



Scope and Challenges of Tourism in Places of Religious Importance in Chhattisgarh

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SCOPE AND CHALLENGES OF TOURISM IN THE PLACES OF RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE IN CHHATTISGARH By Dr. Swati Tiwari Abstract India is a land of pilgrimage and tourism is an important sector of economy. If both the terms are brought together it will open ample of areas for religious tourism in the country.

ABSTRACT

India is a land of pilgrimage and tourism is an important sector of economy. If both the terms are brought together it will open ample of areas for religious tourism in the country. The word religious tourism is comparatively new in tourism sector. In many countries, tourism is main source of revenue and it is considered as backbone of their economy. At present it is mostly used for marketing purpose.

There are a large number of religious places in Chhattisgarh. Every year thousands of tourists from various parts of India visit these holy places in Chhattisgarh. These places are not only popular for religious importance but also well known for its architectural structure. This paper mainly discusses religious places of Chhattisgarh state. This study is conducted to find out the current state and scope of religious tourism in Chhattisgarh. This paper is based on data obtained from secondary sources. Various magazines, journals and official websites of government of India and Chhattisgarh is reviewed for data collection. Number of visitors are considered as demand factor and religious tourism product and service providers as supply factors. A proper understanding of key issues and a proactive remedial steps are required to promote Chhattisgarh as a preferred tourist destination in the map of India and world. A sincere effort has been made to find out basic challenges before government of Chhattisgarh to develop it a tourism state and suggestions are made.

KEYWORDS

Tourism sector, Religious tourism, Marketing, Economy.

INTRODUCTION

“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.”- Saint Augustine.

Tourism, for most of the people is an activity mostly taken up when they are free from their daily routine life or they wanted to opt a break from the job. People are ready to travel across the world. Tourists or travelers are mostly attracted by the natural beauty, archaeological, historical, sports & adventurous activities offered by that particular place.

But every destination possesses some strengths and weaknesses that either enhance its capacity to attract foreign visitors or repel it. Similarly there are some factors of external environment can originate various opportunities or threats as well (Archana Bhatia, 2013) Tourism sector for any country is one of the big markets in the world and contributes remarkably to the economy of any country.

Tourism industry has capacity to absorb all kinds of workers, from unskilled to skilled, technicians, managers, businessmen, suppliers, etc. Government of India is trying to facilitate tourist, as an all the year around tourist destination. “Foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) during 2017 were 10.18 million with a growth of 15.6% over same period of previous year. In 2016, FTAs were 8.8 million with a growth rate of 9.7% over 2015.” (India Tourism Statistics 2018, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.)

In 2016, International Tourist Arrivals (ITAs) were 14.57 million in India (including both FTAs & NRIs). Foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) during the period of 2017 were Rs. 180379 crore with growth of 17% over same period previous year. In 2016, FEEs were Rs. 154146 crore with growth rate of 14%. India’s position in the world tourist arrivals (ITAs) is 26th and shares 1.17%. Share of India in ITAs receipts is 2.05% in terms of US\$ and ranks 13th position. It is very lucrative industry and glamorously participates in the economic development of the country.

Tourism industry provides employment at large scale and makes equitable and sustainable development of any region. Same role can be played by tourism in Chhattisgarh state, which is richly endorsed with natural resources, wildlife, herbs, palaces & forts, beautifully carved temples & monuments, etc. It is 10th largest state in the country and situated in the heart of the country.

It has plains, plateaus and hills which gives it a diversified look and cultural heritage. This state provides a huge platform to tourism industry to dwell and flourish. There are many unique sites which are unexplored and that are far away from conventional tourist destinations which are so overcrowded these days. There are many places of religious importance like Boramdeo Temple, Kevalya Dham Jain Temple, Shadani Darbar, Lakshman Temple, and Danteshwari Temple, Khallaridevi Temple, Jatarani Temple, Talagaon, Ratanpur, Malhar, Girodpuri, Damakheda, Mainpat, Dongargarh, Rajivalochan Temple, Champaran, Iutra sheriff, Madku-dweep and many more. Many temples are of great archeological importance, which defines the rich religious heritage of Chhattisgarh.

If these religious places are blended with the flavor of tourism, it can become a great source of revenue for state and employment for all class of society. The religious tourism is built on two type of networks. The traditional way of pilgrimage, it mainly depends on the informal network automatically generated between pilgrims and local social bodies.

While organized way of pilgrimage is frequently sponsored by state or public charitable trusts. These bodies properly organize and provide various services and facilities necessary in religious tourism. Religious tourism is considered by many scholars as something that has evolved from pilgrimage as a form of travel and therefore it may best be explained by referring to the ritualistic tradition of pilgrimage. (Shinde, 2018)

Objective of study

1. To examine the potentials and prospects of religious tourism in Chhattisgarh.
2. To examine the status of infrastructural facilities in the major religious sites of Chhattisgarh.
3. To find out required plan for the promotion of religious tourism in the study region.

Research methodology

This research paper is based on secondary data. The secondary data required is collected from Reports of the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India 2017-18, India Tourism Statistics at a Glance 2017, and booklet on Chhattisgarh tourism, Statistical Handbook of Chhattisgarh, and other related information has been collected from research papers published in various magazines, newspapers, private survey agencies and journals. Descriptive study is done in drawing inferences. This study is delimited only up to the geographical boundaries of Chhattisgarh. Statistical data related to tourism in whole India is also considered but data related to Chhattisgarh is focused. (Data related to year 2018-19 was not available while writing this paper and after that due to pandemic no significant data change took place.)

Review of literature

In 1992 Smith noted an absence of research on pilgrimage tourism (cited in Carlos F. et al., 2012). “Religious tourism is one of the least studied fields in tourism research “(Vukonic 2002). Clift and Clift (cited in Carlos F. et al., 2012)) “explored a range of possible reasons and motivations as to why pilgrimage tourists go travelling, which included a wide variety of reasons that ranged from asking for blessing and fulfilling vows to curiosity, sightseeing and holidaying”. Another study by Tsaj et al. (cited in Carlos F. et al., 2012)) concluded that “cultural reasons were found to play a role as well as religious motives”.

“In religious tourism, the main resources for the physical and metaphysical experience of the visitors include places of worship, temples, shrines, churches and cathedrals, rituals, festivals, performances and events” (Shackley, 2001; Rinschede, 1992).

“It has also been observed by various authors that pilgrimage tourism in general has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas” (Elsner, 1992).

“The interest in pilgrimage tourism has affected a number of industries around the world (Elsner 1992), including the tourism industry.”

“In tourism marketing, many authors agree that pilgrimage tourists play the most significant role; hence, marketers always try to learn the attitude and behavior of pilgrimage tourists to effectively design and offer their tourism packages” (Josan, 2009).

“A widely followed theory of marketing argues that every market consists of groups or “segments” of customers with different needs and demands” (Kamla-Raj, 2010).

“The pilgrimage tourist as someone who visits a specific place out of the usual environment, with the intention of pilgrimage - meaning and/or growth, without any overt religious compulsion, which could be religious or non-religious in nature, but within the divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling.” (Hernandez-Avila, 1996), According to Lok Sabha Secretariat (2013), the role of the Government in tourism development has been redefined from that of a regulator to that of a catalyst.

Anushree Banerjee (2014) stated that “the major issues that are restraining the industry from achieving high economic value are shortage of qualified personnel, shortage of tourism training institutes, shortage of well qualified trainers, working conditions for the employees.”

Shalini N. Tripathi & Masood H. Siddiqui (2010) mentioned that “tourism and hospitality have become key global economic activities as expectations with regard to our use of leisure time have evolved, attributing greater meaning to our free time”. While the development in tourism sector has been amazing, but India’s share in overall tourism foot fall and generation of revenue from it is insignificant. It is a well known fact that India possesses great opportunities in the field of tourism.

Form the various research papers studied, it can be concluded that tourism in religious and pilgrimage region is drawing attention as a significant factor of tourism marketing. When tourism is blended with religion, more revenue, employment generation and increase in standard of living will take place.

Scope and challenges of tourism industry in the places popular for its religious importance in Chhattisgarh are developing as tourism hub, proper marketing is required. Here marketing means such services must be sold to visitors and tourists which satisfies them and opens an avenue for more people to visit the place. The American Marketing Association defines marketing, “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals.” One point which is clearly included in the definition is, ‘an exchange’ that satisfies both seller and buyer of the service. Seller is that ‘organization’ which includes city and its residents. A city must be provided with all the facilities and amenities which is desired by the tourists. Promotion and marketing of that city must be for multiple visits of tourists, not single. This is not one time selling of product and services. In fact selling is completely different then marketing. It is a part of marketing. A city can be developed as tourist place only by repeated visits of tourists. And for this, long-term marketing strategy is required. Development of tourism must also fulfill the needs of that city and residents of that city. The developments made to encourage tourism meets the necessity of its residents. Infrastructure, safety, and economic development, all improves the standard of life for its residents. As far as Chhattisgarh is concerned it safe and peaceful state as per tourism activities. Chhattisgarh mainly has roadways as means of transport. Length of national highways in this state is 3232 km. The state highways and connecting district roads are of 8,031 km. length. Railways plays important role in goods transportation. Entire rail network in Chhattisgarh comes under South East Central Railways Zone of Indian Railways, having it’s headquarter in Bilaspur. The state possesses first position in freight loading and sixth in revenue earning for Indian Railways. Its main junctions are Bilaspur, Raipur, Durg and Champa and are connected to almost every big cities of India. North and south Chhattisgarh is not well connected to rail network. In many areas of North and South Chhattisgarh railway projects are going on. State is connected to every important and big cities of India by roadways and railways. Chhattisgarh has only one airport (Swami Vivekanand Airport) in Raipur. Four new aero drums are under progress in the states. Rest of Chhattisgarh lacks in airways connectivity. In Chhattisgarh there are ample of opportunities to develop its various cities as tourist centers. This state is basically a tribal state, but people from all the region and religion of India reside here. In a nut shell, Chhattisgarh can be developed as tourist hub for devotees and tourists of different religion. Few places showing its diversified religious legacy are highlighted below:

1. **Rajivlochan Temple:** This Temple is about 1100 years old in Gariaband district, 45 km from capital city, Raipur. Rajivlochan mandir is standing on twelve pillars each of which is intricately curved with the idols of hindu gods and goddess. Mainly the figure of Lord Vishnu, Rama, Narasimha and Goddess Durga. Standing at the



assemblage (sangam) of three rivers - Paury, Sondhur and Mahanadi, the temple attracts its visitors with its main design made of Chaitya arch wooden motif. At the entrance way of the enshrine, beautiful carving of snake goddess is curved. It is also famous for Kumbh-mela.

2. **Ghatarani & Jatmai:** This place is about 85 km from Raipur in Mahasamund district. Jatamai & Ghatarani are two different places 8 km apart. There is a lush green forest near Ghatarani waterfall. Jatmai is temple of goddess Durga, beautifully curved out magnificently on stone. Waterfall beside the temple gives heavenly look of the whole place. The nature tour is combined with religious flavour as at both places temples have been built.



3. **Anand Prabhu Kudi Vihar:** It was constructed by a follower of Buddha named Bhikshu Anand Prabhu. Anand Prabhu Kudi Vihar, Mahasamund was constructed during the period of Mahashivgupt Balarjun. Amongst all Buddhist vihars located in Chhattisgarh, this the famous one. There are two dwarpaals on both the laterals of the entrance. The inside of the vihar displays a six feet tall statue of Buddha touching the earth.



4. **Kunkuri Cathedral Jashpur:** It is approximately 40 km from away from Jashpur Nagar, the Kunkuri Cathedral, was built in 1962. At the entrance of the cathedral, a beautiful idol of Mother Mary is placed to welcome the visitors into the church. The seven arcades and arches in the Kunkuri Cathedral, is unique construction of its own type. Its accommodating capacity is approx. 5000 seats, the church attracts visitors & worshippers without differentiating on the basis of other religion and at the same time from distant places of our country.



5. **Radha Krishna Temple:** This Temple in Kawardha in Chhattisgarh documented to be built between 1830-1840 by predecessor of Raja Ujjiyar Singh. The Radha Krishna Temple, Kawardha has basement in which the saints used to practice their religious rites and rituals. The tank near temple called Ujjiyar Sagar.



6. **Battisa Temple:** Located around 100 km from Jagdalpur, this site can be reach by local transport and the temple is worth visiting due to its unique architecture. There are two temples which are connected by a common Mandapa which is based on 32 pillars, hence the name. Comprising of 8 columns and 4 rows, the pattern of temple is quite symmetrical. Each of the temples has garbh-griha which is devoted to Lord Shiva and each garbh-griha has enormous Shiv-linga.



7. **Giroudhpuri Dham:** Situated by the convergence of the Mahanadi and Jonk rivers, 80 km from Bilaspur, the Giroudpuri Dham is one of Chhattisgarh's most respected pilgrimage. This small village is a great combination of spirituality and historical interest. It is the birthplace of the founder of Chhattisgarh's Satnami Panth, Guru Ghasidas. Pilgrims arrive here for veneration and prayer at his 'seat', which is located next to the Jait Khamba. Guru Ghasidas baba has done long tapasya under the tree called Auradhara. This tree can be seen here at present also. the devotees of Baba Gurughasi Das called this place as tapo-bhoomi. There is a holy pond called Charan kund where annual gathering of the people



of followers of Baba GhasiDas and other visitors takes place, popularly known as Girodhpuri Mela. Hardly a couple of kilometers away, an ancient pond “Amrit Kund” is located and it is famous for its water having sweet taste.

8. **Shadani Darbar:** Shadani Darbar is a famous pilgrim center for Sindhi community. This shrine was founded by Sant Shadaramji Mahraj who is accepted to be the incarnation of Lord Shiva. He dedicated his whole life in the religious service of god and for the well-being of fellow beings.
9. **Champaran:** Champaranya is a birthplace of mahaprabhuji who is a founder of Vallabh sect. People following on his path are called Vaishnava. Champaran is 50 km away from Raipur. Within the premises is an old tree under which Mahaprabhuji was left as an infant. There is a museum on the first floor depicting life of Mahaprabhuji. In addition to this temple/bethak, there is a Shrinathji'shaveli and another Bethak.
10. **Kewalya Dham:** Kewalya dham jain temple is located approx. 15 km from Raipur in kumhari. Kaivalya dham is a purely Jain tirth near Raipur. There are 24 identical temples of jain tirthankars built on both the side of main temple of Aadinath prabhu. Fabulous architecture and awesome ambience of garden in the temple premises is a delight to visit.



These are few examples of religious places of Chhattisgarh. There are many more places of religious importance which can be visited and experienced with its natural and architectural beauty. There are many challenges coming in between the all-round development of state as tourist hub. Major challenges are mentioned below:

1. **Unexplored and unidentified spots:** There are many sites and places which are known to local people. Those who are living in nearby places visit these areas and for rest it is almost like undiscovered spot
2. **Lack of transportation and communication:** Transportation and communication convenience is very improper in remote areas. Regular transportation is not easy to get all-the-day around. Same is the condition of communication. In this era of high speed internet connectivity there are many places where no internet service is there or if service is there internet speed is very slow.
3. **Lack of other infrastructural facilities:** Other infrastructural facilities like electricity supply, fresh drinking water supply, local transport, housing, boarding, lodging, restaurants, etc. are not available.
4. **Safety and security:** Although Chhattisgarh is comparatively very safe to live in, but in some places like South Bastar and north & North-East Chhattisgarh naxalite movements are registered. So some areas are not believed to be safe for tourists.
5. **Lack of effective marketing both inland & overseas:** Advertising and marketing is necessary for sale of products and services. Same is applicable for tourist spots. Effective and appealing marketing is not done at domestic and overseas market.
6. **Lack of help desk:** There are no helpdesks found in railway stations, bus terminus or any specific office of tourism department is established to guide the visitors and provide them necessary information.

7. **Lack of signboards and literature:** Visitors who wanted to reach such tourist places have to ask the people found on the way. Proper and sufficient signboard and literature are not found easily. Signboards shows way to destination and literature tells about the bountiful inheritance of the site.
8. **Lack of online information:** Information about main spots and temples which are already well-known and popular and are found in various websites, but there is lack of information about remotely located sites and spots. Tourist who visit such places do not upload there pictures and reviews. Less participation of visitors in publishing their reviews.
9. **Lack of airplane connectivity:** Chhattisgarh lacks behind in airways. A couple of cities are having domestic flight connectivity, importantly only capital city is connected to leading cities of India. No international airport is established yet.
10. **Language is a big barrier:** In Chhattisgarh, local language and dialects changes in every 20 kilometers. Local language is also found different from place to place, and people are not that educated to understand other language properly. For effective communication language is the foremost important factor.

There are ample of scope of growth of tourism in Chhattisgarh. There are many unexplored and unidentified spots and sites which are yet to be recognized. In the sub-urban area of capital city Raipur, there is a place called Arang, where 108 shiv linga of archeological importance are found. But these temples are known to the people of Raipur region only. In the same way there are of hundreds of such religious sites which are of great archaeological importance but are still ignored by government. These challenges are big barrier in the growth of Chhattisgarh tourism. But, discussion on problems are not the solution. Following suggestions are made to overcome these problems. To make reform movement easier suggestion are divided into primary and secondary category:

Primary suggestions are:

1. Development of primary infrastructural facilities, like uninterrupted power supply, water supply, housing, boarding, lodging, etc. are prime area to work on.
2. Efficient man-power planning is required to make best tourist spots. People working in this sector are necessarily trained in communication, culinary, hospitality and transportation.
3. Well-planned publicity and advertisement is the basic factor for sales of any product and services. Bright publicity campaign, attractive brochure, appealing slogans are some such areas where state government and other travelling agencies are needed to work on.
4. Hoarding and sign-boards are such things which can take an unknown person to the exact location. In Chhattisgarh, there are many places where regular tourists do not visit, but that places can also be accessed by tourists. In such condition, sign-boards are the only guide to take to the destination. Hoardings help in getting knowledge about new spots.
5. Updating information related to tourism on regular basis with new ideas and modern method is necessary step. Government is trying to make good use of technologies to create market for tourism in the state.
6. Ingrowth of a market, foreign exchange plays and important role. International tourists must be attracted and foreign funding can also be created by the Indian settled overseas.
7. Research and ground survey shall be made by the government agencies and private travel agencies to find out localized and specific problems.
8. Fairs and events should be regularly organized with government support, so that such fairs and event may get national and international recognition.

9. Exhibitions must be organized by government to provide a platform to art, craft and other skills.
10. Pro-active step to attract foreign tourists by promoting it at international platforms, fairs and exhibitions.

Secondary suggestions are

1. Focus should be made on rural, cultural, food, adventure, etc. forms of tourism.
2. Private sector should also be encouraged to participate in tourism activities.
3. In fairs, events and exhibitions, traditional cuisine of Chhattisgarh should be promoted.
4. In school, colleges & university there must be a subject of tourism or related field in their curriculum.
5. Tours covering religious spots, region-wise, must be organized by government and private tour agencies.

CONCLUSION

These are certain suggestion which will definitely attract the inland and foreign tourist to the land of Chhattisgarh. There are many steps which will not only give a push to tourism industry in Chhattisgarh but will also make basic infrastructural facilities available to general public also. Tourism is such an industry which is lavishing and glamorous but huge revenue earner also. To explore the natural beauty, rich cultural-religious heritage of Chhattisgarh and to enlighten new generation about great religious legacy, tourism is the best way to get acquainted with it. India is a country where joint family culture persists for centuries. Whenever leisure time is available, first thing clicks in the mind is going out for vacations. But places which are popular at national level are overcrowded and some places are not found suitable to visit with family having grand-parents. Many places are popular among tourist and that may be their first choice to visit alone. Such places are favourite for specific age-group visitors. These places cannot be visited with family having members of all the age group. If tourism is connected with religion, it will provide a golden chance to spend quality time with whole family. Togetherness creates hearty bonding among family members.

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