritual tourism destination. Since time immemorial, India has been known for its spirituality.

Uttar Pradesh (U.P) in India is one of the dynamic and important state which offers lot of tourist destinations, the list of which is very big. It ranges from Taj Mahal which is the 7th wonder of the world is situated at the bank of river Yamuna in Agra.

After the city of Taj, Uttar Pradesh state also includes the unique cultural and religious place like Baba Vishwanath (Varanasi), Shri Ram Janmabhoomi (Ayodhya), Vindhyavasani (Vindhyachal), Braj (Mathura, Vrindavan, Goverdhan), Krishna Janmabhoomi (Mathura) and sangam at Allahabad. Uttar Pradesh also includes like Kapilvastu, Sarnath, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Sankisa and Kushinagar important destinations related to the life of Lord Buddha.

Uttar Pradesh is a state which is very much important for those persons who wants spiritual growth and upliftment in their life. There is no other state or place than the state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P) which actually helps to solve the said purpose. It is the reason due to which tourism Department of Uttar Pradesh introduced U.P Heritage Arc which actually connects three most important tourism destinations of U.P that is – Varanasi, Lucknow and Agra. It will definitely boost up the travel and tourism business in the state. In fact, it helps to cover the true character and spirit of Uttar Pradesh state, by presenting range of religious, cultural, and heritage tourism resources to the globe.

Objective of the Study- The objective of the research study is to check-

- How Mathura and Varanasi are the prominent and important religious destinations of Uttar Pradesh?
- How religious tourism at these places strengthens India's influence on other parts of the globe as a strong religious destination?
- What are the initiatives taken by the government for uplifting tourism Industry?

Moreover, qualitative research approach allows a greater flexibility and interpretation of the collected data (Veal, 2011).

The data collection was done through secondary sources such as old research studies and papers, Journals, Magazines, Websites and National reports and governmental strategies related to tourism development in Uttar Pradesh, India.

Research Methodologies

For this research the author has adopted qualitative approach for research methodology, the reason being this research study is exploratory in nature. Qualitative approach was helpful to facilitate a more in depth analysis of the potential for religious tourism development in Mathura and Varanasi.

Discussion and Findings

Below data depicts and shows the visit of Indian and foreign tourists from 2015 to 2017. It clearly data indicates the increasing pattern which proves that these places have tremendous potential to strengthen the Indian tourism.

Annual Tourists Visit Statistics- 2015, 2016, 2017									
Place	2015			2016			2017		
	INDIAN	FOREIGN	TOTAL	INDIAN	FOREIGN	TOTAL	INDIAN	FOREIGN	TOTAL
Mathura	6626000	25000	6651000	6630000	25100	6655100	7226700	26605	7253305
Varanasi	5413927	302370	5716297	5600146	312519	5912665	5947355	334708	6282063

Source: www.uptourism.gov.in

In addition to this, the religious tourism, (specifically when in this study we are discussing about Varanasi and Mathura) has an enormous potential for generating employment and foreign exchange earnings. This could be helpful in strengthening India's influence to the outer world. As tourism is a multi-dimensional and service oriented industry all the entities like State Governments, Central Governments, and even private sector and charitable organizations are involved in it. They also have an important role to play as dynamic and vibrant partners in the effort to attain sustainable growth in tourism of the country.

The total number of foreign tourist arrivals in the country has increased. It showed an increasing trend except few years during the study period. It denotes that the Indian government is giving concentration both on the development of the

tourism and activities related to tourism industry in India. In addition to this paper also find out that-

- Mathura and Varanasi have come out as the most popular religious places in Uttar Pradesh not only popular among Indians but also among foreigners.
- The study and data shows that, the trends of visitors in these destinations is increasing year after year from all across the globe.
- These areas need lot of support from the government to tourism to grow as; such as cruise tourism adventure tourism, agri tourism or rural tourism etc.
- There is a strong need to spread effective implementation of these policies will help in the growth of Mathura and Varanasi tourist and industry as a whole.

Conclusion

People from across the world now come to India for meditation and spirituality at Mathura and Vrindavan. In fact these places are rapidly emerging as a health and spiritual tourism destination. Since time immemorial, these places have been known for their spirituality and the people who show their interest to have the time beyond the articulated environment along with worldly possessions, they must make strive to visit these holy places.

Tourism growth will also fetch more foreign exchange for the state of U.P. There is no doubt that in Uttar Pradesh, tourism industry in U.P suffers from some social and environmental problem like lack of connectivity, poor infrastructure damage to place of historical importance, heritage and pilgrimage, environmental pollution etc. and it is also a fact that government of U.P has made many efforts to increase tourism at Varanasi and Mathura and trying their best to improve services and comfort required by tourist.

Throughout the research, only secondary data has been collected. For further research, another study can be conducted to find out the satisfaction level of tourists through SWOT analysis by using primary data as well. U.P government is growing tourism at a slow pace but they are doing it consistently, so they are not very far away

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