A STUDY OF THE PILGRIMAGE TOURISM OF BIHAR WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BODH-GAYA AND NALANDA

ABSTRACT

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Commerce

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ALIGARH (INDIA)

2014
ABSTRACT

Tourism is a truly global economic activity – one which takes place in destinations across the world, from leading capital cities and smaller towns and villages in rural and coastal areas, to some of the remotest points on the planet. Tourism means the temporary, short-term movement of people to the destination outside the place where they normally live and work and their activities during their stay at these destinations. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines Tourism as 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 is a complex system of supply and demand wherein destinations provide different products and the visitors desire diverse experiences. Given the diversity of tourism phenomena, scholars have identified many types of tourism such as cultural tourism, adventure tourism, Pilgrimage tourism, sport tourism, cruise tourism and so on. Religion has been one of the motivating factors for travel in the past and continues to be the same in present as well. Pilgrimage places are one of the important attractions for tourism across the world.

The practice of travel to pilgrimage sites has been universal phenomenon since a long time. Most religions of the world today endorse or accept some form of religious travel, and this form of tourism is growing in importance. The sacred sites visited by pilgrims include churches, mosques, temples, grave sites, sacred groves and caves, rivers, mountains, sites of miracles, and locations of divine visitations. The pilgrimage sites on account of its historical, architectural and natural features attract the people with diverse motives ranging from very pious to curiosity and recreation. Every year millions of people travel to major pilgrimage destinations around the world. According to UNWTO (2011), 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world key religious sites each year. Religiously motivated travel has become widespread and popularized in recent decades, occupying an important segment of international tourism.

India is endowed with diverse tourism attractions and each state of India has its own distinct features in terms of tourism attractions. India being the land of many faiths, pilgrimage was integral part of cultural tradition in the past and continues to be the same in the present day. The pilgrimage sites world over are experiencing a continued expansion in terms of visitors’ arrival and provisions of services and facilities for them. India is no exception of this ongoing trend. Majority of top ranking
tourist destinations in India happen to be pilgrimage centers. In India millions of tourists, both foreign as well as domestic, visit numerous pilgrimage centers every year. India is blessed with plenty of well-known religious destinations wherein Bihar stands to hold its own significant position.

Pilgrimage tourism is the strongest sub-sector of Indian tourism and the uniqueness of Bihar lies in being one of the most diverse, multi-religious pilgrimage destination. Bihar is the third most populous and the 12th largest State in India, having multitude of historical sites and well-known pilgrimage sites of local, national and international repute. From time immemorial, Bihar has been distinguished for its spiritual outlook. The strength of Bihar tourism emanates from its association with religious personalities whose birth, enlightenment, missionary activities, and death in Bihar sanctified the numerous spots. A large number of places in the Indian state of Bihar have considerable importance in the history of Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Sufism. Lord Buddha attained enlightenment in Bihar and that was the birth of a new religion i.e. Buddhism. The 10th Sikh guru, Gobind Singh was born in Bihar and spent his early years in Bihar. Bihar is the birth place of three Jain Tirthankars(12th, 20th and 24th). There are many Sufi pilgrimage centers in Bihar associated with different orders of Sufism. Bihar is also dotted with numerous sites associated with the Hindu mythology and the legend of Ram and Sita. Many a places in Bihar are believed to have been consecrated by Rama’s presence while he was on the way to Mithila. Gaya is one of the most important Hindu Pilgrimage Centers in India. The recent inclusion of Mahabodhi Temple Complex (Bodhgaya), brought Bihar to prominence on the global map of the world as a cultural tourist attraction. The cultural landscape of Bihar is characterized by the presence of monuments and pilgrimage sites of all these religions.

The pilgrimage sites in Bihar, like elsewhere in the world, attract large number of pilgrims and tourists from different parts of India and the world as well. The tourist inflow in Bihar, both foreign as well as domestic, has experienced an unprecedented growth. The foreign tourist visits has gone up from only 85 thousand in 2001 to approximately 1.9 million in 2012, registering a growth rate of 1180% over the year 2001. The domestic tourists’ visit has also gone up dramatically from 5.9 million in 2001 to 21.4 million in 2012, registering a growth rate of 260% over the year 2001. The growth rate of foreign and domestic tourist visit in the year 2012 over the year 2011 was 12.8% and 16.5% respectively. The share of Bihar in total foreign
tourist visits in India has continuously improved. In 2006 Bihar ranked 16th in terms of total foreign tourist visits with its share of 0.72%, whereas in 2012 it ranked 7th with its share of 5.3% in total foreign tourists visits in India. The number of foreign tourists in Bihar was greater than that of Goa in 2009 and than that of Kerala in 2012. The trend shows that Bihar is heading towards realization of its tourism potential.

This study makes an attempt to understand the dynamics of pilgrimage tourism in Bihar from three main perspectives. First, the study highlights the salient features of pilgrimage tourism in the state. Second, it examines the management of pilgrimage tourism in the state. Third and last, it explores the demographic and travel related characteristics of visitors; evaluate their perception on the services and facilities available at two pilgrimage destinations, and their overall satisfaction with the visit or stay at Bodhgaya and Nalanda. Bodhgaya and Nalanda are two major pilgrimage-cum-tourist destinations located in the Indian state of Bihar. Frankly speaking, these two pilgrimage destinations are the essence of tourism industry in Bihar. Bodhgaya is the international Buddhist pilgrimage center and the lone world heritage site in the Indian state of Bihar. Nalanda is known for its ancient university and numerous multi-religious pilgrimage sites. The two pilgrimage destinations in Bihar attract the tourists and pilgrims from different parts of the country and the world as well.

This study begins with articulating the concept of tourism, pilgrimage tourism, and also focuses on scenario of pilgrimage tourism in India. The first chapter articulates the meaning of tourism and familiarizes with the varied motives of the tourists for engaging in tourism activity, significant among them being pilgrimage tourism. Pilgrimage, however, has diversity of concepts to different major religions of India. Travel for religious/pilgrimage purposes forms the most significant component of domestic tourism in India. The number of tourist arrivals, both domestic and foreign, in Bihar has witnessed tremendous growth over the years in the first and second decade of the twenty first century. The volume of tourists arrival at a destination is considered one of the indicators of tourism development and the survival of tourism destination depends upon the regular and steady inflow of tourists. The growth of tourism in Bihar has started showing up its spin-off effect on the destination economy. Tourism is the major source of income for the people at various pilgrimage destinations in Bihar. The continuous flow of tourists creates consistent demand for transportation, accommodation, entertainment, shopping etc. and as a
result, it generates revenue for governments and employment opportunities for local people, rickshaw-puller, taxi-driver, hawkers, vendors, guides and photographers. There are a number of restaurants, dhabas, tea stalls, confectionary shops, souvenir shops catering to the needs of tourists in Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Nalanda, Vaishali and other pilgrimage spots in Bihar. Thus, pilgrimage tourism can be consistent source of revenue, employment and income to a destination economy. The tourism potential of Bihar favorably impacts the State which has become a star attraction for domestic as well as foreign tourists.

The second chapter explores the work so far done on various aspects of pilgrimage tourism through a comprehensive literature review and traces out the research gap which this study attempts to bridge. It also explains the research design, sets up objectives and hypothesis as well as the plan of work. The existing literature reveals that the studies on religion and tourism or religious/pilgrimage tourism have largely focused on motivation, economic, socio-cultural and management aspects of pilgrimage tourism in India and the world. The review of literature reveals that pilgrimage spots of Bihar have not yet been studied from the perspective of their potential for tourism industry. The tourist which is the most important element of tourism industry has not been duly focused in any study. There is lack of collection and dissemination of information regarding tourist characteristics, their perception about destination fundamental attributes such as transportation, accommodation, catering and so on and their experience at the destinations in Bihar. The present study aims at breaking fresh ground to re-invent the tourist perception about tourism in Bihar. The study also attempts to provide right direction to tourism industry of the State to attract larger tourist footfalls from inside and outside the country.

The third chapter enlightens about Bihar and its pilgrimage spots associated with Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Sufism. It also highlights the importance of the pilgrimage spots from historical and religious perspectives. The tourist facility available at major pilgrimage destination has been mentioned and the arrival of foreign and domestic tourists at various pilgrimage places in Bihar has also been presented in diagrammatic and descriptive form. The detailed discussion and description helps in understanding the importance of pilgrimage spots and offers guidance to prospective visitors about the location, accessibility and facilities for stay at the major pilgrimage destinations in Bihar.
The study further sheds light on the management of pilgrimage tourism in Bihar. The role of various stakeholders involved in the management of pilgrimage tourism has been discussed in this study in chapter-4. To understand the management of pilgrimage sites the researcher has visited many important pilgrimage sites and interacted with the members of religious trusts and officials of Tourism Department in Bihar. The pilgrimage sites visited by the researcher in order to obtain first hand information are: Nalanda(Biharsharif, Rajgir, Pawapuri, Kundalpur, Sun Temple near Nalanda University ruins), Bodhgaya, Patna(Phulwarisharif, Patna city, Manersharif, Guljarbagh), and Vaishali. The researcher also visited the offices of Bihar Tourism Department, Directorate of Tourism (Bihar), BSTDC and Indian Ministry of Tourism office (Patna) and various Tourist Information Centers spread over Bodhgaya, Gaya, Rajgir, and Patna City. The information elicited from the members of religious trusts, officials of tourism department and the researcher’s personal observation helped in understanding the management of different pilgrimage sites in Bihar. The digital information available on the tourism websites and on the website of few religious trusts was also instrumental in appraising the management of pilgrimage sites in Bihar.

The study elicited and analyzed the perceptions of tourists with regard to the genius loci of tourist destinations and pilgrimage sites and about the overall satisfaction by means of statistical methods and application of statistical tools. First hand information (primary data) was garnered right from the horse’s mouth by conducting a questionnaire based survey of the tourists visiting Bodh-Gaya and Nalanda. The questionnaire explored the perceptions of visitors relating to their stay at pilgrimage sites, the facilities available there, the cost of services, the state of ambience surrounding pilgrimage sites, the shortcoming noticed and the visitors’ suggestions for rectification and improvement. Out of the large population of visitors, a sample of 200 respondents each from Bodh-Gaya and Nalanda, the two pilgrimage destinations under study, was selected at random. The questionnaire survey was conducted at different spots in Bodhgaya and at the premises of ruins of Nalanda University and Rajgir in Nalanda. The researcher first sought the permission of respondent and then told them about the purpose of the survey and time required to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaires were self-administered to those who agreed to participate in the survey and were completed in presence of the researcher.
Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 19.0) was used to analyze the data collected through questionnaire survey. The statistical tools most suited to the analysis of the data have been applied such as mean, reliability test, Independent Samples t-test and One Way Analysis of Variance. Tourists' perception on key destination attributes and tourists' overall satisfaction level at Bodhgaya and Nalanda were evaluated. The analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire survey has been presented in chapter 5 of this study. Besides the questionnaire survey, the researcher observation of different pilgrimage sites and personal interview with the tourists, officials of the tourism authority and members of religious trusts/committees helped in better understanding the pilgrimage tourism scenario in Bihar. The sixth and last chapter presents the conclusion emerging from this study. It also offers suggestions for bringing about improvement in the tourism sector of Bihar as are imperative for the growth and development of this sector.

Conclusion from this study, in a nutshell, bring to the fore that Bihar is distinguished to have multi-religious pilgrimage destinations of national as well as international appeal. The pilgrimage attractions of Bihar are not confined to any single religion rather it has the sites associated with the legends and historical development of Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Hinduism, and Sufism. For Buddhists, Bihar is the land of Buddha’ enlightenment and his religious activities, for Jains, Bihar is the land of birth and death of Mahavir and other Jain tirthankars and religious personalities, for Sikhs, it is the birth place of Guru Gobind Singh, for Muslims, Sufi centers which led to the spread of Islam in that part of the country, for Hinduism, many spots consecrated by Rama and Sita and other places associated with the legends. This distinctive characteristic of Bihar holds great potential for pilgrimage tourism and attracts the people of all religious faith across the country and beyond the country. Thus, Bihar possess enough pilgrimage attractions to satisfy the curiosity of the tourist from India and abroad. The study further reveals that people from different parts of India and across the world visit Bodhgaya, Nalanda, and other different pilgrimage sites in Bihar. Vaishali is international pilgrimage destination in making as it is evident from ever-growing foreign tourist inflow and construction of monasteries of various Buddhist countries. Pilgrimage centers in Bihar have witnessed remarkable growth in tourist arrivals both domestic and foreign, over the years.
From the study, the poor quality of the environment surrounding the pilgrimage destinations in the state as outlined in the Bihar tourism policy-2009 emerged as one of the threat in positive image building of the Bihar tourism. One of the respondents from the USA was embarrassed to see the abject poverty around the destination as he reacted in response of the one of the questions of the researcher "how do you find the place?" answer: nice but too much poverty! Several respondents pointed out the rampant beggars menace in Bodhgaya. The researcher found that local youth with hand bill in the name of charitable trusts flocking the foreign tourist at Sujata Garh(Bodhgaya) for monetary help to their charitable trusts and queuing up the scores of poor children and destitute old persons for getting monetary help from the foreign nationals. Obviously, this stark state of deprivation result in tourist disgust and hatred as no one wants to entertain the poverty. The poor surrounding of the destination may result in short stay and negative word of mouth and ultimately the loss of economic benefits to the destination economy.

The study further revealed that religious trusts play important role in providing the accommodation facilities and other related facilities to the visitors at almost all the pilgrimage centers in Bihar. The central and state governments are committed for the development and promotion of pilgrimage tourism of the state as it is evident in their policy measures and allocation of funds for the same. The state government on its part has been extending considerable financial support by making provisions of substantial funds in the state budget for the maintenance and development of the pilgrimage sites. Due to consistent effort of the government considerable improvement has taken place at the pilgrimage sites and much is still awaited on this front. This is not the end of journey rather it is just a beginning in the arena of global and competitive tourism industry.

The analysis of tourists' demographic characteristics demonstrates that majority of respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda were domestic tourists. 70.5 % of the respondents at Bodhgaya and 74.5 % of the respondents in Nalanda were male. The dominant age group of the respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda was 18 to 40 years. Majority of respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda were graduate, post-graduate and above. In terms of employment status, majority of respondents were either employed or self-employed. In terms of monthly income, 45% of respondents at Bodhgaya and 38.5% of respondents in Nalanda fall in the category of nil/not stated, which includes students, house wives, unemployed, monk and non respondent to this
question of income. Excluding this category of nil/not stated most of the respondents visiting Bodhgaya and Nalanda were in the income group of more than Rs. 40 thousand per month. The analysis of tourists travel characteristics further shows that the pilgrimage destinations are visited by a variety of purposes such as religious, relaxation, cultural, others and even a combination of them, with family, friend, in group and alone, for day visit to weeklong visit and even longer.

Data based analytical conclusion further highlight that majority of respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda were followers of Hinduism and Buddhism. Majority of the respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda were visiting these pilgrimage destinations for the first time. Majority of the visitors at both the destinations usually stay for less than a week. Only 24% of respondents at Bodhgaya and 20% in Nalanda stayed for seven days and more. 16.5% of respondents at Bodhgaya and 18.5% in Nalanda were day visitors. Majority of respondents at Bodhgaya visited for religious purpose, whereas in Nalanda, the purpose of visit for majority of respondents was cultural. Majority of respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda came with family, followed by friends. Majority of the respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda stayed at Hotels, followed by monastery at Bodhgaya and Dharamshala at Nalanda. The trip of majority of the respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda was self-arranged, followed by travel agency. In terms of expenditure of respondents incurred at Bodhgaya and Nalanda during their stay/visit, the expenditure of majority of the respondents at Bodhgaya and Nalanda was up to Rs. 20 thousand. As regards the source of information about pilgrimage places in Bihar, the study finds that friend and relatives were the major source of information at Bodhgaya(44%) and Nalanda(35%) followed by religious literature (23.5% & 21% respectively). The travel agency has been found the more important source of information in Nalanda(20.5%) in comparison to Bodhgaya(13%). The other sources of information include history books, travel guides, Bihar Tourism Department and respondents own curiosity as expressed by some respondents.

The study, in its questionnaire survey, requested the respondents to evaluate the key destination attributes on Likert’s five point scale ranging from very poor (1) to very good (5). The key destination attributes are transportation services, accommodation services, food and catering services, shopping facilities, public convenience, information and guidance, cleanliness and hygiene, parking facility, safety and security and behavior of the local people. The analysis of mean of individual attribute shows that accommodation service at Bodhgaya is the most
satisfactory attribute followed by behavior of the local people and catering and food services, whereas Transportation service is the most satisfactory attribute in Nalanda followed by accommodation service and behavior of the local people. Cleanliness and hygiene is least satisfactory attribute at both the destinations i.e Bodhgaya and Nalanda.

Majority of tourists at Bodhgaya and Nalanda found the price of services was moderate and reasonable. Only 9% of tourists at Bodhgaya and 6.5% of tourists in Nalanda found the price of services very high. 89.5% of the tourists at Bodhgaya and 86% of the tourists in Nalanda indicated that they were satisfied and highly satisfied with their visit to Bodhgaya and Nalanda respectively. 71.5% of tourists at Bodhgaya and 77.5% of tourists in Nalanda were having intention to revisit the pilgrimage destination. 89% of tourists at Bodh-Gaya and 84.5% of tourists in Nalanda expressed their opinion that they would recommend the pilgrimage destinations to others like friends, relatives.

At Bodhgaya, the result of independent sample t test indicates that there were significant differences in the perception of foreign and domestic tourists on transportation services, accommodation services, shopping facilities, public convenience, Cleanliness and hygiene, parking facility. These attributes of destination were more satisfactory for domestic tourists. At Bodhgaya, significant difference was found in the overall satisfaction of the tourists in terms of their age groups and employment status, whereas no significant difference was found in terms of nationality, gender, education level, income group and religion.

The result of independent sample t test indicates that there were significant difference in the perception of foreign and domestic tourists in Nalanda on transportation services, information and guidance, public convenience, Cleanliness and hygiene, parking facility, safety and security and behavior of the local people. These attributes of the destination were more satisfactory for domestic tourists as compared to foreign tourists. In Nalanda, no significant difference was found in the overall satisfaction of the tourists in terms of nationality, gender, education level, employment status, and income group. However, the significant difference has been found in the overall satisfaction level of the respondents in terms of age groups and religions. The result of independent samples t test revealed no significant difference in overall satisfaction level of tourists at Bodhgaya and Nalanda.
The contribution of this study can be discussed from both theoretical and practical standpoints. The study offers an initial understanding about pilgrimage tourism of Bihar. This study is useful for both visitors as well as management authorities. For visitors the study provides information about the pilgrimage spots and its accessibility and available facilities there. For management authorities, the study helps in identifying their customers, knowing their perception and satisfaction resulting from visit or stay at the pilgrimage destinations. The satisfactions and perceptions of the visitors with the services available at the destinations speak in volume about the management of any destination. The study offers reliable source of information to the tourism industry on the tourists’ demographic and travel characteristics, perception and experience of visitors, tourists’ intention to revisit and recommend the pilgrimage destination. The study contributed to a theoretical enhancement of the current level of knowledge in the existing literature on pilgrimage tourism. In terms of the practical contribution, the findings of the study could be used to formulate marketing strategies and to improve the management of the pilgrimage destinations. Last but not the least, this study brings the pilgrimage landscape of Bihar on the global map of pilgrimage tourism and could help tourism planners and policy makers to develop more appropriate development plans and marketing strategies to enhance the competitiveness of the destination.