

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN THE PROMOTION OF COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

With Reference to Religious Centres in Harihar, Davanagere District, Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Research interest has focused on the role of non-religious or secular festivals like music festivals, food festivals, sports festivals, etc. in encouraging tourism, promotion of place branding, preventing rural out-migration and depopulation, providing alternative employment and contributing to rural development. In the present study an attempt would be made to focus on the role of religious tourism in giving impetus to undertaking entrepreneurial initiatives and consequently the economic contribution made to the local economy and the welfare of the people. This article is a review article on the various studies conducted regarding religious tourism and the commercial opportunities that such tourism promotes and the implications of promoting religious tourism in Harihar.

Keywords: *Religious tourism, pilgrim, pilgrimage, entrepreneurship, shrines, out-migration, secular, depopulation, place branding, marginalization, peripherality, heritage tourism, religious vows,*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism which is centred around places of religious significance is an important segment of tourism. With many new and old places of religious importance and pilgrimage centres which are a source of attraction to many who seek meaning in life and divine protection and blessings, there is growing research interest in studying the impact that centres of pilgrimage have on the economy. Such places are important not only to the religious community to whom they are important places of community identity, but also to others who would like to take part in the religious activities in the pilgrimage centres. An interesting area of study is exploring into the economic and commercial aspects of religious tourism, festivals and days of significance as they promote economic activities in a particular place. Increase in commercial and economic activities through tourism to such places is an important contributor to economic welfare and job creation.

A number of religious shrines have special days of religious significance called festivals and solemnities which draw crowds of devotees from near and far away places. Times of festivals and major religious celebrations provide a very apt climate for exploring entrepreneurship activities for the locals and also generates income for others. Arrival of religious festivals leads to an uptick in economic activity. Moreover, when these festivals are specially celebrated in specific places of religious worship known as

religious shrines, there is a noticeable mushrooming of business units, shops and small business outlets around the religious place of worship. As a result, people who engage in commercial activities can benefit by providing adequate supply of goods and services demanded by the gathering people, thus giving ample scope for promotion of entrepreneurial activities in such areas.

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II. RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Religious tourism is a significant segment of the tourism industry and one of the largest contributors to the total volume of tourism in India. The Domestic Tourism Survey (2002-03) by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, indicates that tourism to religious sites form a significant component of domestic tourism. Religious tourism is based on the prevalence of pilgrimage centres which promote the influx of pilgrims or religious tourists to a particular area. Pilgrimages by religious devotees constitute an important part of religious tourism. Pilgrimage is currently experiencing resurgence around the world (Digance, 2006). In a spiritually and religiously charged atmosphere like that of India, religious tourism plays a significant role, not only in spiritually benefitting the pilgrims but also materially enriching them. Religious tourism is considered to be a 'specific type of tourism whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons (Rinschede, 1992). However, scholars identify that religious tourism is a 'niche' market and it is multi-layered (Kaur, 1985) as the tourists engaged in religious tourism may also engage in other non-religious or leisure activities. Pilgrimage characteristics can be found in both religious and secular journeys (Jamal, Hartl and Lohmer, 2010) Thus, religious tourism contributes to the local economy in multiple ways.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To review the literature available on religious tourism in order to ascertain the linkage between religious tourism and economic activities
2. To study the variety of economic activities that are carried out in the area of Harihar town in Davanagere district, Karnataka, in connection with Harihareshwara temple, Church (Minor Basilica) of Our Lady of Good Health, Fatheh Jamia Masjid and other places of religious significance in Harihar taluk.
3. To study the positive benefits that religious tourism has brought into Harihar town.
4. To study the economic effects of religious tourism on the local people of Harihar town

IV. IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM ON THE ECONOMY

Religious tourism has a positive impact on the economy. In a non-western context like India, religious tourism promotes entrepreneurship in multiple ways. As such, there is a strong inter-linking between religious tourism and entrepreneurship. Business opportunities in pilgrimage sites are plenty and they are changing, creating new trends and opportunities in the field of entrepreneurship. The proliferation of modern ashrams, luxury apartments, hotels and restaurants in the region to cater to the increasing tourist flows indicates that a new kind of tourist space – associated with leisure and religious consumption – is being produced” (Shinde, 2010).

Festivals of various types promotes economic activity and welfare (Kwiatkowski *et al*, 2018). In the article ‘The Assemblers of Rural Festivals: Organizers, Visitors and Locals’, Kwiatkowski, et al. study the perceptions of different groups of festival assemblers which might vary regarding a festival effects or festival spinoffs. It studies the perceptions of organisers, visitors and locals of festival effects on rural development. The study deepens the understanding of the functioning of rural areas. Conservation, Consolidation, Transformation, Reinvention, Manifestation and Attraction are the effects of the festival which make festivals gather people and thereby promote economic activity.

Religious tourism promotes a particular place as a brand. Place branding efforts of religious places as “temple-towns”, “Spiritual cities”, “religious hotspots”, “miracle town”, etc. creates a popular name for a particular that benefits the locality with greater inflow of tourists. Place branding involves systematic work from a number of stakeholders who promote a particular place by attributing positive qualities to that place. In the context of rural places facing the problems of marginalization and peripherality, Blichfeldt & Halkier study the branding efforts of the inhabitants of Logstor, a rural town in North Jutland, Denmark, which has brought in a steady stream of tourists and greater economic wealth for the locals. (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014). The authors explain how a “mussels” food festival has been created in order to attract internal and external consumers towards Logstor. The case of Logstor is a typical successful example of place-branding initiatives. The study highlights the fact that if rural places wish to commodify local cultural resources to improve their position and foster development, it is imperative that they choose to focus on stories and events that both appeal to internal and external audiences.

Religious tourism and heritage tourism has an impact on the heritage of the local people who collectively consider the sacred spots as part of their identity. Hence care must be taken to ensure that those who stand to be most impacted by this activity, including the residents, various congregational members and leaders, relevant public-private sector members and those whose heritage is being interpreted and commodified for tourism must be involved in the process of developing such tourist activities and areas. Collaboration with the locals ensures proper heritage interpretation and distribution of benefits and costs. Moreover, such a collaboration ensures sustainable use, development and planning of community resources that would be used in the planning (infrastructure and related hospitality services), equitable distribution of economic opportunities and benefits (e.g. jobs) and preventing conflict that might arise if sacred places and

personal/ethnic heritage are used without the permission and involvement of those affected (Jamal, Hartl and Lohmer, 2010)

Religious tourism needs to be understood in a comprehensive or holistic manner in a way that encompasses both traditional religious pilgrimage and modern secular journeys (Collins-Kreiner, 2018). There is a nexus between pilgrimage and tourism which needs to be explored. It is necessary to identify the motivations of religious tourism. However, it is difficult to conclude that religious tourism is strictly restricted to a visit to religious places. Such visits are also done with other objectives associated with tourism. Hence many other sectors stand to gain from religious tourism. There are many studies done which explore the interlinking between tourism and pilgrimage (Cohen, 1992). Hence the division created between two terms viz. 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' is misguided, as the religious and the secular spheres of tourism are rapidly merging.

As such the survey of literature indicates that religious tourism has an important economic implication. It is very difficult to demarcate religious tourism as separate from secular tourism as a religious tourist or a pilgrim need not be a non-religious tourist. We can conclude that religious tourism is multi-faceted and it benefits the local people economically in various ways and means.

V. DESCRIPTION OF HARIHAR TOWN:

Harihar is a town with a City Municipal Council located in Davanagere District in central Karnataka, India. Census 2011 indicates that 83,219 were residing in Harihar Taluk, with 42,276 males and 40,943 females. Harihar is the administrative headquarters of Harihar taluk. The town is well connected to the major cities through a good network of road and railway. Harihar has a busy railway station and the town is connected by National Highway 4 (Golden Quadrilateral)

Industrialisation in Harihar has led to in-migration into Harihar. Industrialization has created employment opportunities for locals as well as people migrating into the town. Harihar is home to a number of major industries like Grasim Industries of Aditya Birla group, Cargill India Pvt Ltd, Synthite Industries Ltd, etc. Harihar is watered by River Tungabhadra which flows through the town. The river supplies water for the town for domestic consumption, for agricultural use and other use.

Harihar is a religious place as there are a number of religious places of worship which are of significance for people practicing various faiths. On the banks of River Tungabhadra in Harihar town is Harihareshwara temple from which the town derives its name. The magnificently sculpted temple has a rich history. The temple was constructed during the reign of the Hoysala king Vira Narasimha II in between the years 1223-1224 CE. The temple is dedicated to Lord Harihareshwara who is a fusion of Gods Hari (Vishnu) and Hara (Shiva). The car festival (Jatre) is celebrated from the temple every year with great devotion and grandeur. Located in the centre of the town is the Church (Minor Basilica) of Our Lady of Good Health. The church which is dedicated to Mary, Mother of Lord Jesus, was elevated to the status of a Minor Basilica and it is an important pilgrimage centre for the Christians in Karnataka. It is a part of the Diocese of Shimoga. The annual feast of the shrine is celebrated on September 8, which draws large crowds of pilgrims. There are

many Lingayath religious centres in and around Harihar like the Panchamashali Math. There are also a number of Masjids in Harihar like the Fatheh Jamia Masjid, Masjid E Azam, etc. Hence Harihar is a place of religious significance for the people practicing various faiths who flock to the town, especially on days of religious significance.

The presence of many religious places of worship in Harihar has attracted many religious pilgrims to Harihar. Over the years Harihar has become an important pilgrimage destination to a number of devotees. These places of worship have important festivals connected to them which has promoted the name of the town as a pilgrim attraction. Consequently, a number of business opportunities have opened up in and around these places of worship, generating income and employment for the locals as well as for people from surrounding villages and towns.

Entrepreneurship opportunities have grown with the emergence and growth of places of religious interest in Harihar town. The mighty and the miniscule business ventures have equally benefitted from the tourism advantage the town has. While the local farmers market their produce during the peak festival seasons, big hotels, restaurants and eateries cater to the needs of the people. One can notice shops selling local handicrafts and religious articles near the densely populated town-centre in which the religious places of worship are located. The local people have also economically benefitted by providing much needed religious services to help the pilgrims fulfil their religious vows and obligations like donating food to the people in the shrine, having themselves shaved, purchasing locks and other metal items with which people perform religious duties and obligations, etc. Supply of cooked food, supply of religious articles, articles essential for worship like flowers, fruits and candles, supply of illumination or decorative items, professional or skill-based labour, etc are some of the economic activities that have found space. Catering service providers, small vendors and barbers have benefitted from religious activities. Many of such service providers function within the religious centres as dealers. As a result, religious and pilgrimage centres in Harihar town have created entrepreneurship opportunities to the locals.

Around the major religious shrines and pilgrimage centres in Harihar one can visibly notice the mushrooming of many business units. Inside the religious centres there are business units that market religious articles. Around the religious centres there are centres of recreation as well as places for board and lodge. A number of eateries in the area have come up to cater to the inflowing guests at the religious centres. In this way the town is well equipped to cater to the inflowing pilgrim-tourists as understood in a holistic way (Cohen, 1992). Harihar town is well connected with railways and road. Good infrastructure facilities like concrete roads, massive flyover bridge, etc. in the heart of the town where there are major religious centres have not only benefitted the pilgrimage centres but they have also brought in a good number of people into the town. Harihar town is also considered as a religious hub which indicates place branding of the town to promote religious tourism. Moreover, it has been a tradition with people practicing different faiths and from various parts of Karnataka to come to Harihar to visit the sacred pilgrimage sites, especially during the festivals. Festivals lead to a surge in economic activity in the place and the surrounding areas.

VI. CONCLUSION

In India, festivals of all the religions are celebrated with pomp and gaiety. Religious festivals contribute towards religious tourism and in keeping the religious and cultural spirit alive and at the same time providing life and livelihood to millions. Hence the study of the link between religious tourism and the conduct of commercial activities surrounding them is a very interesting study. A religious pilgrimage centre draws all the people irrespective of their religious background or social grouping, thereby making these places uniquely inter-religious. We have a lot to learn and benefit from India's long-lived tradition of respecting people of every faith and its secular moorings. Further efforts need to be undertaken to identify and unearth those aspects of human life, culture and tradition that would appeal to people and thereby strengthen religious tourism.

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