

# POTENTIALITY OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BIMSTEC COUNTRIES: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BUDDHIST EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

The International organization BIMSTEC is the short form of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, comprised of seven nations, namely Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan, situated around the Bay of Bengal. BIMSTEC has a deep connection with Buddhism, originated in South Asia then travelled in South East Asia. In the early days Buddhist Education was very much limited within the members of the monastery, but later on it was open to all. Through ethical, intellectual and spiritual perfection, Buddhist education aims at a highest form of personality transformation. So the main goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom and distribution of peace. Buddhism talks about universal message of peace and tolerance. The historical and cultural linkages in BIMSTEC countries recognized the rich potential for development of tourism specially Buddhist tourism. Cultural understanding and cross border people-to-people exchanges and overall economic development may be done by development of Buddhist tourism. (International Finance Corporation [IFC], 2018).

This article is an attempt to focus on the influence of Buddhist education and interrelationship among Buddhist education, peace and tourism and to highlight the promotion of tourism towards overall economic development of the BIMSTEC countries.

**Key words:** BIMSTEC, Buddhism, Tourism, Peace

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, comprised of seven nations, namely Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan, situated around the Bay of Bengal. The BIMSTEC region is home of around 1.5 billion people, constitute about 22% of the global population with a gross domestic product (GDP) of 2.7 trillion economy. In the last five years, BIMSTEC Member States have been able to sustain an average 6.5% economic growth (BIMSTEC, 2017). BIMSTEC has a deep connection with Buddhism, originated in South Asia then travelled in South East Asia (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry [FICCI], 2018).

BIMSTEC was established in the year of 1997. Initially the membership was limited to the countries around the Bay of Bengal, such as Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation so the name was 'BIST-EC'. Later the inclusion of Myanmar on 22 December 1997 during the Ministerial Meeting in Bangkok, the Group was renamed as 'BIMST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation) then after the joining of Bhutan and Nepal on 2004 at the 6th Ministerial Meeting (February 2004, Thailand), the name was changed. In that year, the group was renamed as BIMSTEC i.e. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC, 2017).

The objectives of BIMSTEC were known to us in the Bangkok Summit Declaration of 6 June 1997, which stated : "Desiring to establish a firm foundation for common action to promote Sub regional cooperation in the areas of trade, investment, technological exchange and other interrelated areas in a spirit of equality and partnership and thereby contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity in their common region; conscious that in an increasingly interdependent world, the cherished ideals of peace, freedom, and economic well-being are best attained by fostering greater understanding, good neighborliness and meaningful cooperation among countries of the same sub region already bound together by ties of history and culture" (BIMSTEC, 1997).

BIMSTEC has a deep connection with Buddhism, originated in South Asia then travelled in South East Asia. In the early days Buddhist Education was very much limited within the members of the monastery, but later on it was open to all. Through ethical, intellectual and spiritual perfection, Buddhist education aims at a highest form of personality transformation. So the main goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom and distribution of peace (Yourarticlelibrary, n.d.). Buddhism talks about universal message of peace and tolerance. The historical and cultural linkages in BIMSTEC countries recognized the rich potential for development of tourism specially Buddhist tourism (International Finance Corporation [IFC], 2018).

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The chief objectives of this paper are:

- i. To investigate the interrelationship among Buddhist education, peace and tourism in BIMSTEC countries.
- ii. To analyse the performance of tourism industry in BIMSTEC.
- iii. To suggest some ways for improvement of tourism industry as a tool of economic development.

## 3. METHODOLOGY USED

The present study is descriptive interpretative and analytical in nature. The study analyses published books, different published research works, newspaper, magazines, reports of various government authorities, and relevant websites. Secondary data has been collected from the Department of Tourism (Govt. of India). Major findings of the study have been made on the basis of document-based logical analysis. This study is essentially qualitative in nature.

## 4. BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST EDUCATION

From the teaching of Buddha (563 to about 483 BC), Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy was developed. Gradually the Buddhism spread from India to Central and Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. The spiritual, cultural, and social life of Asia is deeply influenced by Buddhism. It has played a central role in the region, and in recent times it spread to the West. The pattern of Buddhism is reflected in the Triratna concept or the "Three Jewels" of *Buddha* (the teacher), *dharma* (the teaching), and *sangha* (the community). Buddhism was divided after the death of the Buddha, in two directions represented by two different groups. One was *Hinayana* (meaning "Lesser Vehicle"). It was the more conservative group. The other important group was, *Mahayana* (meaning "Greater Vehicle"). In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1st millennium CE, another third major Buddhist movement, *Vajrayana* (meaning: "Diamond Vehicle"; also called Tantric) developed in India (Omvedt, 2003).

Monasteries and Vihara were the main educational centres of Buddhist education system. Beside the monasteries and Vihara there was Vedic school and secular schools. The educational system was mainly controlled and also supervised by the monks. Both religions and secular types of education were provided there. The main aim of the education was to create a good life, a moral life (Omvedt, 2003). The Buddhist education system mainly had three

important characteristics namely; morality, contemplation and wisdom. The aims of the Buddhist education were more or less similar to the Vedic education system but without giving more stress on spiritual elevation, the stress was given on the personality development which mainly included physical, moral, mental and intellectual development. The doors of the education were open to all (Buddhism, n.d.)

## **5. INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BUDDHIST EDUCATION AND PEACE**

The chief aim of Buddhist education is the attainment of Nirvana through it. Equal status and opportunity to everyone is another main theme of Buddhism and Buddhist education. Under the Brahmanical education the concept of different types of caste system and different social status had been removed through the Buddhist education. The attitude of society towards education was very positive as well as very broad. With the sacred portals of the institutions there were also religious and philosophical portal of institution (Buddhism, n.d.). The relationship between teacher and student was very good; student had tremendous love and respects for the teacher. Their life was full of discipline. The medium of instruction is was Pali. The main teaching method was lecture, discussion and questioning. The education system was purely Indian in nature. As a result the system of education focused on various problems of life and to find out the solutions (Yourarticlelibrary, n.d.).

## **6. INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEACE AND TOURISM**

Tourism leaves significantly impacts on peace through social and economic elements and promotes peace by establishing positive changes. The very fast growth of tourism industry has started since the development of the airline service, especially after the Second World War. Now tourism, which is providing more employment opportunities than any other industry, has become most important economies in the world. Promotion of socio- economic development, tourism is also a promoter of mutual understanding in societies as it is a medium of contacts between cultures and people, which enhance harmony. Apart from socio cultural and economic contribution, tourism also enhance the development of other sectors, like tour operators, low cost airlines, hospitality, sports and recreational activities, water and sewage system and most important sector is local business and market at the same time. Tourism, providing opportunities to everyone, motivates people to equip themselves with skills required to meet those opportunities. Somehow, tourism contributes in generating productive manpower. The more productive manpower develops the society a very fast rate and peace is very likely to be present in developed societies. Therefore, tourism has a clear role in leading societies towards development and peace (Theobald, 1998).

### **6.1 Socio Economic Impacts of Tourism**

Today's tourism industry has shown that it has very high positive aspects. Nearly 260 million jobs were supported by the tourism industry in 2011 either directly or in related sectors and those jobs were beneficial not only to the employees, but also to their families (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2011). International arrivals of tourist have more than doubled since 1990, rising from 675 million to 940 million in 2010, and to 1.035 billion in 2012 worldwide (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2012). Basically, these figures show how significantly the growth in travel and tourism has occurred over the past decades. Definitely, the rise of tourism would not have taken such a magnificent speed without carrying positive aspects and potentials (WTTC, 2011). All the advantages of tourism are difficult to be scripted; some direct benefits will be discussed in the following sub-paragraphs.

### 6.1.1 Impacts on Economy

Tourism has a wide range of positive impacts, like increase of Govt. income, foreign exchange earnings. Sales, profits, income in the primary hospitality sectors like hotels, museums, transportation, parks and restaurants, tax revenues, are the main direct outcome of tourism. The movement of tourists from developed to developing countries helps maintaining economical balance between countries in the world (Satani, 2003). Employment opportunities in developing countries, especially where tourism is seasonal, offers more benefits to the locals as they enjoy part-time tourism employment and have time to be engaged as well in everyday working life such as agriculture (Sharpley & Telfer, 2008). Employment opportunities offered by tourism alleviates poverty, which results in decreasing crime rates. Therefore, tourism helps creating a healthy environment, both physical and human (Satani, 2003).

### 6.1.2 Impacts on Society and Culture

The diversity of tourism is wide; tourism amazingly preserves culture, as tourists are interested in experiencing cultures from ancient times. In fact, many cultures for instance New Zealand's Maori culture, which is believed to be more than a thousand years old but is still adding unique and dynamic experience for New Zealand visitors, are still alive only because of tourism. If there is no tourism to experience it, the Maori culture would have faded away a long time ago or at least would not have been of the same value as it is now (maori culture and tourism, n.d.). Development of the tourism industry can be a good way to preserve and manage cultures sustainably. Subsequently, cultures are preserved for and through tourism which are not only economically worthy but also of civic pride. Furthermore, tourism creates a space where cultures are exchanged, understood and respected among hosts and guests. It enhances harmonious relations, prosperity and reduces their preconception of other cultures. Leastwise, the chances of conflict become fewer, because mutual respect is constituted and parties with conflicts go for a peaceful solution. Hence, preserving culture, tourism at the same time creates a fertile ground for friendly relationships among people which is definitely a creditworthy role of tourism in establishing peace (Satani, 2003).

### 6.1.3 Tourism as a Catalyst for Peace

The first phase of 21st century have introduced the world with amazing high speed internet, electronic devices, and developed medical technologies. But the fact is that these advanced technologies are experienced in the developed parts of the world but on the other side, some portion of the world witnessed the death of 21000 children due to hunger (United Nations World Food Programme [UNWFP], 2003). So there is a dramatic chasm between two parts of the world. The infant mortality shows us the poorest economies. So there is a need to money flow from rich economy to the Developing economies or underdeveloped economies that is extremely urgent. Tourism is considered as one of the fastest and most convenient means that transport money from rich economies down to the poor ones (UNWFP, 2011).

The definition of catalyst is “a substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction without itself undergoing any permanent chemical change”. (The Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). The same is done by Tourism; it is a substance that increases cross-border understanding, and cultural understanding, overall economic development, strengthens and promotes identities of communities, and opens doors to opportunities for everyone, and remains as a never ending process. It also strengthens international cooperation, which reduces the risks of conflicts. This is the main element of peace, which must be maintained between and inside nations. Tourism is said to have the catalytic in nature which promotes peace. WTO has also accounted the vital role of tourism in international relations and world peace, and the

positive impacts of tourism in reducing prejudice and tension have been witnessed in many countries (George, Mair & Reid, 2009).

## 7. PRESENT SITUATION OF TOURISM IN BIMSTEC

Tourism focuses especially on cultural understanding among the peoples, cross border people-to-people connectivity thereby it increase the 'trust quotient' in BIMSTEC region. It will also help to increase the ease of doing business. Different types of tourism, depends on themes, like, Buddhist pilgrimage tourism, educational tourism, health or medical and wellness tourism, community and tribal tourism, river tourism, crafts tourism, literary festivals, river to ocean trails, and history trails etc, will also contribute towards inclusive development of the region. The historical and cultural linkages in the BIMSTEC region as well as the rich potential for development of tourism, was acknowledged by the BIMSTEC leaders. They were very ambitious to take concrete steps to promote intra-BIMSTEC tourism, such as development of tourist circuits and ecotourism; especially they showed their keen interest to develop the Buddhist Tourist Circuit and Temple Tourist Circuit within BIMSTEC the region (FICCI, 2018).

The countries in BIMSTEC region have connection through of Buddha, in multiple ways. The majority of people of Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan and Sri Lanka follow Buddhism, whereas Nepal and India have the most important four great places (*birth, enlightenment, sermon and mahaparinirvana*) related to the life Buddha. Every Buddhist people has the dream to visit the four great places (*birth, enlightenment, sermon and mahaparinirvana*) related to the life Buddha. Buddhist tourist circuit will benefit this sector of tourism tremendously (Omvedt, 2003).

Lack of proper air connectivity is the primary factor constraining the smooth flow of tourism in BIMSTEC. Cooperation and integration will be the methods for the development and strengthen tourism (FICCI, 2018).

Several roundtable and workshop of Tourism Ministers for the tourism was held. In Kathmandu Declaration on Tourism Cooperation in 2008, the Plan of Action was adopted. In 15th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, in August 2017, an Ad-hoc Expert Group was established to develop Buddhist Tourist Circuit and Temple Tourist Circuit in the region of BIMSTEC. The first meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators was convened The Government of India, on 7 July 2017 in New Delhi, and agreed to implement its recommendations and also to establish the BIMSTEC Tourism Fund and support the offer of Bangladesh to host the Third BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Round Table. BIMSTEC has decided to set up the Tourism Fund of US\$ 10,000 from each country. The efforts are undertaken by India. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture can work with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) for future initiatives. This is now acknowledged as highest level priority sector, and UN General Assembly has adopted different resolutions considering the role of tourism in sustainable development, including the Agenda of 2030 and it's Sustainable Development Goals (FICCI, 2018).

## 8. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF TOURISM IN BIMSTEC

For the betterment of the tourism in BIMSTEC countries, there are some suggestions which are already ongoing, or which may be adopted.

- **Development of Buddhist tourist Circuit:** Tourist Circuit is defined as a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located in such a manner that none of these are in the same town, village or city and also they are not separated by a long distance. It should have entry and exit points also. The people of BIMSTEC are bonded by Buddhism. India receives Buddhist tourists at a moderate level. There is a wider scope to improve the sector. If the travel and accommodation services will be developed, it is easily achievable. In India Buddhist tourism is least developed sector. Buddhist heritage tour in Buddhist heritage sites in BIMSTEC countries will develop the religious tourism in the region by culture, education and recreation (FICCI, 2018).

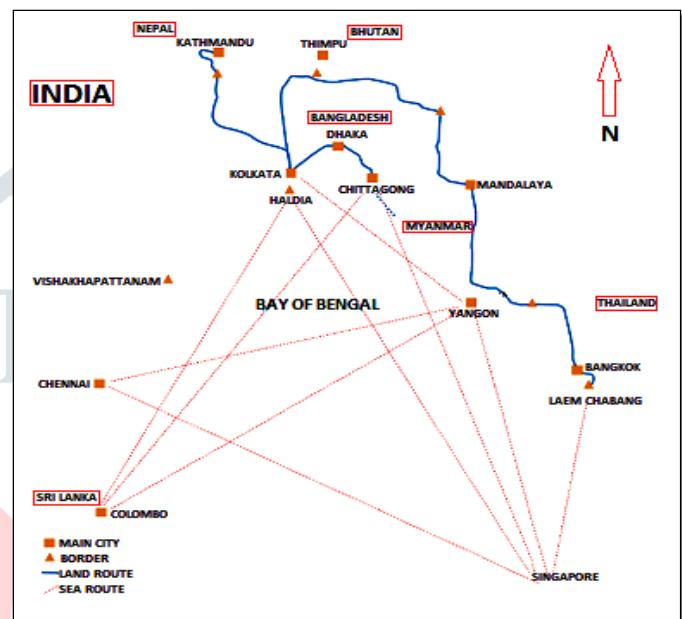


Figure 1. Map of BIMSTEC and International airports, 2019 (Personal Collection)

Figure 2. Trade route (Asian development bank, 2018)

- **International Air Connectivity:** BIMSTEC should develop the air connectivity of Gaya or Lucknow or Varanasi with BIMSTEC countries. Airlines groups should expand their requisite facilities in order to connect the remote parts of the BIMSTEC region, especially major cities in the Northeast with places in Myanmar and Thailand (FICCI, 2018).
- **Proper implementation of UDAN scheme:** The industry welcomed observations made by Jayant Sinha, minister of state for civil aviation, at the special event hosted by the India Foundation and FICCI in June 2017 where he aptly portrayed the UDAN scheme as a key component of the National Civil Aviation Policy, launched by the government in June 2016. Its central focus has been on regional airport development and connectivity and making air travel affordable. In order to make the Bay of Bengal as the real power centre of the region, the BIMSTEC countries would need to work together and profit from India's Open Skies policy (FICCI, 2018). Proper application of UDAN scheme, which will be good to connect Kushinagar / Sravasti, Kushinagar/Varanasi, Gaya/Kushinagar, Lucknow/Sravasti, Kolkata/ Gaya etc.
- **Creation of BIMSTEC Airlines Group:** The most important factors for the smooth flow of tourism in BIMSTEC region is the lack of proper air connection among the Member countries. The inland part of BIMSTEC may be connected by the Airlines. India as well as other member countries may allow the operation of smaller flights

connecting the region, at reasonable flight fare (FICCI, 2018). Figure 1 represents the international airports connecting the BIMSTEC countries.

- **Proper training:** For the development of tourism the Govt. of BIMSTEC countries can take initiative to train the local manpower to work in tourism sector as well as hospitality sector and also train language speaking escorts or as a guide (FICCI, 2018).
- **Cleanliness:** The Buddhist pilgrimage sites have to be properly maintained.
- **World class facilities:** As the Buddhist sites have the world class popularity so the world class facilities have to be maintained by all types of proper infrastructural development (FICCI, 2018).
- **Advertisements:** Have to make advertisement by the BIMSTEC countries to show the facilities and products of Buddhist pilgrimage sites (FICCI, 2018).
- **Regional Festivals and development of tourism:** Cultural understanding and cross border people-to-people exchanges and overall economic development may be done by development of Buddhist tourism, specially it may attained through Existing platforms like, Hornbill Festival of Nagaland, Sangai and Orange Festivals of Manipur and other regional festivals, they are may be utilised to promote common identity and cooperation of BIMSTEC countries (FICCI, 2018).
- **Promotion of Medical Tourism:** Medical tourism has high business potential in BIMSTEC. The major medical tourism hubs are developed in Thailand and India at affordable prices. Myanmar and Bangladesh are most important two countries for India's connect with the other BIMSTEC Member countries. The fast becoming medical tourism and wellness hubs are continuously developing in Guwahati and Imphal, which are closer to Myanmar and Bangladesh (FICCI, 2018).
- **Affordable and decent accommodations:** Affordable and decent accommodations in BIMSTEC region are very important component for the development of tourism.
- **Use of e-Visa:** To make simplified procedures or reduction of paper work is one of the most important steps toward increasing tourist flows. Though visa procedures are now easier, but to facilitate a larger number of people e-Visa will be highly beneficial. The facilities of visas at check posts and at other places need to be increased for greater movement of Buddhist and religious tourists (FICCI, 2018).
- **Exploration of other routes:** The railway, roadway, waterways routes may be developed for the tourism development in the BIMSTEC region. This map (Figure 2) represents the trade route of BIMSTEC (Asian development bank [ADB], 2018). Research must be done if there are any possibilities for the development of this route for the tourism.

## 9. DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOVT. INITIATIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHIST TOURISM

**A. Bodhi Parva :** India has hosted "Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage" from 8 - 10 December 2017 at the India Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi to celebrate of 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BIMSTE, to spread universal message of peace and tolerance practiced by Buddhism. The Festival was inaugurated by Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Culture Dr. Mahesh Sharma on 8 December 2017 (Ministry of External Affair [MEA], 2017).

**B. Swadesh Darshan Scheme:** Tourist Circuit is a route having at least three major tourist destinations which are different in character and is connected to each other. Circuits may have well defined entry points and exit points. These circuits may have one theme and other sub-themes. Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme under Ministry of Tourism 7 major Buddhist spots in India and 1 in Nepal are identified to attract the tourist at a large level. Lumbini (Nepal) - Bodh Gaya- Sarnath- Rajgirh- Sravasti- Vaishali- Kushinagar (Ministry of Tourism [MOT], GOI, 2014).

**Table 1**

*Major Buddhist sites connecting through under Swadesh Darshan scheme:*

Sl No.	Major Buddhist sites	Location	Importance
1	<b>Bodh Gaya</b>	Gaya, Bihar	UNESCO World Heritage Site, This is one of four main Buddhist pilgrimage sites. In Gaya, under the Bodhi Tree, the Buddha attained enlightenment.
2	<b>Sarnath</b>	Near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	This is a sacred site where the Buddha delivered his first sermon, taught the Dhamma
3	<b>Kushinagar</b>	Near Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh	Kushinagar is the place where the Buddha attained Parinirvana .
4	<b>Shravasti</b>	Near West Rapti River, Uttar Pradesh	Buddha spent most of time after enlightenment in Shravasti
5	<b>Rajgir&amp;Nalanda</b>	Bihar	Buddhist caves of Saptaparni, where the first Buddhist council was held after his death.
6	<b>Vaishali</b>	Bihar	Buddha preached his last sermon before he attained his parinirvana.
7	<b>Lumbini</b>	Nepal	One of the world's most <b>important</b> spiritual sites is home to the historic birthplace of the Buddha.

Note: The data are adapted from “Ministry of Tourism, GOI, (2014).

**C. Buddhist Train and IRCTC:** Indian Railway and IRCTC have launched the Buddhist train to connect the famous Buddhist tourist spot in India. It's an 8 day's package (irctcbuddhisttrain, n.d.), where one can visit the famous Buddhist spots in India.

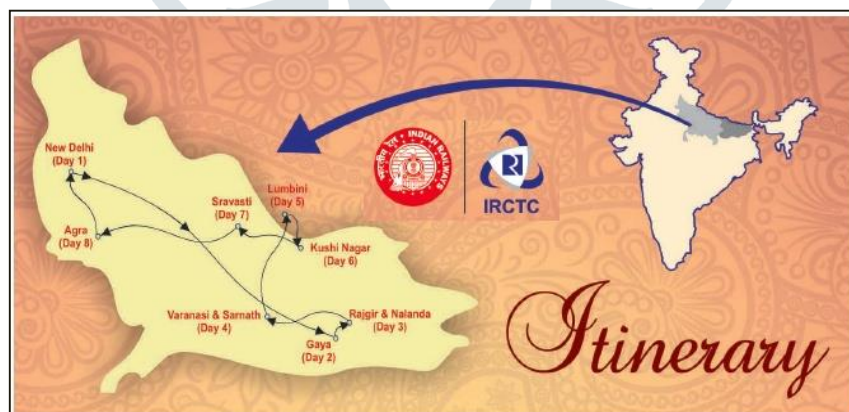


Figure 3. Buddhist train in India (Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation, 2018)



## 10. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

BIMSTEC has given the priority to the promotion of tourism sector by arranging different official and ministerial level meeting. BIMSTEC expert group on tourism was set up to strengthen co-operation and to formulate strategies for tourism cooperation with the cooperation of UNESCAP (The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), Pacific Asia Travel Association and World Tourism Organization and it also drafted the action plan. As there are huge potentialities of the development of tourism, at first the member countries tries to identify the tourism related problems as well as the by the action plan they are trying to expand economic base, increase Foreign Exchange Earnings, Generate employment, Improve standard of living among the member countries, increase international awareness of the richness of the region, and also build up new strategies to develop the Buddhist tourism.

This action plan identifies the major issues, which need to be addressed by the member countries jointly. The areas are

- Development of human resource
- Infrastructural development
- Development of connectivity
- Travel impediments
- Public-private partnership
- Systematic research for new projects
- Environmental and cultural preservation

To develop tourism as well as to increase the awareness about the rich heritage of the region The BIMSTEC group has announced the year 2015 as the year of Tourism. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh will host the Second and Third Meeting of BIMSTEC Network of Tour Operators in 2018 and in 2019 respectively. The Second Meeting of BIMSTEC Tourism Working Group and the Third BIMSTEC Tourism Ministers' Roundtable are expected to be held in Bangladesh in 2018. As peace is the main important theme of Buddhist education and tourism is a catalyst of peace therefore with development of tourism peace and international relationship among the member countries as well as overall economic development will be developed in the region.

## 11. CONCLUSION

BIMSTEC has a deep connection with Buddhism. Through the ethical, intellectual and spiritual perfection, Buddhist education aims at a highest form of personality transformation. As the main goal of Buddhist education is to attain wisdom and distribution of peace, Buddhism talks about universal message of peace and tolerance. The historical and cultural linkages in BIMSTEC countries recognized the rich potential for development of tourism specially Buddhist tourism therefore there is positive relationship among Buddhist education, peace and development of tourism, which are the key factors of overall economic development.

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