

SPIRITUAL TOURISM - A ROADMAP TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT THROUGH THE PRASAD SCHEME

Ms. Vineetha Nair

Assistant Professor – Department of Environmental Studies
St. Andrew's College of Arts, Science and Commerce
Bandra – West, Mumbai

Abstract

Religion has always played a huge role in India's development, economy and politics. Due to social media, easy accessibility, unique cultural experiences and other factors there has been a rise of spiritual or religious tourism in India. With the Gen Z and millennials seeking mindfulness, silent retreats and spiritualism, pilgrimage tourism is not restricted to religion anymore. This has made praycation an increasingly prominent phenomena. Tourism experts predicted that in 2023, 70% of Indian travellers have shown interest in spiritual getaways which include meditation and mindfulness. The inauguration of the Ram Mandir has poised to be a game-changer in India's tourism economy. Cultural tourism, as a selective form of tourism, was initially a response to mass tourism. Presently, cultural tourism covers a very wide area. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined cultural tourism in 1985 as: "... culture-motivated travels, such as study, theatre, and cultural tours, travelling to festivals and similar events, visiting historical localities and monuments, travelling in order to explore nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages. Spiritual tourism refers to the tourism undertaken to connect one's body, mind, and soul. It is not connected with any specific religion. It is different from religious tourism. Religious Tourism which is undertaken to seek blessings from God based on one's religious faiths and beliefs and attain salvation. Spiritual tourism is a broader perspective than religious tourism. Religious tourism is a subset of spiritual tourism.

Tourism and cultural economy are interdependent aspects of human interaction which makes a significant contribution to the global economy. This paper examines the rise and rise of spiritual tourism in India, the relationship between spiritual tourism and cultural economy, the impact they have on each other, (using secondary data) and the role of Spiritual Tourism towards attainment of Viksit Bharat. The paper focuses on domestic spiritual tourism.

Keywords: cultural economy, spiritual tourism, Praycation, Viksit Bharat

INTRODUCTION

Viksit Bharat 2047 is the Government of India's ambitious vision to transform India into a developed nation by the centenary of its independence in 2047. The vision encompasses various aspects of development, including economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance. This requires comprehensive efforts with large-scale infrastructure development, broad-based welfare measures for poverty alleviation, commitments to empowering women and youth through entrepreneurship, as well as the development of a vibrant agriculture sector.

Tourism plays a significant role or the economy of many countries, due to the revenue generated by the consumption of goods and services by tourists, the taxes levied on businesses in the tourism industry, and the opportunity for employment in the service industries associated with tourism. Tourism has its own direct and indirect effect on society which is regarded as an effective instrument on the country's economic development. Tourism industry improves a country's economy, stimulates development process, restores cultural heritage, and helps in maintaining international peace and understanding. Tourism is thus one among the multiple driving forces in the achievement of Viksit Bharat.

Among all the types of tourism, Spiritual Tourism has been practiced in India from ancient times. The phenomena of Spiritual Tourism is very much complex in the present era as it has not been recognized as a type of separate tourism and is often considered to be religious tourism, which is undertaken to seek blessings from God based on one's religious faiths and beliefs and attain salvation.

Government initiatives to promote Spiritual Tourism

The 'Incredible India' combined with the campaign of 'Atithi Devo Bhavah', literally meaning 'Guest is God', India has recognised the importance of spiritual tourism and enhanced travel facilities for the same by planning to develop tourist circuits for every religion. To promote pilgrimage and spiritual tourism in India, the Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi introduced the PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) Scheme in the year 2014-2015 under the Ministry of Tourism with an initial provision of INR 100 crores for that year coupled with the Swadesh Darshan Scheme which is a theme based tourist circuit identifying India's huge potential for the development of tourism and job creation in the country. This scheme focused on

developing and identifying pilgrimage sites across India for enriching religious tourism experience. It aimed to integrate pilgrimage destinations in a prioritised, planned and sustainable manner to provide a complete religious tourism experience. The strategy also followed a comprehensive area development approach and aimed to promote local art, culture, and cuisines that could further generate livelihood in the identified destinations. In October 2017, the name of the scheme was changed from PRASAD to “National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD)”. As of February 2024, a total of 46 projects have been sanctioned under the PRASHAD Scheme, of which 20 projects have been completed. A total of 26 new sites have also been identified for development under PRASHAD Scheme.

The PRASHAD scheme combines the nexus of other projects undertaken by the Union Government to facilitate tourism in India that comprises of flagship missions such as Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Champion Service Sector Scheme, and PM Gati Shakti.

In the Union Budget 2024-25, the Union Finance Minister proposed Rs. 2,449.62 crore for tourism development around key religious sites in the country, on the grounds that it has tremendous opportunities for local entrepreneurship. This money could enable the government’s Integrated Development of Tourist Circuits programme to develop more sites nationwide. The Finance Minister also highlighted the government’s commitment for spiritual tourism growth in India in the interim Budget for 2024-25 and India’s tremendous opportunities for local entrepreneurship was also stressed upon.

The rise of Spiritual Tourism in India

Religious tourism is still the biggest segment of tourism in India. The tourism and hospitality industry in India saw a huge growth due to the demand for spiritual and religious tourism. Post Covid, spiritual tourism has taken the center stage with a significant increase in the numbers of travellers worldwide. As usually believed to be popular among the older generation or the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation X (between 1965 and 1980), religious tourism is now attracting millennials and Gen Z alike post pandemic.

As spiritual tourism in India is growing immensely, the hospitality and tourism industry is aware that they cannot restrict themselves just to religion, and thus, have extended towards mindfulness, yoga and meditation and added adventure packages to accommodate the youngsters as well.

According to reports, 1,433 million domestic tourists visited places of pilgrimage in India, in 2022. About 6.64 million foreign tourists visited India to visit these religious tourist spots. This number rose about 60 % from the previous year, i.e. 2021, when the numbers stood at 677 million for domestic pilgrims and 1.05 million for foreigners.

According to data released by the Ministry of Tourism, pilgrimage tourism earned ₹ 1,34,543 crore in 2022, as compared to ₹ 65,070 crore in 2021. Tourism experts has proposed that 70% of Indian travellers would be indulge in spiritual getaways which include meditation and mindfulness. Thus, the Religious tourism in India has been on an upward trajectory, projecting a CAGR of over 16% between 2023 and 2030.

Tourism and Cultural Economy

In the symbiotic relationship of tourism and cultural economy with each other, tourism acts as a catalyst for the cultural economy and in turn, the cultural assets, become significant attractions for tourists. This interdependence has become increasingly substantial in the present times, where cultural exchange and tourism have emerged as vital components of economic development.

Culture has a direct impact on tourism, and vice versa. In tourism culture becomes an important motive of tourist travel and has an increasingly stronger impact on culture. The impact of tourism on culture, which also reflects on the society, operates with all its positive and negative effects.

Benefits of tourism from culture -

- Improvement of the basic image of the destination
- Increase in consumption and length of stay
- Increase in tourists' satisfaction with the tourist product
- Stimulation of re-visiting
- Stimulation of local and regional demand
- Opening of new market segments

Benefits of culture from tourism -

- Realisation of additional source of income
- Expansion of the market and a new segment of visitors
- Development of professional management
- Realisation of better control over the use of cultural resources
- Realisation of a better cultural image among the local population

Spiritual Tourism and Development

Spiritual tourism is an integrated, social, cultural, environmental and economic activity in the Indian subcontinent. It has played an important role in sustaining the local economy of India. Until recently, Local

spiritual societies, trusts and committees have been managing spiritual tourism related economic activities for hundreds of years. It contributes to the economic activity starting from vendors selling flowers, candles, souvenirs, sweets, fruits and other offerings made by the devotees. Spiritual tourism related businesses not only create new job opportunities in organised and unorganised sectors in the tourism and hospitality industry, but also in construction, infrastructure development, local transportation, tour guides in foreign languages, small tea shops, reviving and sustaining local handicrafts and cottage industries related to spirituality.

Towns and cities popular for their pilgrimage in India have attracted small businesses and worked on infrastructure development for the pilgrims. Development of spiritual tourism places and products helps to preserve local culture, natural environment, handicrafts and help local communities to have a pride in their cultural assets and heritage, and reap the benefits from spiritual tourism development. Thus, Spiritual Tourism has a positive impact on the environment, socio-economic structure of the locality, construction of infrastructure, roads, gardens, hotels, and shops catering to the needs of spiritual tourists.

Challenges of Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism should be planned and developed in a sustainable manner. Currently there are many bottlenecks and problems faced by tourist such as –

- infrastructure development for tourists is still falling behind and not keeping up with the increase in demand of transportation and affordable accommodation
- need for clean washroom facilities at the venues
- need for hygienic food and clean drinking water
- lack of first aid and emergency ambulance facility for tourists
- lack of tourist information kiosks, ticket booking centres and event calendar for all religious festivals and events
- lack of parking facilities due to traffic congestion
- lack of multi-lingual speaking, registered and educated tour guides
- minimising air, water and land pollution- provision of clean and green environment and parks
- need for clean streets, footpaths, traffic lights for crossing and waste management
- need for police security of spiritual place and tourists, including restrictions of beggars
- fair pricing of religious products, souvenirs, entry ticket to temples and mosques by tourists, which should include tour guides to provide full educational and cultural experiences
- dissemination of up-to-date information on official websites and online ticketing, and finally
- maintaining and preserving local traditions, culture, historical values and customs to provide traditional and authentic spiritual experience of tourism based on the place and product

Success stories of Spiritual Tourism Destinations – Case Studies

Ram Mandir at Ayodhya

The construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has held immense cultural and religious significance for India and has sparked discussions about its potential impact on the country's economy. The impact of the Ram Mandir on the Indian economy is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon and have far-reaching consequences across various sectors.

One of the primary expectations from the construction of Ram Mandir is a surge in religious tourism at Ayodhya, as well as other religious and historical sites in the vicinity, leading to a substantial increase in the overall tourist footfall at Ayodhya. This is expected to stimulate economic activities such as local businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops. The swanky upgrade of the Ayodhya railway station, the construction of a greenfield airport and highways, and cruises on the river Saryu along with demand for local transportations such as buses, taxis, e-rickshaws, will generate more revenues. This is likely to have a multiplier effect by attracting further investments, spurring economic activities beyond the immediate vicinity of the temple and in moulding Viksit Bharat. It is also expected that the Ram Mandir will generate around 3 lakh Jobs in coming 4-5 years in sectors such as retail, hospitality, and transportation which will play a significant role in shaping Viksit Bharat. The temple also brings multi-fold benefits for the state of Uttar Pradesh like crossing Rs 4 lakh crore mark in state's tourism by the year end and bolstering its finances by Rs 20,000-25,000 Crores in tax revenue. According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), the consecration ceremony alone generated business worth more than INR 100,000 crore across India.

Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor

Since 2014, when Varanasi became PM Modi's parliamentary constituency, the city has not looked back. The city has been beautified; untreated sewage water no longer flows into River Ganga and the famous 'Ganga Aarti' is a site to behold. The Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor in Varanasi has been the trendsetter for top class religious and cultural tourism that has transformed pilgrims' experience of the temple town. This was due to the development initiated under PRASHAD Scheme in two phases. The project "Development of Varanasi under PRASHAD Scheme – Phase II" was approved by the Ministry of Tourism with the cost of Rs. 44.69 crores in February 2018 and inaugurated in December 2021. The Ministry of Tourism's data suggests more than 70 million

people visited the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in 2022 after its renovation, compared to around 8 million a year earlier. This has effectively contributed to income generation and development of Varanasi.

Shree Jagannath Temple Corridor Project, Puri

Began in 2019, Shree Jagannath Temple Corridor Project is also named the Shreemandira Parikrama Project and is perhaps the most extravagantly envisioned project with reportedly an estimated budget of Rs. 3,200 crores. The tourist footfall in Puri in 2022 was 1.48 crore. However, visitors from neighbouring cities like Kolkata, Ranchi, and Raipur prefer to return to their destinations or Bhubaneswar instead of stay in Puri town because of the lack of quality accommodations. The Odisha government initiated several corrective measures to boost tourism and economy like a tourism and ecotourism roadmap at identified tourism destinations. According to the sources in the Odisha Government's Department of Tourism, 500-star-category room hotel accommodations amounting to ₹ 460 crore from big brands (Taj, Hyatt, ITC) are proposed to be added. The overall contribution of the tourism sector to Odisha's GDP was 13 per cent in the year 2022. After the inauguration of the Jagannath Temple corridor; the upcoming international airport and other infrastructure-related developments, especially in the Golden Triangle (Puri, Konark and Bhubaneswar), it is expected that by the end of 2025, the tourism sector will contribute at least 15 per cent to the state GDP. More tourists are anticipated to visit Odisha, and which in turn will create direct and indirect jobs in the state.

REFERENCES

- [1] Haq, Farooq & Medhekar, Anita. (2017). The Economic Effects of Spiritual Tourism in India and Pakistan. 10.4018/978-1-5225-2659-9.ch004.
- [2] Busayo, B.M. (2017). Exploring the relationship between religion tourism and economic development of a host community.
- [3] Cheer, J.M., Belhassen, Y., & Kujawa, J. (2017). The search for spirituality in tourism: Toward a conceptual framework for spiritual tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 24, 252-256.
- [4] Mukherjee, S., Bhattacharjee, S., & Singha, S. (2020). Religious to Spiritual Tourism-An Era of Paradigm Shift in India. Available at SSRN 3546903.
- [5] Rumki Bandyopadhyay, R.B., & Kushagra Rajendra, K.R. (2018). Religious tourism: the beginning of a new era with special reference to India. In *Religious tourism in Asia: tradition and change through case studies and narratives* (pp. 67-76). Wallingford UK: CAB International
- [6] Banerjee, M. (2014). Spiritual Tourism: A tool for Socio-Cultural and Sustainable Development. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 1244-1249.
- [7] Jauhari, V. (2010). How can the visitor experience be enhanced for spiritual and cultural tourism in India? *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 2(5), 559-563.
- [8] Vijayanand, S., 2012, 'Socio-economic impacts in pilgrimage tourism', *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 2(1), 329-343.
- [9] Himadri Phukan, Z. R. (2012). Emergence of Spiritual Tourism in India. *International Journal of Marketing and Technology*, 300-317.
- [10] Shanthakumari, D. R. (2016). Challenges and opportunities of spiritual tourism in India. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 737-740.
- [11] Singh, Sujay, Contemporary Precedents in Pilgrimage Tourism: A Case Study of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor (September 15, 2023). Singh, S. V., Tripathi, A., Jha, R., & Ranjan, R. (2023). Contemporary Precedents in Pilgrimage Tourism: A Case Study of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor (SKVTC). In *Prospects and Challenges of Global Pilgrimage Tourism and Hospitality* (pp. 52-72). IGI Global., Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4623027>
- [12] Norman, Alex. (2012). The Varieties of the Spiritual Tourist Experience, *Literature & Aesthetics*. 22. 20-37.

Web References

- [1] <https://www.caclubindia.com/articles/impact-of-ayodhya-ram-mandir-on-indian-economy-51030.asp>
- [2] <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/the-economics-of-ayodhya-ram-mandir-fostering-multi-billion-dollar-push-in-infra-super-stock-spike/articleshow/107050917.cms?from=mdr>
- [3] <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/religious-tourism-in-india-to-grow-at-a-cagr-16-by-2030/article67755554.ece>
- [4] <https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/varanasi-puri-and-ayodhya-bonded-by-development-4894104>
- [5] <https://www.hotelierindia.com/operations/the-rise-and-rise-of-spiritual-tourism>

- [6] <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/its-praycations-time-as-holy-towns-see-massive-surge-in-bookings/article67696456.ece>
- [7] <https://tourism.gov.in/prashad-scheme>
- [8] <https://retirement.outlookindia.com/spend/travel/sitharaman-gives-a-boost-to-spiritual-tourism-in-interim-budget-2024>
- [9] <https://www.investindia.gov.in/team-india-blogs/spiritual-tourism-india>
- [10] <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business/progress-very-slow-in-tourism-ministry-s-prashad-scheme-parliamentary-panel-101707458035172.html>
- [11] <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/religious-tourism-in-india-to-grow-at-a-cagr-16-by-2030/article67755554.ece#:~:text=According%20to%20Ministry%20of%20Tourism,temporary%20%26%20permanent%20jobs%20by%202030.>
- [12] <https://travel.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/research-and-statistics/india-emerges-as-global-pilgrimage-destination-with-flourishing-spiritual-tourism-in-2023/101019689>
- [13] <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1989112>
- [14] <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/01/26/indias-tourism-sector-is-set-for-a-boom-powered-by-religious-trips.html>
- [15] <https://travel.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/research-and-statistics/india-emerges-as-global-pilgrimage-destination-with-flourishing-spiritual-tourism-in-2023/101019689>