ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“Gratitude is not a thing of expression; it is more a matter of feeling”. This is and has been my feeling and my heart throbs me to admit that I shall be shirking my duty in case I do not express my gratitude to my revered teacher and guide Prof. S.P. Bansal, Director, Institute of Vocational(Tourism) Studies, HP University Shimla, under whose benevolent guidance and supervision the present study was undertaken and completed. His wide range of knowledge, enlightened guidance, sympathetic attitude, encouragement, valuable suggestions and healthy criticism has enabled me to accomplish this research work. A special word of thanks is due to him, as it is he who originally conceived the idea of topic under study and turned it into realization.

I am also indebted to Dr. Sushma Rewal Chugh, Dr. Sonia Khan and Dr. Chander Mohan Parsheera, faculty members of Institute of Vocational Studies, HP University Shimla for their words of encouragement from time to time during execution of this work. I also want to express my great thanks to Dr. Prashant Gautam, Assistant professor in UIHMT, Panjab University Chandigarh and Dr. Jaswinder Kumar, Guest Faculty, Institute of Vocational Studies, HP University Shimla, who were always ready to help and assist me.

My special thanks are due to my colleagues and friends for their encouragement and inspiration that I have been able to continue and complete this piece of research work.

My sincere thanks are due for Department of Tourism, Himachal Pradesh, Government, Economics and Statistical Department of Himachal Pradesh, Himachal Tourism Development Corporation, Temple officers at Jwala Ji, Chamunda, Naina Devi, Chintpurni and Brajeshvari, Market and research division, Ministry of tourism Government of India for readily providing the requisite data and facts on various perspectives.

My special thanks to my family members who always encouraged me to peruse higher education, and without their love and motivation, this would have been a very hard journey. My love for them is eternal. I would also like to thank to office staff of IVS, MTA HPU Shimla, for their assistance and support.

Yogesh Behl
PREFACE

Mankind has an innate desire to observe and seek understanding of the different cultures that exist in the world. These desires to observe and understand different ways of life, traditions, values, and belief systems constitute the very platform of tourism. For domestic tourists, cultural heritage can stimulate a greater understanding in the local history, which may transcend into the feeling of pride and patriotism. For international tourists, this tourism resource can nurture a sense of respect and understanding of other cultures. However, presenting culture as a tourism asset may, in due time, lead to commodification of culture which may impede a community’s effort to achieve sustainability by unbalancing other critical community capital assets. In fact, he contends that tourism development runs the risk of invoking a metamorphosis of community, whereas the old traditional community culture eventually dies and is replaced with the birth of a new culture.

Religious tourism is motivated by faith or religious reasons have been in evidence for centuries. In more recent times, however, it has been suggested that modern tourism has become the functional and symbolic equivalent of more traditional religious practices, such as festivals and pilgrimages. In other words, it is claimed by some that tourism is a sacred journey. Religion and tourism share a close relationship in which the former motivates travel and is a source of assorted visitor attractions. Pilgrimage is one expression of the ties between the two and the paper identifies key pilgrimage tourism issues pertaining to demand and provision that are discussed within the context of the contemporary hajj. The subject of religion and tourism, once comparatively neglected, is generating a growing literature. Conventional pilgrimages are a manifestation of the way in which religion and tourism interact and have a very long history. They are essentially about movement and activity directed by religion. Major faiths of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism all inspire pilgrimage as does Islam, which is considered in more detail hereafter. Such travel has been facilitated by wider trends of improving transport and communications that increase accessibility. Greater affluence is fuelling demand and numerous religious and non-religious agencies arrange, sell and promote pilgrimage tours, which are a lucrative market. Some religious leaders are also showing willingness to sanctify sites in an attempt to engage followers in what is seen by many as a secular era. It can have new age associations when
more personalized forms of spirituality are pursued, and these journeys may be multifunctional whereby religion is not the sole element.

Sites, too, have been labeled ‘multiple products’ of appeal to visitors of differing degrees of religious commitment. Pilgrimage is one of the best-known phenomena in religion and culture and it features in all the major religions of the world: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Pilgrimage is a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding. Whether traditional and religious or modern and secular, pilgrimage is experiencing resurgence all over the world, and longstanding shrines still act as magnets to those in search of spiritual goals. Pilgrimage is one of the forms of ‘circulation’ which, in turn, is one of the forms of population mobility.

Pilgrimage also creates other population mobilities such as trade, culture exchange, political integration, and the less desirable spread of illness and epidemics. It inevitably necessitates spatial movement; hence it stimulates geographers’ concern with distance and its effect on behaviour. In this case distance decay, where interaction between close places tends to be much greater than that between widely separated places and which applies to most human movement, does not apply. Travel to pilgrimage sites may be expressed by contrasting spatial relationships meaning that the attractiveness of a site is not due to its proximity to its audience; it could even be because of its remoteness and the lengthy journey that travellers have to make to get to their magnetic goal. Pilgrimage is an important subject in the geographical world also because of its size and spatial influence. Pilgrimages have powerful political, economic, social and cultural implications, and even affect global trade and health. As part of a religion, pilgrimage has exerted geopolitical influence for most of human history. The boundaries separating one civilization from another were drawn in part along religious lines. Conflict has often been motivated or at least justified by the desire to spread the true faith, to reclaim sacred sites or to make a pilgrimage. Religious groups have also been important in preserving culture, in promoting peace and brotherhood. This very substantial role in defining the heritage of a people is outside the domain of middle-range theory in the social sciences. This phenomenon has stimulated much interest and much writing about it throughout history, parallel to the practice itself. Himachal Pradesh has numerous picturesque tourist destinations which are
responsible for generating much of revenue for the state, agriculture, textile burgeoning hydroelectric power export industry are the other sources of income in the state. A state in north India Himachal Pradesh literally means a region of snowy mountains. It also referred as ‘Dev Bhoomi’ meaning abode of Gods. Himachal Pradesh is among those states in India which has a good per capita Income. A number of pilgrimage centers and Hindu temples are situated in Himachal Pradesh. There are more than two Thousands temples in Himachal Pradesh. These temples are also magnificent works of architecture. The temples are the centers of attractions for the visitors and tourists. Many of them are also associated with ancients legends.

The present study investigates the phenomena of religious tourism in Himachal Pradesh, more specifically in Shakti Peeths of Himachal Pradesh and tries to identify the various issues aspects related to it. The present study is divided into ten chapters. Chapter-1 discusses the current scenario of tourism and various issues related to religious tourism in global and national context. It also identifies India’s competitive advantage lies in the area of religious tourism because its religious heritage and culture is unique. Religious tourism has a big future in India. India is richly endowed with ancient temples and religious festivals. Religions originating in India, be it Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism or Buddhism, have a vibrant culture and spiritual philosophy. Chapter 2 tries to find out the opinion and an extract of various researchers in the field of religious tourism and pilgrimage tourism and tourism impacts at international, national level. The aim of this literature review is to studies that have explored a given topic in the past. This chapter defines the current level of knowledge about the theoretical and conceptual research on religious tourism derived from different sources. Chapter 3 tries to explain the complete research process. It explains the research need, objectives, scope, limitations, methodology, and sources of primary and secondary data. Chapter 4 discusses the brief historical, topographical and other features of Himachal Pradesh. It also studies the tourist resource potential with reference to various religious monument and shrines in Himachal Pradesh. The temples, churches, gurudwaras and monasteries are the centers of attractions for the visitors and tourists. Many of them are also associated with ancient’s legends. Chapter 5 studies the history behind the Shakti Peeths and studies the various Shakti Peeths of Himachal Pradesh. The Shakti Pithas are places of worship consecrated to the goddess Shakti or Parvati or Sati or Durga, the female
principal of Hinduism and the main deity of the Shakt sect. Chamunda, Brajeshvari, Naina Devi, Chintpurni and Jwala Ji are five Shakti Peeths of Himachal Pradesh. The chapter analyses resources inventories of all the Shakti Peeths critically. **Chapter 6** makes the profiling of tourists visiting Shakti Peeths of Himachal Pradesh. The chapter categories tourists on the basis of sex, age, profession, travel information, accommodation availed, number of members in the group, transportation services availed, length of stay, budget of tour, places likely to be visited etc.

**Chapter 7** studies the tourists’ perception and satisfaction about various products and services in the Shakti Peeth area. It is well established fact the overall tourist satisfaction and a tourist’s intention to return are partially determined by his/her assessment of the destination’s different attributes. In this respect, tourists’ satisfaction with respect to transportation, accommodation, sightseeing, parking facility, shrine management, darshan arrangement, attitude of pujaris’ etc. is identified. **Chapter 8** studies deals with the religious tourism impacts upon the local community in the Shakti Peeth areas. The chapter also studies various types of impacts that religious tourism creates within the community. The chapter analyses perception of local community about various religious tourism impacts in the local community. **Chapter 9** uses factor analysis was used to identify the underlying dimensions of perceived impacts of religious tourism. ANOVA is used to assess whether there exist any significant differences between demographic variables and resident’s attitudes toward tourism. **Chapter 10** This chapter gives some practical suggestions and recommendations based upon findings primary and secondary data as well as upon personal observations. These suggestions and recommendations will be of importance to tourism developers in any religious destination and in Shakti Peeths particular.

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